New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling

Existential Academy

61-63 Fortune Green Road

London

NW6 1DR

Bewitched, Amputated or Dead: An Existential Study of Leadership Stuckness

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Julia Kukard

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[1] Not his real name

ABSTRACT

This is a constructivist grounded theory project building a theory on the process and definition of leadership stuckness. Ten senior leaders were interviewed, and the qualitative data analysed for patterns. This led to the creation of a theory of the process of stuckness and an existential definition of stuckness.

It was found that the process of leadership stuckness involves three losses: the loss of self and capacity to self-reflect, the loss of relationships, and the loss of meaning. A significant proportion of this research has been devoted to understanding how the participant and the context were perfectly primed for a merged relationship of stucknesss including the leader's childhood and training. Other significant findings were that leadership stuckness is "normal", occurs more than once in a lifetime, and varies in severity and complexity. An existential definition of stuckness was generated, as were recommendations for working with an existential approach to stuckness.

KEY WORDS

Leadership, stuckness, constructivist grounded theory, existential psychotherapy, existential coaching, leadership development

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bewitched, amputated or dead; three ways that interviewees used to describe how they are in the world when they are stuck. While these words frequently have negative connotations, one cannot always be present in this world. Sometimes we need to live in other worlds as a requirement to living more fully in this one.

This research explores the excruciating, zombie, and groundhog states of leadership stuckness through literature, my reflexivity processes, findings, and analysis from the research. I provide a theory of stuckness and an existential definition of stuckness. I do so, not that we may eradicate stuckness for leaders and others, but rather with the hope that we could learn to live with stuckness more comfortably, allowing it to move through our lives from time to time and reaping its rewards.

1.1. Background to this research

My interest in stuckness derives from my many personal experiences of stuckness, in particular a period of stuckness lasting seven years. My seven-year impasse made me enormously curious about why I could not move out of a situation, even though I have a lot of personal agency and had tried in multiple and exhausting ways to move forward. As I began to explore my own stuckness in therapy and life, I realised that this period of stuckness may have been a necessary incubation process during which I had been gestating a new version of me. I wondered if this was the case for others and how this would work for leaders at work.

I work as a leadership development practitioner, globally but mainly in South Africa. I also teach leadership to MBA students at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business. My clinical placement has been in a residential care home for people with debilitating schizophrenia, borderline and bipolar symptoms. In all three situations I observed people who were stuck in behaviours and rituals that appeared out of context, as if they were "puppets" responding to invisible directives from another time and place. Sometimes it looked as if the directives were contradictory or absurd, leaving the person confused, immobile, exhausted, and stuck. Not all the people I considered to be stuck seemed to be aware of their stuckness, but many were frustrated, angry, giving up, and feeling helpless in the face of their inability to have traction in the world. I recognised these experiences as being the same as my experience of stuckness and it was this that led me to focus my research on stuckness and, in particular, on leadership stuckness.

1.2. Aims of this research

I aim to provide an existential account of leadership stuckness and more specifically a theory about the process of stuckness, including an existential definition. Through this I will begin filling out some gaps in the broader literature on stuckness and leadership stuckness in particular.

1.2.1. Stuckness as a social AND intrapsychic process

Stuckness can be conceived of in many ways; for example, as an intrapsychic state only involving an individual (Freudian psychoanalysis), or conversely only as a result of an oppressive or limiting context (Marxism).[2] My reading, reflexivity work, and experience suggest that stuckness relates to how one is in the world and as such involves both the inner and outer worlds of the stuck person. Stuckness is thus a relationship involving an individual and a context/other individuals and therefore an intrapsychic and a social process. This relationship orientation is appropriate for an existential project because of the key role existential theory awards relationships (Van Deurzen and Iacoucou, 2013). This is explored further in section 3.3.2. Furthermore, the socially constructed nature of stuckness makes it an idea subject to explore using Constructivist Grounded Theory (see section 4).

1.2.2. A working definition of leadership stuckness

There are many, many definitions of stuckness and the more I researched, the more definitions I found. These ranged from being stuck in situations, relationships, versions of ourselves, goals that no longer served us or even stuckness at a developmental stage. In fact, when I read Hans Cohn (2000) and Van Deurzen (2012), I realised that all existential psychotherapy was focused on working with one kind of stuckness (dilemma) or another.

The leadership literature also provided accounts of leadership stuckness. These are included in the literature review below. I have chosen to draw my working definition of stuckness from this literature, notably the work of Petriglieri, who straddles the world of leadership and psychotherapy.

Petriglieri notes that leadership stuckness

> *might result from socially rewarded ongoing progress experienced internally as purposeless activity. In this case* [of stuckness*], the opposite occurs. We feel stuck because, to gain social rewards, we are changing faster than we can make sense of or feel comfortable with. Stuckness, however, is not always a symptom of the timeless friction between the inner pace of the individual and the outer pace of culture. It can also represent the beginning of a solution to fragmented isolation by functioning as a pregnant pause in the reworking of a life narrative* (Petriglieri, 2007, p. 192).

[2] These are my interpretations of what a psychoanalytic or Marxist definition of stuckness would look like, and as a result there is no reference.

The components of this commentary on stuckness, from which I am extracting a working definition, include the following: a leader, a context, socially rewarded behaviours, a problematic relationship between the person and the context as understood by the person (meaninglessness), a suggestion that the adaptive process of leader to context is difficult and that the situation may result in the formation of a new life narrative.

My working definition of leadership stuckness has changed over time, starting with a definition by Taggart (2012) (described in section 1.2.3) and finally settling on the work of Petriglieri as above. This shift was based on the emerging data and my reflexivity processes. Critically, the definition notes that stuckness is a relationship between a leader and a context/other person and has moved from a decontextualised, non-relational, blaming, non-value-adding (stuckness is not useful) and non-academic definition to one that reflects the context, apportions responsibility more evenly within the parties in the stuck relationship, and firmly identifies the value of stuckness to the leader. The change in definition is symbolic and reflective of the huge changes in research orientation emerging from reflexivity and research processes.

1.2.3. A working definition of the term leadership

There are literally thousands of definitions for the terms leaders, leadership and leadership development and no universal agreement as to what leadership is. Many of these definitions are derived from the prevailing trends in leadership and the style in which leaders lead (April et al., 2011). Going down the rabbit hole of exploring what various thinkers believe leaders actually are and do may not be helpful in terms of coming to an understanding of what leadership is, because there are so many divergent beliefs. For this research, I would like to keep the working definition very simple and pragmatic and use the term leaders to refer to individuals in a leadership role in organisations. This includes managers; middle and senior, including executives. A very broad definition of leadership has been provided in this first chapter: leaders are people in leadership roles and the act of leadership is what leaders do in those roles.

Alongside this functional definition, I also hold in mind an existential definition of leadership that is offered by Hannaway citing Jean Lupman-Blum, which states that “the ongoing excavation of the leadership concept is part of a deeper search for the meaning of life, a search for how each of us mere mortals fits into the larger picture” (Hannaway, 2019, p. 15). This is a leadership definition that we return to – the notion that leadership is about meaning, identity and community.

1.3. Rationale for exploring leadership stuckness

I explore leadership stuckness as opposed to stuckness in the general population. I do this for several reasons, the simplest being that leadership is my area of work, experience, and fascination. Below are three additional reasons for this research focus.

1.3.1. Leadership stuckness is prevalent and recognised as a problem for leaders and organisations

The literature suggests that leadership stuckness is a relatively unexplored area, although it is extremely prevalent, and a danger to organisational health (De Haan, 2016). De Haan uses the terminology overdrive patterns to describe ways in which once effective behaviours become sedimented and overutilised in leaders, resulting in stuckness and hugely reduced effectiveness to the point of causing harm to an organisation. This research also notes that overdrive patterns increase the more senior the leaders become, to the extent that at board level, all executives are at risk (De Haan, 2016). Leadership derailment refers to a body of knowledge exploring why leaders fail. Not all failure can be ascribed to stuckness but it is still interesting that Hogan suggests that 50% of leaders are derailed in some way (Kaiser and Hogan, 2010).

Petriglieri, as per the definition above, provides a more psychological view of leadership stuckness, noting that there are contextual elements, emotions, and a situation that leaders cannot make sense of or adapt to. He is more positive about the impacts of stuckness, suggesting that an experience of this nature can actually support development (Petriglieri, 2007). This is very different from the generally negative view of stuckness by leadership writers.

My 30 years of experience in organisations suggests to me that many leaders, especially senior leaders, do not always bring the fullness of themselves and their lives into their work context. They appear to live their work, and even personal lives, according to conventional, corporate, or professional mores rather than the full complexity of who they are. This behaviour of editing of self is suggested and encouraged by business literature which advises that leaders must edit and brand themselves to be successful as leaders (Smallwood, 2019). I have always been cynical about the value of editing oneself and wondered if this reduction of self has any impact on how and when a leader gets stuck.

Leadership stuckness affects organisational health, ethics, and performance. As Hollis also notes, “As an institution is the sum of its individuals, and more, so it is just a reflection of its leadership. When the leader is stuck psychologically, the corporation too will be stuck” (Hollis, 1998, p. 105). And Hollis notes, referring to Plato (The Republic), that the “relationship between the health of the ruler and the land is inescapable” (Hollis, 1998, p. 112).

1.3.2. Stuckness affects the broader system, including diversity and inclusion trends

Leadership health affects the system. Looking around the world at the moment (November 2020), it is quite easy to identify stuck leaders and stuck organisations, political parties, NGOs and religious movements that together create a web of conflict, financial asymmetry, inequality of all kinds, discrimination and poverty. I would like to contribute towards understanding the role stuckness plays in this complex “mess” and how it could be released.

I work in South Africa on inclusion in organisations and my experience suggests that the racial history of South Africa creates and highlights stuckness, as people of all races struggle to move beyond their experiences of Apartheid. Changes in status, fortunes, cars, houses, power, and influence occur rapidly, but identity seems to stay the same on all sides. White people still exhibit entitlement and internalised superiority, and Black people continue to feel inferior and oppressed by the system. These too are examples of stuckness, and this research may be able to help with finding a way to release this stuckness and other global patterns related to the relationship between a person and a context.

1.3.3. Finding a more useful role for me

I have taught on the University of Cape Town business school MBA for the past ten years and worked in corporate leadership development since 2009, and as a leadership coach since 2006. Over time I started to question what context I was preparing leaders for, and whether I was part of the "leadership problem" and not part of the solution as I had intended. I play a role as a coach supervisor to about 30 coaches (group supervision) and I have noticed these coaches are starting to ask the same questions as I am. I am hoping to answer these questions in this research, and also find a way for me to play a more useful role in preparing coaches and leaders for today and tomorrow, instead of for yesterday.

1.3.4. Helping myself

I have spent too much of my life feeling insufficient and flawed, wondering how I can continue to be, love and produce into the world, despite this shameful sense of being incomplete. I have always struggled with Tillich's injunction to accept and love all of ourselves, despite being entirely unworthy and unacceptable of this love and approval in our own eyes (Tillich, 1949/2000). Similarly, Biko's suggestion that we bring in and value all of our identities, even those we considered negative (Biko, 1978), has always managed to irritate me because I struggled to see how it could or even should be done.

It occurred to me, after much therapy, that this inferior sense of myself was a stuck identity which continued to hold sway over my life, and that sitting underneath this DProf was a real desire to find a way out of this particular prison. I wanted to find a way to "liberate" myself and place myself in a more equitable, easy-going and relaxed place with regard to myself and the world. Curiously, much of this has been completed during the doctorate (see reflexivity Appendices B and C). Critically, I have learned a lot about how to be for myself while at the same time being for others, instead of only being able to be for myself or for others. This has significantly changed a number of relationships in my life for the better.

1.4. The research context

I completed this research with leaders in South Africa, a very particular context, at a very specific time in our history (2015-2020). This research needs to consider several contextual issues, including the emerging market, and the cultural and racial context. Emerging markets are known for their volatility, uncertainty and high risk that may support or even create certain leadership behaviours that encourage stuckness (SpenglerFox, 2015). Leaders need to be highly adaptive in emerging markets and so stuckness becomes easily identified (April et al., 2011). Leadership stuckness is easily noticed when leaders do not respond to markets as they are, but rather as they were, or rather as the leaders hoped they would be, or even as a mini version of an English or European market.

Related to the South African context is that of racial, gender, and other dynamics. These are critical to understanding the context in South Africa but may also be useful on a broader scale as suggested above.

Although the interviews took place prior to the outbreak of COVID globally, most of this document was written under lockdown in South Africa. COVID and lockdown have required me to change my home and work activities and routines, adapt to different financial situations and experience relationships under stress. I have been in a constant state of adaptation over the past nine months. This experience has really reinforced the role of context and highlighted the need for constant adaptation in this research (see Appendices C and D).

As a last note, I am an African existentialist philosopher, and I feel deeply the absence of Africana existential philosophers in the curriculum of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC). I would like to include some of these philosophers in this research, not just as an attempt to remedy this gaping lacuna, but also because these philosophers add significant value to understanding the process and experience of stuckness as a result of their racialised and objectified experience of life.

1.5. Dissertation outline

The introduction presents the aims and background to this research. It provides a working definition of the terms leadership and leadership stuckness. This chapter also includes the rationale and context for this research.

Chapter 2, the Literature Review, begins with an overview of the methodology and role of this chapter in the research. After critically examining the currently available definitions of stuckness and leadership stuckness, I examine the sources that create stuckness. These are organised into three sections: stuckness emerging from a narrow inner world and an inability to self-reflect, stuckness related to the nature of relationships with others, and stuckness as a function of our meaning making capacity. The review houses a significant amount of literature within these three categories because it is these three categories that are critical in developing the final theories. The rest of the chapter deals with the

experience of stuckness, why people stay stuck, and the value and disadvantages of stuckness. This research approaches stuckness as a relationship and so the review includes a section on attachment patterns and the context in which stuckness takes place (the system of business). The chapter concludes with a list of gaps in the literature review that could be expanded upon by this research.

Reflexivity is a crucial part of this research and so I included a separate chapter on my own processes of stuckness and release during the period of this research. I conclude with a summary of my reflexivity processes and how they impacted on the outcomes of this research.

The methodology chapter describes the research processes as required by constructivist grounded theory. A particular focus is on describing how I created a new and substantive theory from the data. This chapter concludes with a review of the ethics related to this research.

The findings chapter lays out the uninterpreted data on the participants, the context, and the processes they went through in becoming stuck and unstuck. Participants' comments on their experience of stuckness, the value and disadvantages of stuckness, and their suggestions for working with stuckness are also recorded in this chapter.

The following chapter weaves together the perspectives from the literature review and the findings. I begin by reminding the reader of the process of theory construction in this research and then elucidate on the two theories emerging from this research. The first theory integrates the sources of stuckness as described in the literature review with the findings, thereby producing a theory of the process of stuckness. The second theory generated in this section is that of a definition of stuckness. This chapter also includes additional information that speaks to the gaps in the literature. The final section of this chapter includes notes on the limitations and generalisability of this research.

Recommendations are provided in Chapter 8, regarding particular ways in which the theory of the process of stuckness can be used to support therapeutic interventions. Some organisational suggestions are also made even though this research is not focused on organisational psychology/development.

The final chapter includes a conclusion and a personal note from myself noting how this research has affected me and supported my development.

1.6. Conclusion: Introduction

Researching leadership stuckness is an area of interest, both personally and professionally. Furthermore, there are ethical, moral and sustainability aspects that provide a rationale for this research. This is because understanding stuckness could provide direction for solutions to enable adaptability, fluidity, equality, and growth in leadership behaviour that could be generalised to broader populations, and possibly even organisations and systems. It is possible too that this research could provide some insight

into individual and personal forms of stuckness. It is for these reasons that I would like to explore leadership stuckness.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

2.1.1. The role of a literature review in grounded theory

The literature review presented in this chapter explores stuckness in leaders. The objectives of a literature review include to understand the existing body of knowledge, to identify where additional knowledge could be useful (what is missing), and to provide supporting information with which to make sense of the findings (Ramalho et al., 2015).

There is much debate around the process of reviewing literature in a grounded theory process. Charmaz (2006) notes that the researcher should limit their engagement in the literature until the findings are harvested, and only then structure and engage in the literature review around these. Practically, this would have been difficult in the DProf process because the literature review was required before the data was generated. Thus, although much reading did occur prior to the data harvesting, the final review is organised and constructed, at least to some extent, by knowledge created through reflexivity processes and the data itself. This is in line with grounded theory *(*Charmaz, 2006, Ramalho et al., 2015).

2.1.2. Core objectives for this literature review

Core objectives for this literature review are to identify and explore existing literature that can provide insight into and/or point to an existential account of leadership stuckness. A secondary aim is to identify gaps in the literature on leadership stuckness that this research can develop.

This research takes the approach that stuckness is a relationship between a context/person/people and a leader. As a result, these key research areas are supplemented by an exploration of an "other" partner in the stuck relationship (the context/person/people) as well a look at relationship patterns through the lens of attachment theory. This is in line with the working definition of stuckness provided by Petriglieri (2007).

2.1.3. Literature review strategies

To my knowledge this study is the first existential study of leadership stuckness. As such, there was very little direct literature on leadership stuckness but there was a lot of related literature that could be usefully employed by this research, particularly in terms of existential thinking. As a result, the review has needed to integrate a very wide range of authors, all of whom have offered something towards understanding leadership stuckness. This has had implications in terms of the complexity of the review and the difficulty in organising this material in a way that retains the reader, makes sense, provides the

information necessary, and allows me to identify gaps. It is for this reason that I have worked through six iterations of this review.

The first version of this literature review was based on my initial limited understanding of stuckness, the second utilised feedback from the PAP Viva and supervisory processes, the third took direction from the pilot study, version four was based on a full understanding of the data including my own reflexivity processes, and version five comprised a final review of the literature before submission to supervisors. The sixth and final review process constitutes a re-organisation of the literature to answer the specific research questions, understanding and identifying gaps in the existing literature, and building up a knowledge base for the analysis process. Appendix A contains a table providing additional detail on the six literature review processes undertaken for this research.

2.1.4. Research and search activities

Initially, I reviewed my DProf projects, literature and learning from my placement. This was helpful in identifying existential writers on stuckness. Since freedom and stuckness is a theme stretching across most existential texts, this reading has been extensive and ongoing.

A number of search words were used to identify relevant literature and these increased as my understanding of stuckness grew. The search words included leadership stuckness, derailment, agility, leadership fluidity, repetition compulsion, objectification, dehumanisation, redemption, emancipation, corporate slavery, meaningful work, engagement, and empowerment. None of the search avenues proved sufficient on its own, but all provided some material towards understanding stuckness. This has meant that the literature review tends to be broad ranging and pieces together a multiplicity of literature sources rather than uses one field or author as the sole source of information.

These searches were completed on Google Scholar, the Middlesex online library, the University of Cape Town (UCT) online library, and the UCT Graduate School of Business online library. I have also consulted my own personal and work-based libraries of coaching, organisational psychology, and leadership literature.

In addition, I spoke with a number of researchers in the field eliciting sources, insights and ideas for further research.[3] I delivered two presentations of this research to the South African Organisation Development Network (SAODN) at the beginning and towards the end of this research period. Both events generated additional literature leads as well as sample participants.

[3] These researchers included Professor Kurt April (leadership), Dr Dominik Heil (Heidegger and corporations), Dr Richard Pithouse (Fanon), Dr Valerie Livesay (leadership), Dr Ashley Wells (leadership), Simon Kettleborough, Lucille Greeff, Christo van Staden, Dr Makgathi Mokwena, Joanne Wilson, Anne Isabelle Sam and many other leadership practitioners.

2.1.5. Final literature review structure

This final literature review is organised around the specific questions asked by this research. I begin with a review of definitions of leadership and general stuckness, and then proceed to exploring the process of stuckness for leaders and a more general population. This is followed by a review on the experience and value of stuckness for leaders and others.

This research uses the notion of stuckness as a relationship, and as a result I have also included literature on the nature of relationship and the context in which the leadership stuckness occurs.

2.2. An existential definition of leadership stuckness

2.2.1. Exploring existing definitions of leadership stuckness

Several definitions of stuckness have been identified, four of which are described and critiqued below. The four were chosen because they provide a good representation of ways in which leadership stuckness and stuckness in general are described in the literature and come from the fields of leadership development, psychology, and coaching. These are critiqued based on my reading, the emergent narrative in the data, and my reflexivity processes.

I began this research process using Taggart's (2012) definition, which is as follows.

> *1. being unable to go forward toward a future state of being;*
> *2. being unable to go backward, to return to a prior state of being;*
> *3. having the desire to move one way or another;*
> *4. wanting to will something to happen but recognizing, if only dimly, that one's will is inconsequential;*
> *5. hence, repeating the same gestures or remaining paralyzed while becoming half or fully aware of this repetition or this state of paralysis.*

While this definition acknowledges the lack of movement and the pain therein as well as the individual's desire and attempts to move, it does not bring in the role of the context fully enough or find benefit in stuckness as an experience. It also lacks academic credibility as it is a reference from a business website that is pop in nature.

Watzlawick et al. (1974/2011, p. 13) provide a definition that is more academic in rigour and acknowledges the context and the repetitive and enduring nature of stuckness. They note that stuckness is "A person, a family, or a wider social system enmeshed in a problem in a persistent and repetitive way, despite desire and effort to alter the situation". The definition does not, however, find benefit in the state of stuckness nor provide an account of the lived experience of stuckness or advice on its release. This does not make the definition wrong, but my experience in the research and in my own reflexivity is that there are significant benefits to stuckness that need to be acknowledged.

Bella (2011, pp. 2-3), citing a number of authors, describes stuckness as "A frustrating pattern that limits capacities (Kahn, 2003), a lack of movement in a therapeutic process (Beaudoin, 2008), arrested cognitive and emotional development (Neufeld and Maté, 2006), a 'standstill' or 'feeling frozen' (Sachs, 1999), an absence of positive change or growth (Vetere and Dallos, 2003), and a 'force' that is counter to intended behaviour (Lipson and Perkins, 1990)". Once again, the context is not included in the definition, there is no phenomenological orientation, and this definition does not find benefit in the experience of stuckness.

The closest definition to my experience of stuckness and what was emerging in the literature and data on stuckness is that of Petriglieri (2007, p. 192), who notes that it

> *might result from socially rewarded ongoing progress experienced internally as purposeless activity. In this case, the opposite occurs. We feel stuck because, to gain social rewards, we are changing faster than we can make sense of or feel comfortable with. Stuckness, however, is not always a symptom of the timeless friction between the inner pace of the individual and the outer pace of culture. It can also represent the beginning of a solution to fragmented isolation by functioning as a pregnant pause in the reworking of a life narrative.*

This definition is drawn from the context of leadership, acknowledges the importance of the environment and others, does not blame the individual, and acknowledges the role stuckness can play in the growth of a leader. This definition invites the idea of stuckness as an inability to adapt to a changing context, a disconnect in the relationship between a leader and his/her environment. It does not, however, provide any insight into the lived experience of stuckness nor is it existential in nature, being orientated around a transactional analysis view of the world.

2.2.2. Conclusion: An existential definition of stuckness

In general, the definitions of stuckness that I found did not meet all the needs of the emerging data and narrative. Most were behavioural and negative in orientation, and with limited phenomenological description. Few were contextual, and there was little that seemed to offer a full explanation of stuckness as a relationship. Stuckness was most often seen as negative and a reflection on a person's attitude, capability, or capacity to provide utility in this capitalist system. This means that I needed to provide my own definition in the analysis and conclusion section of this document.

2.3. The sources of stuckness

As noted above, there is a wide range of authors whose work offers value to this research on stuckness. As this is an existential project and views stuckness as a social process, I focus on existential authors although additional thinkers have been included where appropriate.

I use the term sources of stuckness to speak to what I see as the possible origins of stuckness. These are broad narrative themes and include the richness of one's inner world and the capacity to self-reflect, the importance of engaged relationships and the ability to construct self-transcending meaning. The rationale for the inclusion of these specific themes will become apparent as each source is explored.

I use the term mechanisms of stuckness to refer to sub-processes within these sources of stuckness. Thus objectification is a mechanism of stuckness creating the source of stuckness related to the richness of one's inner world and capacity to self-reflect.

2.3.1. Stuckness emerging from a limited self and capacity to self-reflect

2.3.1.1. Introduction

Heidegger was concerned with the meaning of Being as a human, the fundamental ontology (Carman, 2003). He theorised that humans are humans because they have a fundamental ontology that allows us to be self-reflective and in a constant state of emergence in response to the world – *Dasein* (Heidegger, 1927/2008; Steiner and Reisinger, 2006). We have an inner world that reflects on how we are in the world and an adaptive quality that responds to the world and the facticities of fallenness, and this adaptive quality is enhanced when we appreciate that we are moving towards death.

Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1943/2003) explores the idea of consciousness, noting two types of beings, "beings-in-itself" and "beings-for-itself" (p. 70). The first type of being is the being of things; for example, a tree, and the second type; the being of consciousness. Beings-in-themselves do not have the capacity to self-reflect, change and emerge, but humans (beings-for-themselves) do because they are at the same time a physical object and have a consciousness. Our consciousness is empty, and we have no intrinsic identity, but we do have an identity that emerges and changes as a result of our behaviour and the choices we make in life (Sartre, 1943/2003). We are human because we are emergent, and we are emergent because we have an inner life that can reflect on and respond to the world.

Choice in Sartre's eyes was an essential aspect of humans; even when we do not choose, we choose (Sartre, 1943/2003). When we have a diminished capacity to self-reflect, our capacity to choose is impaired because we lack critical information required for this.

This section introduces the idea that leaders and others can get stuck when they/we/others limit or narrow our inner world and the internal options we can see available for sense making and acting. For example, if we believe we are a victim only then we can only respond to the world from this perspective, but if we understand that we are a victim and a "winner", then we can respond from more than one perspective and we thus have greater agility and adaptability in the world. A second part of this argument is that our capacity to self-reflect is linked to the richness of our inner world. When we have a limited inner world, we may be less inclined to self-reflect as there is "less" to reflect upon and the

gains of self-reflection are less compelling. The richer our inner life, the more potentialities there are to reflect upon, and the more intrinsically rewarding the process of self-reflection. Furthermore, the richer our inner world is, the more data we have to make sense of our experience in the outside world.

The mechanisms for stuckness related to a narrow inner world and a limited capacity for self-reflection include being-for-ourselves and being-for-others; losing ourselves in the crowd/herd/Das Man; becoming a tool, asset; inauthenticity, boredom and being asleep; becoming an object; bad faith; competitive relationships, and the gaze including shame, scapegoating, self-criticism and being the outsider; splitting and some suggestions made by the leadership literature. Below is a description of each of these mechanisms, showing how each results in a loss of self and/or capacity to self-reflect.

2.3.1.2. Being for ourselves and being for others

Heidegger's perspective (1927/2008) is that before we come to know ourselves, we are caught up in a relationship with the world around us so that the self we come to know also contains aspects of the environment. There is no subject/object or me/world and it is very hard to understand which part of this unified entity/Dasein or openness-for-being is me and what is me mixed with the world. Not only are we merged in this way, but we are always in relationships to others: being-for-others, serving, connecting with and meeting/rebelling against the expectations of others.

We are caught in the constant and paradoxical dance of being-for-ourselves and being-for-others. This dance moves from one side of the continuum to the other as we try to balance out these dynamics. My reading of Heidegger (1927/2008) suggests that he would prefer us to err on the side of being-for-ourselves, but this is a difficult position to manage as we are not always sure of what this means or looks like because we do not always know ourselves. When we get fixed on one or the other side of the continuum, thereby losing our fluid response to the environment, we risk becoming stuck. This is because we then respond too much or too little to the context, resulting in no traction or spinning in circles, in other words stuckness.

2.3.1.3. Losing ourselves in the crowd/herd/Das Man

Van Deurzen and Iacovou (2013) note similar themes in the work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. These philosophers all explored the relationship between the individual and the unthinking and non-individualised masses (crowd, herd, Das Man) and suggest that we get stuck when we lose ourselves and our identity in the crowd/herd/Das Man. As a result, we lose our capacity to hold engaged relationships and live our own life. Being self-authoring in the face of pressurising others is the only way we can have authentic relationships and live our own lives. When we do not do this we get stuck in others' lives, which are ultimately unsatisfying and lacking in meaning to us (Van Deurzen and Iacovou, 2013). Extrapolating from these authors, to prevent stuckness or to unstick ourselves, we need

to embrace our individuality, take responsibility for our own lives, and learn to hold the resulting anxiety as a badge of honour announcing that we are alive.

2.3.1.4. Becoming a tool or asset

According to Heidegger, tools and assets do not have a self-reflective or emergent quality; they have a singular and utilitarian identity, for example a hammer. Heil, building on Heidegger (1927/2008), notes that "Humans can … reveal themselves and other humans as assets. Only humans can interpret themselves as assets and, by doing so, are denied and deny their very own nature" (Heil, 2011, p. 110). In this role the identity of the person becomes essentialised around their utility as a tool or asset (Heil, 2011) and their agility in the world is reduced to performing this one particular role.

Critically, Heidegger and Heil posit that when we objectify others or turn them into non-transcending and essentialised tools or objects we do the same to ourselves, and we too become tools or assets with the same unitary capacity in the world.

Heil describes the relationship between humans as a tool or asset and the context in which they operate as em-bankment. This is the opposite of Dasein or openness-for-being because the emergent qualities of a human are removed. As such, the individual, merged with the organisation, has limited capacity for self-reflection and transformation (Heil, 2011).

2.3.1.5. Inauthenticity, boredom and being asleep

Other processes that could, according to Heidegger, deny our emergent quality and thus our fundamental ontology include inauthenticity, being asleep, and specific forms of boredom (1927/2008).

For Heidegger, when we do not live life with the awareness that we will die, we can be tempted to avoid engaging fully in our experience of being in the world and we become inauthentic, losing access to this fundamental ontology, self-reflectiveness, and emergence (1927/2008). Commenting on this, Spinelli (2005) notes that "Inauthenticity is not only the denial of an authoritative self, it is also the elevation of that self to a non-relational individuality proclaiming occurrences as owned or disowned, mine or not mine, there or not there" (p. 48). In this sense it can be argued that inauthenticity can create stuckness because it denies the emergent self and claims a non-relationality. Nevertheless, Heidegger insists that neither authenticity nor inauthenticity is better than the other; both are valid ways of existing and we are not, and cannot, be authentic all the time (Gardiner, 2011). This is interesting and important for the research because it means stuckness emerging out of inauthenticity is normal and in at least some cases non-pathological. Thus, we cannot always be unstuck, and moving between stuckness and unstuckness is part of the ongoing rhythm of life that allows us to balance the ostensibly competing demands for constancy and adaptability that make our lives possible.

A similar process is that of being asleep, which is the opposite of Dasein. It is being-away, a state of "…existing in any of a variety of non-attentive, absent-minded, unfocused modes of being" (Slaby, 2010, p. 7). Heidegger notes that this latter state is more the norm than the experience of being-there (Slaby, 2010). Once again, we are reminded that stuckness is a normal part of our experience as humans.

Being bored by something, being bored with something, and profound boredom are the three states of boredom described by Heidegger. Being bored by something involves an external focus for boredom (*zeitvertreib*), being bored with something has more of an internal focus, and finally, in profound boredom the boredom is all internally located. All three types have the structure of being held in limbo (*hingenhaltenheit*) and being left empty (*leergelassenheit*). There is a different quality of time in each type of boredom and in the latter two types there is an existential abandonment of self and it is this that interests me in relation to this research. This is because when we abandon ourselves, denying ourselves and our emergent nature, we become more susceptible to becoming stuck.

2.3.1.6. Becoming an object

Section 32.3.1.1 describes Sartre's ideas on consciousness, noting two types of being: "beings-in-itself" and "beings-for-itself" (1943/2003, p. 70). He understands humans as beings-for-themselves because they are simultaneously a physical object and have a consciousness. Our consciousness is empty, and we have no intrinsic identity, but we do have an identity that emerges and changes as a result of our behaviour and the choices we make in life (Sartre, 1943/2003). It is this capacity to emerge and change in response to the environment that makes humans human and the same property that allows us to remain fluid and avoid stuckness. According to Sartre there are several ways in which humans become an object, which includes bad faith and the mechanism of the gaze. These are discussed below alongside other authors' views on these phenomena.

2.3.1.7. Bad faith

For Sartre we exist before we become something. We become something when we take responsibility for our lives and actively create meaning. Sartre understands that this requires taking responsibility for ourselves and our choices and that this is sometimes difficult and at times impossible for us to do (Sartre, 1943/2003).

To avoid having to take responsibility for decisions, conflict, our uniqueness, or doing what we really want, we can act in bad faith. This is when we remain paralysed by the facts or believe unrealistically that there are none (Feldman and Hazlett, 2013). We essentialise our identity into one aspect of ourselves as if this is all we are, as per Sartre's description of the waiter who presents himself as having only one identity, a waiter (Sartre, 1943/2003). By doing this he denies other aspects of himself, including other identities such as man, lover, or father. This is a minimisation of our identities and thus our options for responding to the world. Bad faith can also be the opposite of this, which is when we

identify with a multiplicity of identities and believe that we can be anything (Sartre, 1943/2003). When this essentialisation takes place, through bad faith, then we become an object, a being-in-itself (Feldman and Hazlett, 2013).

Sartre notes that it is normal and expected for us to be in bad faith from time to time, although we should try and avoid it because it can lead us to not taking responsibility for our lives (Sartre, 1943/2003).

Sartre's earlier position was that we are totally responsible for our lives and that this responsibility exists no matter the context for our lives, and furthermore that bad faith is an avoidance of taking up this responsibility. After 1948, Sartre does allow for the influence of context more fully, but he still retains the focus on personal responsibility for how one is in the world (Poellner, 2015). A critique of Sartre's earlier and to some extent later approach is that when personal responsibility and choice become decontextualised, they become non-adaptive and non-emergent. This undermines Sartre's notion that a fundamental quality of humans is our emergent and adaptive selves.

2.3.1.8. Competitive relationships and the gaze

Sartre, competitive relationships, and the gaze

Sartre's early views were that we compete with others, veering between being submissive (masochistic) or oppressive (sadistic) to interact with others (Poellner, 2015). Sartre's later works note that relationships could be mutually supporting, based on generosity and give and take (Poellner, 2015). Sartre defined humans as being-for-themselves, having the capacity to transform and explore new ways of being in the world. However, he noted that we want to retain our own freedom but objectify/turn others into objects, beings-in-themselves. We do this because this objectification allows us to be safe from their judgement and from others finding us deficient (Poellner, 2015). We do this by the way in which we view and interact with others (the gaze).

De Beauvoir and the gaze

De Beauvoir too speaks of the notion of the gaze, in particular with reference to the objectification of women. She wrote about the impact of the societal essentialising gaze on female identity, in particular how this directs women's expression of femininity in their lives, resulting in an objectified manifestation of femaleness (De Beauvoir, 1949/2015). De Beauvoir notes further that when one's own subjectivity and freedom are based on the denial of another's subjectivity and freedom, then our own subjectivity and freedom do not exist at all (De Beauvoir, 1949/2015). This is a return to the Heideggerian idea mentioned earlier that when we objectify others, we also become objectified (Heidegger 1927/2008).

African existential writers and the gaze

The previous philosophers were white European men, barring De Beauvoir who was female, white and European. According to Gordon (2008), Africana existential philosophers like Fanon and Biko are

concerned with the givens of existence as per Heidegger, Sartre and other European existential philosophers, but there is one essential difference. This is, that black existential philosophers are primarily concerned with what it means to be black in a world that sees one as other and less than (Manganyi, 1973; Gordon, 2008). Manganyi and Hook note that Africana existential philosophy speaks of being-black-in-the-world instead of being-in-the-world, which tends to describe white experience. Furthermore, they argue that being-black-in-the-world is an experience of being an object, and not a person, in the world (Manganyi, 1973; Hook, 2008). In my view, this experience creates a very different orientation to that of white European existential philosophers and in particular leads to an increased recognition of the impact of context on human freedom.[4] It is however important to note that this division may not be totally neat, for example Sartre's later works that show a greater acknowledgement of the role of context in creating individual freedom. During this time he was influenced by Marxism and its appreciation of context in relation to oppression (Poellner, 2015).

Fanon adapted the ideas of Sartre and De Beauvoir to the colonial context in Algeria. His work fundamentally agrees with their views and those of Heidegger, with regard to humans being defined as humans when they have a rich inner world resulting in an emergent identity and a capacity to reflect and transform. He suggested that the colonial gaze dehumanised and objectified the Algerians and hence caused them to suffer psychiatric illnesses. Furthermore, he argued that the process of objectifying others objectifies oneself, and renders all ontologies impossible (Fanon, 1986).

Biko was exposed to the work of Sartre and Fanon in South Africa in the seventies and integrated these ideas within his theory of Black Consciousness (Macqueen, 2014). Black Consciousness as an ideology is fundamentally concerned with mental oppression and the objectification of black people (Hook, 2008). Biko noted the dehumanising, essentialising and objectifying effect of the Apartheid regime on black South Africans and the way in which black South Africans internalised this oppression and began oppressing themselves even in the face of possible liberation. He noted to how this form of inner oppression caused people to become alienated from themselves. He comments that "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (Biko, 1978/2004, p. 31).

Mbembe and du Bois explored the process of internalising the gaze as a function of the splitting off of one's authentic self and the replacement of this by a false self. They see this as related to black oppression and, more recently, to the neoliberal capitalist system (Mbembe and Dubois, 2017). This is explored more fully in the section on neoliberalism (section 3.9.1) and the corporate context.

[4] This comment is based on my reading of Africana existential philosophy and European existential philosophy. European and American authors I have read include Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, De Beauvoir, Arendt, Buber, Jaspers, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Camus, Yalom, Dreyfus. As for Africana existential philosophers I have read WEB Du Bois, Cooper, Fanon, Manganyi, Biko, Mbembe, and Gordon, to name a few.

Please note that although the context for objectification for these authors is colonialism and racism, this research views the context for this research as the neoliberal corporate context. This extension of the context for objectification to the neoliberal and corporate context is justified on the basis that both contexts tend to objectify people. This concept is further explored in the section on the context for stuckness (Section 3.9).

Shame, scapegoating, self-criticism and being the outsider

I would like to argue that other versions of the gaze include shame, scapegoating, self-criticism and being the outsider, because these examples all relate to how one is viewed by oneself and others. My argument is based on the notion that all these processes involve someone looking at themselves or someone else and offering a judgement that then comes to define how a person feels about themselves.

Shame

Shame relates to an enduring sense of being defective, often developed early in childhood in response to how the world and significant others engage with us, and enacted in a variety of contexts throughout life (Bradshaw, 2005; Kukard, 2006). There are many causes of this shame, including inter alia being abandoned as a child, being exposed to high levels of criticism in the family system, abuse of all types, and physical, mental, neurological and psychological difference (Bradshaw, 2005).

April and Mooketsi (2010), building on the work of McDuff et al. (1998), note two kinds of shame: existential and episodic. Existential shame relates to "an enduring sense that one is defective, inadequate and inferior to others" (p. 69) and in women tends to be related to socialisation that informs girls that they are inferior to boys. Episodic shame relates to a sense of being revealed as inferior in public, for example in a corporate setting. If one has a high degree of existential shame, one has an increased predisposition for episodic shame. This can occur because shame has become the way in which we relate to the world and to ourselves (Bedrick, 2020).

Shaming either by others or by ourselves as a result of legacy shaming by others results in the narrowing of one's identity constellating around one or more shameful aspect/s of oneself. To this point, Stolorow notes that Heidegger "viewed shame as the mood of inauthenticity, of being "held in hostage by the eyes of others, belonging not to ourselves, but to them"(Stolorow, 2013 p. 456, quoted in Van Deurzen-Smith, 2020, p. 427).

Scapegoating

Scapegoating is a process whereby one is identified as the problem in a system by others. It occurs in families and in workplaces where the system cannot solve the real problem in the situation, and where individuals believe that they will be penalised if they own up to any culpability. The process of scapegoating requires the essentialising of a person into the qualities most despised by a specific context

and is intrinsically an objectification process dependent on the mechanism of the gaze (Boeker, 1992; Corney, 2008).

Scapegoating tends to lead to an experience of shame and isolation, as others avoid scapegoats and the scapegoats themselves begin to believe that isolation is the only way in which safety can be created (Hartling et al., 2015).

Self-criticism

Self-criticism is a process whereby one identifies faults in oneself, and in many cases focuses on these faults to the exclusion of positive information about oneself. The literature on self-criticism within the therapeutic and coaching context is vast (Kannan and Levitt, 2013). Kannan and Levitt note that self-criticism can vary hugely in depth, occurrence, and severity. They refer to previous research that has linked self-criticism to depression, anxiety, eating disorders, suicidality, difficulties in connecting with others, psychological distress, and an ongoing lack of satisfaction with performance and life (2013). When one is focused only on one negative aspect of oneself, it is possible to become stuck as one loses options and resources for responding to the world from a position of being capable, lovable, etc.

Petriglieri in his article and case study on leadership stuckness notes the self-judgement in the leader experiencing stuckness (Petriglieri, 2007). It is for this reason that this is included here, that it might in some way be associated with stuckness and keeping stuckness in place for leaders.

There is extensive literature on self-criticism and leaders, especially in the context of coaching (O'Neill, 2000; Kets de Vries, 2006, 2013; Hannaway, 2018; Van Deurzen-Smith, 2020). Within coaching literature, self-criticism is understood as intending to create better performance, but in many cases, it has the reverse impact by delaying, impoverishing, or eliminating action, in other words, getting stuck.

Being the outsider

Van Deurzen's (2015) research into identity creation for outsiders has been included below because many of the research participants considered themselves outsiders.

Van Deurzen (2015) provides several insights into what it means to be an outsider and how one might experience the essentialising of oneself into the outsider role by oneself and others. Perhaps of greatest interest to this research is the process she speaks of when one is faced with being an outsider. This includes returning to one's past and previous identity, grieving one's outsider status, then attempting to adopt a false identity more in line with the context, and finally the creation of a new transcendent identity based on an experience with uncertainty and not knowing who one is (Van Deurzen, 2015). Exploring the outsider is useful because, as the research will show, most of the participants felt like outsiders.

Critique and a concluding note on the gaze

Sartre, De Beauvoir, Fanon, Biko and others have noted the impact of the gaze internalised on reducing our inner worlds and thus our capacity to be adaptive and have agency in the world. The agents for the gaze have been described as individuals, societies, countries, genders, races, and corporates, all of which have the capacity to change our inner world through how they look at and treat us.

A critique of the gaze is that the gaze and free will are almost mutually exclusive as ways of explaining human behaviour. If the concept of gaze is true then we do not have free will, at least in relation to Sartre's earlier version of free will and total responsibility as espoused by Sartre. And, if we have free will then the gaze is not an overwhelming directive from the context on how we need to be. My sense is that the notion of free will and total responsibility does not consider how a context may impact on our ability to see and act on choices. It does not acknowledge how stuck we may be because of how the world has engaged with us and how this may limit our choice and behaviour.

2.3.1.9. Splitting creates stuckness

Spinelli (2005) describes splitting as occurring when our understanding of ourselves differs from our experience in the world. He notes that we all have some level of multiple personalities but that this can also become pathological as we create meaning and behaviours that are intended to defend us from the truth of our experience and leave our sense of self intact, even if not necessarily appropriate and true (Spinelli, 2005). When this happens, we become detached from the world and our meaning making becomes less relevant, leading to stuckness.

2.3.1.10. The psycho-economic and leadership literature

Below is a description and critical evaluation of the themes in the leadership literature relating to a diminished self.

Organisations and leaders operate in a capitalist world where staff and leaders are objectified and used as tools (Heil, 2011; Mbembe and Dubois, 2017; Wilson, 2018; Baker and Kelan, 2019; Van Deurzen et al., 2019). Petriglieri comments that the changed relationship between employer and employee can result in the dehumanisation of leaders, and that stuckness is a loss of adaptive capacity likely caused by this dehumanisation and insufficient self-knowledge (Petriglieri, 2007). He notes too that business schools may replicate the dehumanisation of leadership and some schools of coaching reinforce this way of treating humans as tools (Lodwick, 2015; Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2015). Other processes of essentialisation and objectification occurring in corporates include the internalisation of corporate values and acceptable behaviours and potential displacement of intrinsic characteristics (Piccorelli and Zingale, 2012; Mbembe and Dubois, 2017).

According to Vos, functionalism is the underpinning ideology of capitalism referring to everything or anyone having a functional utility that can be bought and sold. He summarises the characteristics of functionalism as abstract, goal orientated, efficiency orientated, control, measurability, randomness, flexibility, failure attributed to the individual and not the system, and the use of humans as tools or instruments (Vos, 2020).

Ashman and Gibson (2010) note that it is common for leaders to disown parts of themselves that are not considered ideal in a specific corporate context in order to fit the organisational recipe for staff identity. And, as noted earlier, this process of splitting occurs when we remove part of ourselves to retain a version of ourselves. This occurs too in the context of workplaces where leaders split off undesirable parts of themselves and project these onto their subordinates (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012; Baker and Kelan, 2019).

The discussion above is a description and rationale for leaders to edit, adapt and package their identities for their workplaces. The underlying judgement of these authors is that this behaviour, conscious or not, is wrong. A critique of this is that it is any personality adaptation may not necessarily mean a loss of self but merely an appropriate adaptation to an environment. It may also be that the current trend towards authentic leadership may ameliorate or moderate this behaviour (Boatwright et al., 2010; Yeager and Callahan, 2016; Hinojosa et al., 2014).

A last possible factor in the leadership literature that relates to mechanisms of stuckness is that of self-criticism (Petriglieri, 2007). Self-criticism may be a critical factor in holding stuckness in place alongside shame and scapegoating, because of this behaviour's capacity to arrest or eliminate action, and to sow the seeds of shame and self-doubt.

2.3.1.11. Summary: Stuckness emerging from a limited self and capacity to self-reflect

This section has described many mechanisms that reduce our inner world and thus our options for choice and behaviour, and that also diminish our capacity for self-reflection. These include becoming tools, assets or objects, bad faith, competitive relationships, the gaze, and splitting. When we lose or diminish our inner worlds, our self-reflection and self-direction, we become more like objects than humans and we lose our capacity to adapt and transcend and this can cause us to become stuck.

2.3.2. Stuckness emerging from the nature of our relationships with others

Spinelli notes that our version of ourselves (our self-structure/identity) is constructed as a result of interactions with others, and that the traits we attribute to ourselves derive primarily from our comparisons between ourselves and others. Thus, we cannot exist outside of others. In the words of Spinelli, "the 'I' defines itself through its interactions with the 'not I'" (Spinelli, 2005, p. 95) and in this way the 'I' always contains the 'not I', the shape around which the 'I' has formed. Thus, the self is not

singular and separate but rather generated and made manifest by other selves that interact with us. Without these other selves our self would not exist. In this way of thinking we cannot be separate and singular and only exist as a self because of others. It is only through the interaction with others that our selves are created and, it could be argued, continue to be created. This is very much in line with Heidegger, Sartre and others' ideas described above.

Existential philosophers recognise "the centrality of relationship to human existence and they have argued convincingly that individuality is secondary" (Van Deurzen and Iacovou, 2013, p. 1). We are always in relationship (Heidegger, 1927/2008); however, it is not their existence but the nature of our relationships that is of relevance to stuckness.

In the previous section, I described how others may impact on the depth and richness of our internal world. This is relevant here, but I would like to focus more in this section on the nature of the relationship. The argument presented below is that certain kinds of relationships enable us to be more fluid and adaptable and less stuck. This is because of two factors: firstly these relationships support our inner worlds and self-reflection to flourish, and secondly because they invite us to enter and engage with the inner worlds of others. Through entering the worlds of others, we learn what exists outside of ourselves and the supportive nature of an engaging relationship invites and encourages us to adapt to the other person. This is because when we care about someone else, we tend to be curious about who we are caring for and are more likely to adapt to people we care about. Good relationships teach us skills that allow us to engage with and adapt to individuals, groups and contexts and keep us relevant and fluid. When we do not know how to engage with what/who is outside of ourselves, we will not take in the information necessary for adaptation, nor will we be inclined to or know how to adapt to a person/context. We will not be able to respond to the environment/person as it/they are, rather we will tend to respond to a person/context from a position of how we are. This disconnect can result in a loss of connection or traction between two actors in a relationship, thereby bringing about an experience of stuckness.

2.3.2.1. Dehumanised and disengaged relationships cause stuckness

For Buber, a human is only a human because they engage in a particular kind of relationship with another human. We cannot be human without the humanising presence of another. He writes of I-Thou and I-It relationships, with the former referring to a relationship between two humans where the engagement is characterised by respect, validation, and a recognition of the inner worlds of the other. In I-It relationships, we relate to another person as an object. This dehumanises them, which in turn dehumanises us (Buber, 1923/2010).

Buber's view is similar to that of Ubuntu, an African humanistic philosophy which states that we are only humans because others are human and they are human because of how we interact with them

(Louw and Fourie, 2011). This speaks to the same idea of relationships as safe-guarding and supporting our inner worlds and our capacity to self-reflect and adapt to an external context/person.

Jaspers and Levinas similarly speak of authentic encounters with others as being the source of our humanity and subjectivity (Van Deurzen and Iacovou, 2013). This means that connections with others help us to connect to ourselves as well as to adapt to an "external" world.

We cannot become human alone (Van Deurzen and Iacovou, 2013) and we need others to humanise us, in particular, to enrich and validate our own inner world and encourage us to leave the safety of our own psyche to explore that of another. When we do not have engaged relationships that grow us in this way, we run the risk of becoming stuck in our own world, disconnected from reality and unable to have traction in the world. In other words, we can become stuck.

2.3.2.2. Too much engagement with others creates stuckness

Heidegger describes the balance between being-for-oneself and being-for-others (Heidegger, 1927/2008; Reuther, 2014). When this balance is out of kilter, we can lose ourselves in others' realities or not integrate and balance other realities within our own. In other words, we lose our capacity to self-author our lives and with that our ability to adapt positively to changes in our inner and outer context. We become stuck in a life ill-suited to ourselves and are unable to render the idiosyncratic value each of us has to offer.

2.3.2.3. The psycho-economic and leadership literature

As noted above, the neoliberal environment, the way businesses operate, and the way in which leaders are grown and supported encourage leaders to treat themselves and others as objects. It is for this reason that some authors suggest new ways of being that build leaders' subjectivity and ontology and through this re-humanise the workplace (Lodwick, 2015; Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2015). The research will show how the rehumanising of the workplace could have a significant impact on reducing and releasing leadership stuckness.

2.3.2.4. Summary: Stuckness emerging out of the nature of our relationships with others

Engaged relationships help us to vitalise our inner world and teach us how to reach out beyond ourselves and connect with someone else or a context. The process of transcending oneself in this way is the very act of adaptation and ensuring connection between a person and another person/context. Engaged relationships diminish our capacity to get stuck.

2.3.3. Stuckness emerging from struggling to find meaning

Adams and Vos, quoting Van Deurzen, note that "Existential-Phenomenological therapy is fundamentally interested with meaning and meaning-making, evident in that most fundamental question for us all: How can I live a meaningful life?" (Van Deurzen et al., 2019, p. 218).

Vos notes that "…meaning is the combination of motivation, values, understanding of our place in the world, setting goals and flexibly committing to them, self-worth, and coping with challenges in life" (2020, p. 8). He suggests that there are different types of meaning, with some forms of meaning being less or more satisfying to humans. He explores the types of meaning that are helpful to humans and comments on how our mental health is affected when we do not have satisfying meaning (see section 2.3.3.2 below).

This section argues that meaning allows us to see the bigger picture, adapt, endure, and transcend difficult times. It allows us to move our focus from everyday small acts towards a broader longer-term orientation about purpose. When we do not have meaning we lose our rudder in the world and suffer negative psychological impacts. When we do not have meaning we can become distracted by immediate gratifications which may not lead to a sense of living one's life well. When we do not have meaning we struggle to "understand" life and have courage to continue living and face up to the difficulties and responsibilities of our lives. Meaninglessness can result in confusion and a sense of being lost, which can result in a lack of movement, traction, and agency in life, in other words, stuckness. It is for these reasons that stuckness can emerge from struggling to create meaning. As will become clear in this section, relationships are a significant, but not the only, source of meaning (Frankl, 1946/2006).

Ways in which meaning can support stuckness include having no meaning and not being able to make meaning of having no meaning; having meaning that is not satisfying; or not being able to make meaning because one is confused by double-bind communication, limit situations, sedimentation, totalisation and mineralisation, dilemmas and paradoxes, splitting, trauma and addiction. These aspects form the structure for this section.

2.3.3.1. Having no meaning can support stuckness

Camus posited that there was no meaning, and that the world was in fact absurd (Blomme, 2014; Camus, 1995/2012). According to this author, the main question philosophy should answer is why we should continue to live at all, given how meaningless life actually is. Despite this, Camus did find some meaning in the creative act and in rebelling against the meaningless of society and life (Blomme, 2014; Camus, 1995/2012). Camus also suggested it can be very liberating to face up to the fact that life is meaningless.

Meaninglessness can cause depression, lethargy, and a reduced ability to engage in the world. When this happens, we lack a rudder in the world and drift about on the tides of life. This is a form of stuckness as we fail to have traction in the world.

2.3.3.2. Having meaning that is not satisfying can support stuckness

Frankl's approach to psychotherapy (logotherapy) is based on the idea that our main motivation for continuing to live is meaning. Meaning allows us to live even when our lives are miserable. The therapeutic approach that has emerged from Frankl's work focuses on noögenic neurosis, or neuroses related to a person's ability to make meaning (1946/2006).

We have a will to meaning that makes our lives worth living even if the conditions of our life seem intolerable. We can create meaning in three different ways: by doing something (work/deed), experiencing someone or something, or by the attitude we take when we deal with inescapable suffering in our lives. Frankl notes that when there is a vacuum of meaning in someone's life, then the will to power or pleasure takes over. We then fill this meaning void with activities to further our power and pleasure instead of focusing on what is truly meaningful for us in life. In this way, we abandon ourselves, choosing a life that is potentially less satisfying and risking becoming stuck (Frankl, 1946/2006).

More recently, Vos explored meaning making within the capitalist system and noted:

> *The Capitalist Life Syndrome can be defined as that perspective on economics— whether a reality, symbol, or imagined model—which focuses on materialist, hedonist, and self-oriented types of meaning from a functionalist perspective; which sees individuals and history as a functionalist process predominantly determined by materialist factors; which makes individuals feel unfree despite the capitalist imagination of freedom; and which leads to a crisis in the existential, psychological and overall well-being of individuals* (Vos, 2020, p. 18).

Vos notes that our meaning making within the capitalist system is materialist, hedonistic, and self-orientated in nature. Materialist-based meaning orientates us to value our material possessions, status, education, and professional success in life as a way of living with meaning. Hedonistic meaning is generated through experiences with ourselves, food, drink, life, sex, peak experiences, pain avoidance, animals and nature. Self-orientated meaning relates to supporting and enjoying the value of ourselves in life. This type of meaning includes meaning created through our capacity for resilience, self-efficacy, ability to meet challenges, being in control, and achieving goals. Self-acceptance, self-worth and self-insight are also experienced as meaningful within this paradigm (Vos, 2020). Appendix B provides more detail regarding types of meaning as per Vos (2020).

Less pronounced in the Capitalist Life Syndrome are social types of meaning, purpose, or higher goal types of meaning and existential types of meaning. Social forms of meaning relate to being connected to others, conformism, altruism and birthing and raising children for the sake of a community. Higher

purpose types of meaning relate to personal growth, self-transcendence, authenticity, wisdom, place in life span, justice, ethics, spirituality, and religion. Existential and philosophical sources of meaning include meaning in being alive and moving towards death, uniqueness, connectedness, freedom, and responsibility for our lives (Vos, 2020).

According to Vos, a significant part of the Capitalist Life Syndrome is the offer of freedom that is an illusion. On the one hand we are told that we can choose our life, and the material, hedonistic and self-fulfilling forms of meaning associated with it. However, within the system we are corralled and directed by, inter alia, education, professional and personal mores, and advertising, and only the very rich and powerful can choose to operate out of the gravitational pull of the system. For most of us, we do not notice that we think we are free but are not (Vos, 2020).

The impact of the Capitalist Life Syndrome, according to Vos, is that we focus on the more superficial forms of meaning to guide our lives and less on finding meaning through being authentic, individual, purposive, and connected. According to Vos, this has an impact on our mental health: we experience existential crises, internalise blame for external events, experience a sense of helplessness and fatalism, and become depressed and anxious (Vos, 2020). These are all forms of stuckness caused by taking on meaning that is ultimately not meaningful.

One could argue that we live in a capitalist world and that this may require us to "play the game" from time to time in order earn a living to fit in. However, this may just be a form of bad faith because we do not want to run the risk of not fitting in and being penalised for it.

2.3.3.3. Not actively making meaning can support stuckness

Camus and Sartre differed as to how meaning is generated. Camus argued that there was no meaning but what meaning there was, was in creative acts (Camus, 1995/2012). Sartre (1943/2003) and Frankl (1946/2006) both believed that we need to actively make meaning as most meaning is not inherent in an event/situation/person. When we do not actively make meaning, we run the risk of meaninglessness at work and in our home lives and this can lead to stuckness.

2.3.3.4. Being unable to make meaning can support stuckness

Sometimes, one is unable to make meaning, perhaps because the information is contradictory or not available or because our meaning making capacity cannot organise our experience of the world. Below are examples of where we can struggle to make meaning and where this in turn has the capacity to create stuckness.

2.3.3.5. Double-bind communication can support stuckness

Laing (1960/2010) and Bateson et al. (1978) worked with patients who displayed symptoms of schizophrenia. They found that in many situations the patient had experienced double-bind communication in their families of origin. This occurred when a person received conflicting communications from one or more sources. These communications took the form of injunctions, to do or not to do something. Importantly, there were also conditions that prevented the victim from escaping or influencing these conflicting instructions. The victim then became confused and panicked, often immobilised, lost a firm sense of reality and might become paranoid. Critically, the victim could not take in information from the world, make sense of it and respond effectively to it because all information became confusing. Over time the person became hypersensitive to these conflicting injunctions and ultimately one would need just a bare suggestion of these to set off a sense of panic (Bateson et al., 1978; Laing, 1960/2010).

Although Laing's work was primarily done in the context of schizophrenia and psychosis, Ashman and Gibson (2010) note that this can manifest in more "normal" people; in fact, in leaders in the workplace. They note that even in the case of ontologically secure people, workplace practices and behaviours can encourage individuals to disconnect from themselves.

In summary, double-bind communication has the potential for us to become stuck because we are unable to process information coming in from the "outside" world and act on the basis of this information.

2.3.3.6. Dilemmas and paradoxes can support stuckness

Van Deurzen et al. (2019) describe dilemmas and paradoxes as occurring when a person has difficulty in choosing between two binary and ostensibly opposing ways of meaning making and resulting courses of action. Neither appear entirely appropriate or useful and one is caught in an experience of ennui and stuckness. She notes that movement from stuckness and growth comes from resolving these apparent contradictions in the form of a new and transcending reality.

Impact of death, trauma, and addiction on stuckness

Death

Grieving and death anxiety can undermine one's capacity to make sense of the world (Yalom, 2008), as can experiences of trauma. This means that the individual sticks to known and certain behaviours and lacks flexibility to make real choices in the world, and when the world changes, they continue with the same old routines, and are in effect stuck.

Jaspers considers death a limit situation, where we come to the end of our ability to make sense of things (Grieder, 2009). The fear of death (death anxiety) or the experience of another's death (grieving) can lock one into stuck routines, unrelated to life and its requirements for living now. Our meaning

making can thus become disconnected from life (Yalom, 2008) and fail to provide the direction we need to self-author our lives.

Trauma

Existential thinkers consider trauma as an experience with death, the abyss and nothingness that causes a loss of identity and meaning (May, 1977/2015; Pitchford, 2008). Stolorow (2011) notes that trauma shatters one's "experience of existence" and it is this shattering that creates ontological insecurity; as a result, we struggle to make sense of who we are (cited in Thompson and Walsh, 2010). "Without a sense of self we struggle to deal with the daily challenges of our existence, the facticity of our life" (Thompson and Walsh 2010, p. 379). From a neurological perspective the neocortex "loses its capacity to rationally evaluate and guide behaviour and is relegated to simply ratifying a primitive form of rote, inflexible, subcortical mediation of behaviour" (Smith and Jones, 1993, p. 89). Furthermore, Hübl notes that trauma results in a decreased relational capacity, a factor that would have a significant impact on the level of meaning one has in life (Hübl, 2020).

Addiction

Kemp notes that "Addiction is a fixation, a stasis, a repetitious habit … And all this to try to prevent change and exposure. Addiction is a closed loop" (Kemp, 2018, p. ix). Part of this repetitive cycle is that meaning making is focused on the object of addiction. This focus subverts and dominates other kinds of meaning so that we continue in the same repetitive and stuck way.

Limit situations can support stuckness

A different way of losing meaning is through limit or boundary situations. In these cases, we may have experienced "death, guilt, condemnation, doubt and failure" (Van Deurzen, 2009, p. 16), and can no longer make meaning from our current orientation. This leads to stuckness in relationships until we are able to respond from a different, more complex and authentic self (Grieder, 2009).

Petriglieri (2007) uses the term leadership impasse to describe a situation where leaders cannot make sense of the world in the same way as they have done before. This is a form of a death of meaning making. If a leader is not able to adjust the way in which they make sense of the world and continues to behave according to the old and now outdated forms of meaning making, they will become stuck.

Livesay (2013) speaks to a fallback version of stuckness where we return or fall back to a previous and more comfortable level of making sense of reality. She notes five reasons why we may do this, including as ordinary triggers physiological brain responses, contextual gravitational pulls, challenges to identity, and unresolved trauma. Wells, building on Livesay's research, agrees fallback and fall forward are normal processes and we are in a state of fluidity around our responses to the world (Livesay, 2013; Wells, 2018).

Sedimentation, totalisation, and mineralisation can support stuckness

Merleau-Ponty's work on sedimentation builds on the work of Husserl. They both understand sedimentation as the process by which a truth becomes experienced as solid and fixed. Van Deurzen notes that sedimentation is "the acting as if truth is stagnant and knowable. Sedimented truth is the quasi truth that has become deposited as if it were solid" (2009, p. 95) and the situation persists because "[t]here is no good adaptive reason for me to challenge my own habits and attitudes as long as these seem to serve me well" (2009, p. 296).

Spinelli (2005) also uses the term sedimentation in this way. He notes that the more sedimented our interpretation of the world is, the less of the world we actually see. "The more willing we are to bracket our sedimented beliefs and theories about ourselves, the more adequate (if, nevertheless, still incomplete) will be our knowledge of who we are – and can be" (Spinelli, 2005, p. 95).

Sartre uses the term totalisation to refer to the process through which we understand the world, an inner map of an outer reality that we use to guide us through the world (Sartre, 1943/2003). When our totalisations stop emerging and become "written in stone" (Van Deurzen, 2009, p. 90), then we have entered a process of mineralisation. As Van Deurzen notes, "We are well beyond the notion of bad faith now, for mineralisation can become a fact of life rather than mere self-deception that can be undone at any moment" (p. 90).

In these instances, we are no longer reading the world as it is but rather according to old, outdated maps that speak to the past and not the present. As a result, we have an inability to make reasonable meaning of our context and respond to it effectively. This results in a loss of traction in the world and stuckness.

The leadership literature on stuckness and meaning

Pertaining to the leadership literature, De Haan (2016) uses the terminology overdrive patterns to describe ways in which once effective leadership behaviours become overused and thus become less effective at solving problems and engaging with the world.

Leadership derailment relates in the main to what are considered "personality defects" which undermine the very relationships that leaders need for implementing their vision. These "personality defects" are described through the lens of Horney's (1950) taxonomy of "flawed interpersonal tendencies" (cited in Hogan et al., 2009, p. 564). While the paper does not fully explore the idea that these flawed tendencies may have value in some situations, it suggests that when one over-uses a tendency, this can lead to leader derailment. It is this that is of interest and relevance to this research, that ultimately it is not the presence of flawed interpersonal tendencies but the stuckness in over-using these that leads to leader derailment.

2.3.3.7. Summary: Stuckness emerging from struggling to find meaning

An inability to create or find meaning in life can lead to stuckness. This is because we struggle to make sense of the world and the directives given to us by others. This is caused by a number of mechanisms, including not being able to locate or generate meaning, having meaning that is not meaningful, double-bind communication, dilemmas and paradoxes, the impact of death, trauma and addiction, limit situations and sedimentation, totalisation and mineralisation.

2.3.4. Conclusion: The sources of stuckness

This section has drawn on a variety of texts to explore stuckness. This literature was organised around three sources that appear to create stuckness. These include a narrowing inner world and a limited capacity to self-reflect on one's life. The mechanisms for this source of stuckness relates to losing ourselves in an attempt to fit in, objectifying ourselves or being objectified by others, bad faith, and competitive relationships. The second source of stuckness relates to the nature of relationships that we may have with others, specifically dehumanised and disengaged relationships or the loss of self in relationships. Lastly, I have explored how a limited or lack of real meaning can contribute to experiencing stuckness.

All three of the sources of stuckness appear to have influence on the process of stuckness. It is unclear at this point, however, whether all three sources need to be in place for leadership stuckness to occur or whether only one source is sufficient.

It is interesting to note that the sources of stuckness are described as "normal", even if not desirable. For example, Heidegger notes that one cannot be authentic all the time (1927/2008). Furthermore, the sources do not have a binary existence; that is, exist or not exist, but rather occur on a continuum in degrees. For example, we may internalise some aspects of the gaze and not all (Sartre, 1943/2003; Biko, 1978/2004).

2.4. The experience of stuckness

At first glance there appeared to be very little literature that recorded the lived experience of stuckness for leaders or anyone in any detail. However, as my understanding of types of stuckness began to grow I found that stuckness was more widespread and more variable than I expected, and this led to a wide variety of new sources on the experience of stuckness. Working with all of these is well beyond the scope of this research. As a result, I have limited the research to the areas below, notably the experience of leadership stuckness, of stuckness in general, the experience of objectification, being shamed or scapegoated, and the experience of trauma and addiction, because these factors relate directly to the research participants' experience. This is followed by a section on intrapsychic experiences of

existential anxiety, guilt, and dissonance. The varieties of experiences of stuckness suggest that diverse types of stuckness may exist.

2.4.1. The experience of leadership stuckness

Petriglieri (2007) provides a case study of a leader that is experiencing stuckness and going through a transactional analysis process to release this stuckness. He notes that his client felt stuck, frustrated, lonely, felt like she was missing something, self-critical, and experienced conflict between an idealised version of herself and a growing realisation that this may not be reality.

Although I found only one academic article (Petriglieri, 2007), there are many web-based leadership/coaching texts that refer to frustration, overwhelm, confusion, and exhaustion, but these texts are often more pop in nature and not always academically rigorous (Oestreich, 2012). Some such as Oestreich focus on how stuckness can look from the outside, for example in the form of passive-aggressive behaviour.

2.4.2. The experience of stuckness

Bella completed a qualitative, heuristic study examining the psychological, spiritual, and creative experiences of feeling stuck. Her work was based on interviews and art processes with 10 participants drawn from the general population exploring the experience of stuckness (2011). She describes the qualities of the experience (how it felt) of stuckness for her interviewees:

> *Frustration, anger, battle, distraction, unfocused, pressure, squeezing, fear, not being able to express herself, shakiness, shivery and cold, protection, danger, warning system, unconscious influences, impatience, logjam, lack of flow, self-judgment, squashed, squeezing, clenching, adversarial, shame, disconnected, disjointed, not being big enough, gatekeeper, being held back, external forces, meanness, disbelief, no-follow through, inauthentic, head-cantered, achy throat… unfocused, comparisons, hard sharp, pointy, metallic, tightness, dullness, heaviness, lack of clarity, held down, immovability, inability to express, opposition, adversarial, containment, struggle, self-judgment, blame, barriers, distraction, spiralling, spinning out of control, lack of focus, flying apart.* (Bella, 2011, p. 98).

Bella's work includes a description of the somatic impacts of stuckness including shakiness, feeling held down, squashed, constricted, energy-less or highly energised. Cognitive processes experienced in stuckness include repetitive thoughts, self-judgement, self-blame, and embarrassment. Bella notes that thinking tends to be paradoxical while one is stuck. This is interesting because it speaks to the idea of stuckness being a function of opposing forces (Bella, 2011) and relates to Van Deurzen's comments above on paradoxes and dilemmas (Van Deurzen et al., 2019).

Bella further notes that the experience of stuckness can be similar to the experience of depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder, often both, given the prevalence of negative feedback loops that

reinforce stuckness. Bella continues that self-judgement was a strong theme with all of her interviewees (Bella, 2011).

2.4.3. The experience of objectification

Central to this research is the idea that when one is treated as an object or when one treats oneself as an object, one loses, inter alia, one's subjectivity and autonomy, one's capacity to emerge, create meaning, engage in human relationships, and transcend situations. Nussbaum describes what it is like to be treated as an object (1995). She states "Instrumentality: treating someone as a tool, Denial of autonomy: not allowed to act independently, Inertness: incapable of activity or agency, Fungibility: interchangeable, Violability: not respected, can be violated, Ownership: owned, bought or sold, Denial of subjectivity: treated as if feelings not important or need to be considered" (Nussbaum, 1995, pp. 249-291).

As described above, De Beauvoir (1949/2015) notes the objectification of women through societal definitions of what it means to be female and feminine. The notion of objectification is covered extensively in liberation ideology and psychology, for example Fanon, who described this as the cause of mental illness and a loss of self-esteem (Fanon, 1986; Hook and Truscott, 2013; Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). Biko also made many observations about the experience of self-alienation, which he noted as including self-deception and self-evasion, flight from freedom, impression management, and judgement of other black people (Biko, 1978/2004).

Similar experiences are described as generated through neoliberalism, a positivist way of making sense of the world, and the Capitalist Life Syndrome, all of which have functionalist underpinnings. This includes alienation from self, self-criticism (introjection of blame), experiences of depression and anxiety (Heil, 2011; Wilson, 2018; Adams et al., 2019; Vos, 2020).

2.4.4. The experience of being bullied, shamed or scapegoated

As described above, bullying and scapegoating are a common experience in organisations; yet, I was unable to find an academic article describing the lived experience of being bullied and/or scapegoated at work. Less academic website texts on this subject noted that one can feel isolated, ignored, side-lined, blamed for all the errors that occur within the workplace, which can cause one to feel inferior, self-critical, depressed and anxious (Naidu, 2020).

Regarding shame, Tantum suggests that "shame is the emotional experience most closely related to feeling nothingness" (Van Deurzen et al., 2020, p. 427). He continues that this is an experience most akin to facing the void.

Bedrick (2020) continues that the experience of shame causes us to lose our trust in ourselves, to disconnect from our inner guidance and to seek direction from outside. People predisposed to shame

habitually see themselves as to blame for negative events and work hard trying to fix themselves. Because shamed people tend to see themselves at fault and are disconnected from their own inner compass, they tend to not protect themselves from the influence of others and are easily invited to carry others' projections and failures (Bradshaw, 2005; Kukard, 2006; Bedrick, 2020).

When we experience shame, our identity is reduced to one experience of ourselves, in particular our sense of being defective; we essentialise and objectify ourselves. Thus, when we experience shame, we become an object.

2.4.5. The experience of death, trauma and addiction

Death anxiety affects us in many ways; including creating a need to connect with a higher and godlike parental figure, trying to hold back ageing, undertaking extreme life-threatening activities, and even hoarding (Yalom, 2008). In all cases, it is the desire, unconscious or not, to hold off death that results in repetitive patterns of often unhelpful behaviour.

Grieving is a complex process associated with many feelings and emotions that can go back and forward in an iterative process of adapting to the new changed context. It can also result in stuckness where the grieving person cannot move forward in life. Haley notes that one can get stuck in any of the stages of grief and this could result in experiences of guilt, anger, repetitive and distressing thoughts, depression and frustration (Haley, 2020).

Trauma is a vast and important area of existential work. A simple description of the experience of trauma will suffice for this research. To this end, trauma specialists notice that trauma can result in intrusive and repetitive thoughts, attempts at avoiding stimuli, attempts at numbing, anger, re-victimising of self, self-harming, addictions, psychosis, dissociation, and many other experiences of a recurring nature (McFarlane et al., 2006; Thompson and Walsh, 2010; Corbett and Milton, 2011; McHugh et al., 2012).

As noted above, addiction also offers an experience of repetition and a sense of loss of control (Kemp, 2018). It is thus also a mechanism for creating stuckness in a person's life.

Common to all the above forms of stuckness is the experience of being stuck in a destructive, unpleasant cycle of repetition where one feels helpless to change the situation.

2.4.6. The experience of losing one's soul

Camus (1995/2012) notes that meaninglessness can feel like an experience of losing one's soul, an experience of emptiness like the void. This links to Tantum's comment that shame can feel like the void (Van Deurzen et al., 2020).

2.4.7. Intrapsychic existential experiences

This section describes existentially orientated intrapsychic processes that may occur when people experience stuckness.

2.4.7.1. Existential anxiety, regret and guilt

Cole provides clear definitions of existential anxiety, regret and guilt. He notes that existential anxiety is the anxiety we feel when we understand that we are responsible for ourselves and our lives and the meaning we create for it (Cole, 2016). When we fail to honour this requirement and we let our lives slip by without stepping into the responsibility of being our unique selves and creating idiosyncratic meaning in and of our lives, we experience existential guilt (Cole, 2016), or, as May (1977/2015) describes it, guilt at failing to live up to our potential. Existential guilt is different from existential regret where one experiences a desire to go back to an experience and live one's life out differently, notably making a more conscious choice the second time around (Cole, 2016).

2.4.7.2. Existential dissonance

Cole (2016) notes that existential dissonance can occur as a result of evaluating one's experience of oneself now in relation to how one was in the past. This is a temporal dissonance that can support self-awareness, leading to a greater understanding of the emergent nature of one's identity. However, for many people this dissonance can be anxiety provoking and it thus needs to be managed and avoided through selective accommodation and assimilation processes. Cole notes that "while this changelessness and stability may provide security and certainty to the person … [it] has the unintended side effect of negating the very movement inherent in the flow of life*"* (Cole, 2016, p. 299).

2.4.8. Conclusion: The experience of stuckness

The research suggests that there is a wide range of experiences associated with stuckness but there are some areas of commonality, in particular that stuckness is painful and behaviour has a repetitive cyclical nature. People who are stuck are likely to feel frustrated, bored, disorientated, confused, inferior/shamed and out of control. They experience high levels of self-judgement expressed through repetitive and often paradoxical thoughts. Alienation from one's own inner ontology through self-deception, self or context evasion was also identified as a function of stuckness. It was noted that this can result in impression management and/or the judgement of other people. Stuck people feel exhausted.

Stuckness can cause existential anxiety, regret, guilt and dissonance, all experiences that speak to a longing for another and more satisfying way of being.

2.5. Are leaders aware of being stuck and why do leaders stay?

2.5.1. Are leaders aware that they are stuck?

There is very little in the research to answer this question categorically. However, Petriglieri (2007) notes that his client, a corporate leader, was not aware of her stuckness but was aware of the pain that she was in because of it. This suggests that leaders may not be aware that they are stuck, even when they are in pain as a result of being stuck.

It is implicit in Petriglieri's paper that it was the pain that brought the client into therapy and that would ultimately lead to her awareness of her stuckness and the shift that was required for a more fluid leadership existence. Thus, one can assume that stuck leaders do become aware of their stuckness but only at a certain point in the process of stuckness.

2.5.2. Why do people stay?

A question that has come up repeatedly in relation to leadership stuckness is, why leaders stay in the stuck situation, in particular in contexts that are abusive. This is particularly important in the case of people who appear to have significant agency in the rest of their lives. A first and easy initial answer relates to the section above (2.5.1), where I noted that leaders do not always know that they are stuck and need to do something about it.

Many of the definitions speak to stuckness as an experience of having no traction and not being able to move (Watzlawick et al*.,* 1974/2011; Bella, 2011; Taggart, 2012). Thus, immobility is part of the very nature of stuckness. However, a question still stands that if one cannot change the way the situation unfolds, perhaps one can remove oneself from it. The assumption is that leaders could resign, or take leave, etc. The research (literature and data) suggests that people tend not to leave, and it is this behaviour that I explore below.

To make sense of why people stay in stuck situations, I have drawn out implicit assumptions in the research; however, they are all very broad and have not been explicitly stated by the authors but rather been extrapolated by myself. For Heidegger, people stay because they do not know they are stuck (in Das Man), they are inauthentic, asleep, bored, or objectified, and have no awareness of their own stuckness (1927/2008). For Sartre, people stay because of bad faith or a lack of responsibility to deeply engage with the situation and risk conflict and pain as a result (Sartre, 1943/2003). For Fanon (1986) and Biko (1978/2004), people stay in oppressive regimes because their inner world has been "captured", they do not always know that they are stuck and that they lack the capacity to visualise freedom, let alone act towards obtaining it.

Bella notes that people who are stuck do not want to be, and do not notice any benefits in being stuck, while they are stuck. However, she notes that there are meaningful benefits to being stuck but that these tend to only be noticed after the stuckness event (2011). This is interesting and suggests that people do not stay stuck for the "benefits" as listed below but are staying because they cannot move for the reasons provided above.

Interestingly there is little about the context in the literature, other than stuckness created through the gaze or oppression of others.

All in all, there is very little general and leadership literature available on why people stay in these stuck relationships.[5] This is an area to which this research can contribute.

2.5.3. Conclusion: Are leaders aware of being stuck and why do leaders stay stuck?

Existing research suggests that leaders are not always aware that they are stuck, although it is likely that they will become aware at some point in the process of stuckness, perhaps when the pain of stuckness drives them to explore their situation more fully. This may also be a factor in why leaders stay in stuck relationships.

There is very little research available on why people stay in these stuck relationships. Suggestions implicit in the work of Heidegger, Sartre and Fanon/Biko offer the following reasons: that people are not aware of the situation, refuse to take responsibility for themselves, cannot imagine having freedom, or lack the ability to move. Bella's work suggests that people do not stay for the benefits of stuckness (as listed below) because they do not know what they might be. This is an area to which this research can contribute.

2.6. The paradox of stuckness: Upsides and downsides

Though there are significant downsides to being stuck, there is also meaningful value in being stuck. These factors are presented below.

2.6.1. The disadvantages of stuckness

2.6.1.1. Stuckness in individuals

Most of the authors present the disadvantages of being stuck, many focusing on the unpleasant phenomenological experience of it, ranging from frustration, anger, shame, pressure, lostness, and a lack of control. These are documented in this section on the experience of stuckness above which

[5] I briefly considered exploring the literature on why battered women stay with their abusers but realised that there were too many differences between the two groups for this to be useful (for example battering husbands may "make" them stay and there are often children involved; very different contexts to corporates).

includes a brief note on the experience of stuckness as being akin to experiencing the terror of the void (Van Deurzen-Smith, 2020). All these experiences contribute to a loss of self-esteem, which further undermines one's capacity to get unstuck.

A critical disadvantage of stuckness is the loss of traction in the world as the leader is unable to impact on their environment (Petriglieri, 2007; Kaiser and Hogan, 2010; De Haan, 2016) and direct their lives and/or the organisation they lead in a way that they desire. This is reiterated by writers on objectification who note the loss of agency in the experience of stuckness and the inability for individuals to direct their own lives (Biko, 1978/2004; Fanon, 1986; De Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Nussbaum, 1995; Heil, 2011; Vos, 2020).

Not included in the literature is the idea that stuckess wastes time, an idea that time-poor executives would understand. It is a moment where nothing seems to happen and everything stands still, and it can last for extended periods of time.

2.6.1.2. Stuckness in organisations

The organisational impact of stuckness is an additional disadvantage because stuck individuals can damage the organisational culture, undermining the outputs and future of the organisation by creating stuck cultures (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012). Hollis (1993) concurs that a stuck leader can undermine the success of an organisation. This has far-reaching consequences because it can result in financial wastage, the loss of key personnel, the taking on of unsustainable projects, reputation damage, loss of shareholder value (pension funds), and the impact of the organisation on consumers and the broader society. It is also possible that leaders may be more prone to fraud as they seek to "punish" the organisation for their unpleasant experience.

An additional disadvantage of stuckness not identified in the literature includes a diminished capacity for innovation, as leaders continue to implement old solutions into new contexts, thus rendering less helpful results.

2.6.1.3. Stuckness in societies and systems

Stuckness impacts on a societal and system level in the form of oppression (Biko, 1978/2004; Fanon, 1986; De Beauvoir, 1949/2011). This is when groups of people hold on to deprecating ideas of other groups, thereby creating political, economic and social strife and undermining the social cohesion necessary for living well and delivering value into the world.

2.6.2. The benefits of stuckness

The benefits of stuckness are organised below around the three themes running through this research: our inner worlds, our relationships, and our need for meaning. I would like to add an additional factor to this: stuckness as a survival process, because this is useful in understanding the data.

2.6.2.1. Stuckness as a way of reigniting our inner worlds and self-authorship

This literature review has described how stuckness can be caused by the loss of our capacity to self-reflect and to take responsibility and self-authorship. And it is this that in turn has implications for our capacity to adapt and indeed transcend contexts. Stuckness, and in particular the pain of stuckness, can alert us to the fact that we have lost a connection with ourselves and invite a more authentic way of being. There are many authors, not all from an existential orientation, who describe this value of stuckness. I have included some of these views below.

Heidegger notes that boredom in particular offers us the opportunity to wake up to how things really are, understand our "existential predicament" (Slaby, 2010, p. 15), and make the relevant adjustments. (Heidegger, 1927/2008). This is a similar process to that of limit situations. For Jaspers, limit situations, including death, guilt, condemnation, doubt and failure, could jolt us out of our inauthenticity and force us to live a more authentic life (Ashman and Lawler, 2008; Grieder, 2009; Van Deurzen, 2009).

Cole describes existential dissonance using two case studies (2016). In both, the individual comes to the realisation that who they are now is not who they can or want to be in the future. Cole notes that this same dissonance can occur as a result of one's experience of oneself now in relation to how one was in the past. This is a temporal dissonance that can support self-awareness, leading to greater understanding of one's own potential for inauthenticity and the emergent nature of one's identity. When we are able to reflect on the dissonance, we are able to make more active choices in life and live life more meaningfully.

Erikson notes that we can experience a number of existential crises in our lives and that this is a critical part of our maturation process. He continues that the questioning of our identity allows us to mature through the eight maturational stages that he defines, based on the work of Freud. Each stage requires a different type of identity-based question and it is through the exploration of these questions that the individual formulates an emerging and changing identity (Erikson, 1975; Andrews, 2016).

An example of this is the mid-life crisis as explored by James Hollis (1993). Our body may not look the same, we may discover that our expectations of life were too low/high, or we start seeing that who we think we are is not who we really are. For Hollis, a desirable outcome of a mid-life crisis is that we acknowledge our emergent identity and reformulate how we think about ourselves. A less useful

outcome is that we medicate ourselves against the pain of this disconnect in a variety of ways and stagger on through life with our stagnant identities intact.

2.6.2.2. Stuckness as a way of deepening relationships

I have described earlier in this literature review how Buber, Jaspers, Spinelli and others see relationships as humanising and playing a role in forming one's identity. Stuckness in relationships is painful and can lead to dysfunctional ways of coping, including aggression, duplicity, and much more. When the stuckness is explored for what it is, rather than for its symptoms and footprint, it offers a way of reviving relationships (Van Deurzen, 2015). When we see only the behavioural emanations of stuckness, it is likely that we will manage to avoid dealing with the causal issue and risk losing the benefits of this experience.

2.6.2.3. Stuckness as a way of finding meaning

Frankl experienced a physical stuckness in a concentration camp that he "solved" by creating meaning and that in turn allowed him to continue to live despite the harsh conditions he was exposed to (1946/2006). Once again, we need to actively engage in the problem of meaning, and in particular true meaning for me, or we risk losing the benefits of stuckness.

2.6.2.4. Stuckness as a means of survival

In this instance, the limitation of our identity and uniqueness enables us to survive. This often occurs when we adopt group identities instead of generating our own unique one. We do this as a way of staying safe in a community. For example, Piccorelli and Zingale (2012) speak to the way in which corporate employees may internalise the values and acceptable behaviours of an organisation to survive and get ahead (Piccorelli and Zingale, 2012).

Linked to this idea is the notion that stuckness of identity may have similar survival benefits to what psychoanalytic psychology calls defences. Defences allow us to continue to function when information arises that is difficult or disturbing for us to assimilate. Defences can include repression, regression, projection, reaction formation, or sublimation (McWilliams, 1994). While this may be useful in the short term as a means of survival, ultimately, we need to uncover the hidden information to connect more with reality and live a more real and meaningful life.

2.7. Conclusion: The paradox of stuckness

Stuckness is both useful and not useful to leaders. It is painful, and results in a loss of traction and agency that can last for a very long time. Stuck leaders can damage organisational cultures, enable waste, the erosion of organisational value, fraud, corporate injustice, stakeholder damage and human

skill. On a societal level, stuck groups can damage and destroy other groups, creating conflict and injustice.

However, stuckness is useful in helping us to reconnect with whom we are, with others, and as a way of finding meaning and spirituality in our lives. For some it can also be a way of ensuring our survival by building our capacity to adapt.

2.8. Stuckness as a relationship

As suggested earlier (section 1.2.1), this research considers stuckness to describe the state of a relationship between a person and another person/s or environment. As a result, it would be useful to understand the "recipes" for relationships that may be in use by the participants of this study. It is for this reason that this section explores attachment theory. I have chosen attachment theory to describe the relationships because it is considered existential in orientation (Reuther, 2014) (see section 2.8.1).

2.8.1. Attachment theory

Attachment theory itself is based on the original research of Bowlby and Ainsworth in the sixties with children. Subsequent research has demonstrated how these early attachment patterns sustain themselves into adulthood and hugely influence leadership–follower relationships as well as leadership styles overall (Vansloten and Henderson, 1997; Popper et al., 2000; Pines, 2004; Fraser, 2007; Popper and Amit, 2009; Boatwright et al., 2010; Littman-Ovadia et al., 2013; Hinojosa et al., 2014; Rahimnia and Sharifirad, 2015). Broadly, researchers speak of three attachment styles: secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant. Table 1 below provides a summary of these styles.

	Secure	**Anxious-Avoidant**	**Anxious-Ambivalent**
Typical childhood pattern	• Emotionally available parents that were sufficiently and consistently engaged in supporting the child when in distress.	• Emotionally unavailable parents who were disengaged and detached.	• Inconsistent caregiver responses in terms of levels of sensitivity, support, and responsiveness.
Attachment recipe	• High levels of trust, capacity to seek out and obtain support, comfort with independence and with intimacy	• High levels of distrust of others' intentions result in the choice of independence over intimacy. Can be emotionally distant in relationships. Prefers autonomy and has difficulty asking for and receiving support. Cool, stoic and in control.	• Ongoing worries about abandonment, fear of rejection because of inadequate performance, retains relationship through performance.
Implications for leadership	• Likely to show higher levels of empathy and emotional connection to others	• Less likely to trust others and show lower levels of compassion. Less relational and more transactional leadership style.	• Likely to show more attention to the needs of others, leading to a more relational style of leadership. However, often feels under-

			appreciated and devalued by co-workers. They may expect to have their work devalued.

Table 1: Attachment Theory

Summarised from the work of Vansloten and Henderson, 1997; Popper et al., 2000; Pines, 2004; Fraser, 2007; Popper and Amit, 2009; Boatwright et al., 2010; Littman-Ovadia et al., 2013; Hinojosa et al., 2014; Rahimnia and Sharifirad, 2015.

Attachment patterns can be understood in an existential sense as a kind of hermeneutic circle, the recreation of new relationships based on the learning from previous ones. Heidegger maintains that any learning or activity has some prior learning that is invoked to guide subsequent learning. This is a familiarity, a "dwelling", a place where things are so familiar that we do not notice them any more (Heil, 2011, p. 52).

Reuther, building on Heidegger's work, notes that attachment patterns are patterns created in the process of fallenness. They provide the basic recipe for how we attune to the world and thus the way we might experience *Dasein* and world (verb) with the world (noun) (Reuther, 2014).

As such, attachment patterns offer an account of how we are drawn into certain relationships, why we stay in them, our blind spots in relationships and how we understand the nature of relationships (Popper et al., 2000). Critically for this research, conditional attachment patterns (anxious-avoidant and anxious-ambivalent) suggest that leaders with these attachment patterns are less relational and more transactional in nature. They have higher levels of distrust than people with secure attachment patterns and worry about being abandoned because of poor performance. These leaders choose autonomy over intimacy and have difficulty asking for help as they tend to try to be in control and stoic in orientation (Reuther, 2014; Popper et al., 2000).

2.9. Understanding the system of business

For this research, the context in which leadership stuckness occurs is mainly that of organisations and the system of business as a whole. It is for this reason that I have included a section on the "other party" in the relationship with the leader, that is the more senior leaders, and the system of business.

This research uses the term *system of business* to refer to several factors, including the broader neoliberal capitalist system, the shareholder system (individual and institutional), the corporate and organisational system, and the leadership development and support functions (MBAs and coaches) that develop leaders. These systems will be discussed individually below, in relation to the phenomenon of stuckness.

2.9.1. Neoliberalism

The section on capitalist life syndrome introduces neoliberalism, a form of capitalism.[6] The structures and policies of the economy in the United States, United Kingdom and South Africa are understood as neoliberal in orientation (Wilson, 2018; Galieni, 2018). Neoliberalism is a form of unrestrained free market capitalism where the rights of individual market capitalists are prioritised. Government interference is reduced, and individuals are expected to "compete" on their own, by the rules of free market capitalism, with limited state support. Within this ideology is the belief that individuals are naturally self-interested and can compete rationally and effectively in the world. Competition is heralded as a way of removing waste, increasing efficiency, and ensuring individual responsibility (Wilson, 2018).

Wilson describes the four Ds of neoliberalism as,

> - *Dispossession: The accumulation of wealth through stealing vital resources from people*
> - *Disimagination: The destruction of our capacities for critique and radical thinking*
> - *De-democratisation: The undoing of democratic ideals, institutions, and desires*
> - *Disposability: The relegation of individuals and populations to social death* (Wilson, 2018, p. 51).

Two aspects and impacts of this are discussed in more detail below because they have greater relevance for the research.

2.9.1.1. Positivism, humans as assets, tools, and slaves

Linking to Wilson's points above related to "disimagination" and "disposability" (2018, p. 51) is the notion of humans as tools, assets, and/or slaves. This is related to the broadly-adopted scientific, positivist and utilitarian paradigm that is used to make sense of and provide logic for decision making in the neoliberal context of business.

Within this paradigm, numbers are seen as an accurate representation of what the organisation is doing and achieving. While there is some awareness of the irrational/art nature of business, the belief is that science has a better chance of creating profit than other ways of thinking about business. Furthermore, human ontology is not useful or important unless it can be directed towards increasing profit. This leads the business system to discount human subjectivity, and a tendency to understand and use humans in

[6] I have not included the capitalist life syndrome literature in this section because it relates to the broader life of a human, and not only the business/work context.

the same way we use technology; the use of humans as tools and not beings (human resources management). Humans become objects that are inert, fungible and can be bought and sold (Heil, 2011). Neoliberalism brings the pretence that we are free but deals with us as slaves (Wilson, 2018).

Van Deurzen notes that in a "post-modern society",

> *People often feel that they have a choice between either becoming commodities themselves as slaves in the production process or focusing so much on achievement in producing these commodities that they will not have time to enjoy the commodities that they have accumulated* (Van Deurzen-Smith, 1994, p. 7 cited in Van Deurzen et al., 2019, p. 148).

Either way, we are in service of and controlled by the system.

African existentialist philosophers Mbembe and Dubois (2017) make the observation that this neoliberal corporatisation of the world results in a loss of our self and our autonomy. They describe an estrangement from oneself, occurring through the splitting off of the authentic self and the creation of a false self by an other, the gaze. They note that the result is ontological impoverishment and the need to restore our stolen humanity. Mbembe and Dubois continue with the warning that "the risks experienced by black slaves are now the norm for all subaltern humanity" (Mbembe and Dubois, 2017, p. 47). This comment validates the use of literature on oppression, particularly black oppression (Fanon, Biko), in this research as a way of understanding leadership stuckness.

The mechanism of objectification acts to diminish our inner world, thereby creating a context for stuckness. This has been dealt with in the earlier section (section 2.3).

2.9.1.2. Individual responsibility for failure

Critical to this research is the idea that failure, responsibility for that failure, and the correction thereof are located individually rather than systemically. If there is a failure event, there is an assumption that this failure is a function of an individual's attitude and ineptitude rather than a result of the effectiveness, fairness, or appropriateness of the system. Wilson posits that very often individuals are less able to respond to this failure event because their critical thinking skills are undermined by the system and the context is diminished as a causal factor in failure by themselves and others. This is enhanced by fear in a system where one might, for example, lose one's job, housing, health benefit, etc., because individuals are disposable and fungible in the same way tools are (Wilson, 2018). This pushing of responsibility towards the individual and away from the system has led to the billion-dollar self-help industry, including self-help literature for leaders (Wilson, 2018).

Baker and Kelan explore the psychic lives of corporate women under neoliberalism. The notion explored by this research is that executive women, rather than identifying the neoliberal organisation as the source of their experiences of inequality and unfairness, enter psychic processes of splitting and blaming and locate culpability for systems' failure in other less successful women. Success and failure

become personalised and located outside the organisation and the individual. This serves to retain an idealised version of the neoliberal workplace as fair and equal, and the individual to retain the sense "of the self as a 'business', completely agenic, productive and separate from others" (Baker and Kelan, 2019, p. 71), the perfect neoliberal self. Those blamed are described as not taking responsibility for their lives, not trying hard enough, and lacking the desire for self-improvement. As Baker and Kelan note, "success is dependent on one's hard-work [sic], effective personal decision-making, and perseverance through challenges, regardless of one's gender identity" (2019, p. 102).

This same theme is repeated by existential psychotherapist Manu Bazzano, who suggests that personalising failure instead of pointing fingers at the system results in people becoming hardened to their own pain, alienated from themselves, and indifferent to the pain of others (Bazzano, 2016). This echoes Petriglieri, who notes that in the contemporary context, leaders are more exposed to both threats and opportunities, and that "it is left to the individual to take charge of his or her destiny by staying updated, seizing favourable prospects, and dealing with uncertainty" (Petriglieri, 2007, p. 186). He continues that the impact of this on leaders is isolation and psychic fragmentation.

Not all business organisations will always push towards individual responsibility. However, my 30 years of experience in corporates, working with performance management systems, hierarchies, bonus systems, and leadership responsibility, suggest that there is an orientation towards making individuals and not systems responsible, at least some of the time. This could be caused by the political nature of blame in organisations, or the fact that corporates tend not to "think" systemically or contextually and are thus more inclined to identify individuals and not contexts as the problem.[7]

The removal of the context for sense-making and explanation of where one is in the world is reminiscent of Sartre's concept of total responsibility (1945/2003), something he retracted after 1948 (Poellner, 2015). Sartre began to take the context more fully into account because it does in fact impact on an individual's capacity for freedom.

My sense is that the system is always there, influencing the options we see and how we make sense of the world and respond to it. This is particularly apparent in a third-world environment where structural inequalities deeply affect a person's capacity for life, health, education, satisfying work, and relationships, aspects of life that are hugely interfered with by demographic and identity inequalities, standards of living, poor health care, lack of safety and migrant labour systems.

[7] This comment is motivated by my research on maturity of leaders in organisations and documented in a book I co-authored (April et al., 2011).

2.9.2. Shareholder systems

Numerous authors have explored the function of business and found answers ranging from shareholder value (Friedman, 2002; Friedman and Becker, 2007) to the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1998; Sherman, 2012) to values or purpose-driven organisations (Barrett, 2014). Csikszentmihalyi's view is that business exists to enhance human wellbeing, but it is not clear how he understands human wellbeing, especially within the neoliberal context (2003). He notes that

> *It may seem counterintuitive to argue that happiness and business have anything to do with each other, since for most people work is at best a necessary evil, and at worst, a burden. Yet the two are inexplicably linked. Fundamentally, business exists to enhance human well-being. From the earliest traders carrying amber from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, salt from the coast of Africa to its interior, or spices from the islands of the Far East to the rest of the world, up to the present when new car models are heralded each year, the production and exchange of goods makes sense only if we assume that they will improve the quality of our experience* (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 21).

While this is a positive view of the role of corporates, for corporates like those in this study, the shareholder system dominates the function of business, prioritising returns for shareholders over (almost) everything else. Short-termism is the term used to describe the movement of shareholder capital to financially better investments, based on the short-term performance of their existing corporate investments (Harber, 2017). The pressure on leaders and the organisation as a whole to maintain shareholder value is enormous, and the power major shareholders have within organisations is significant. CEOs become fungible if they fail to deliver returns. In a US study on the top 3000 US stocks, 52% of CEOs were fired (Bet-David, 2020). This research argues that fungibility of CEOs to shareholders encourages CEOs to treat their staff, including their senior leaders and staff, in the same way as suggested by Bet-David (2020).

Although business and ideas about the role of business are broadening out, mainstream business, as per the organisations within this study, are most concerned with shareholder value and leaders retain their positions when they are perceived to enhance this. Stock markets, institutional and private investors, and pension funds prioritise this and the concomitant use of humans and assets to achieve this (Heil, 2011; Daskal, 2018). This factor, the fungibility of leaders (Bet-David, 20202), and resulting fear create a ripe environment for stuckness.

2.9.3. The corporate organisation

2.9.3.1. Definition of organisations

Organisations are most often defined by their legal nature or the fact that they have a structure that is aligned towards a goal (Heil, 2011). These definitions do not give insight into how an organisation can

play a role in a stuck relationship and are not existential in orientation. As a result, the research will draw on Heil's interpretation of Heidegger's insights on beings.

Heil uses Heidegger's four basic types of being: physical objects, non-human organisms, humans, and works. These beings are described in terms of having, partially having, or not having a world (Heil, 2011). Physical objects like stones do not have a world, non-human organisms such as animals have a partial world, humans have a world and works are worlds created by humans. Metaphors of an organisation as a machine fit in with the physical object paradigm, metaphors of organisations as organisms fit in with the non-human organisms, and metaphors of humans (aggregated) within the human being notion. All four beings have implications for how people are managed and who they are expected to be within the organisational system. The machine metaphor invites leadership to manage staff as machines without ontology, the organism metaphor to treat humans as an "animal rationale" (Heil, 2011, p. 68), and the human metaphor invites one to think about the organisation as symbolised by one person, a group of people, a personification of an organisation. Heil (2011) suggests that the prevalent way of thinking about organisations and those who work within them is the metaphor of the machine, with humans as the tools within this machine.

As noted in section 2.3.1, when a leaders' identity is not emergent, when leaders have to edit themselves and create a digestible version of themselves rather than be authentic, when leaders are tools and not people, then they run the risk of becoming stuck.

Heil's suggestion for rehumanising the workplace is to think about organisations as worlds, as people creating worlds in the same way in which artworks are created and where the emergent nature of humans is recognised and valued (Heil, 2011).

2.9.3.2. Bullying, shaming, scapegoating and psychopathy in organisations

Bullying, shaming, and scapegoating were explored earlier as mechanisms enabling stuckness (section 2.3.1.8). I noted that these are processes related to "the internalised gaze" in which a person can be essentialised and objectified. This can result in a reduction in the richness of a person's inner life and a loss of self-reflection capacity, in other words, become a source of stuckness.

Bullying and shaming in organisations

Typically, guilt is the experience of doing something wrong and shame is the experience of being wrong (Kukard, 2006). There has been significant research on shaming in organisations both in South Africa and globally (Mayer et al., 2017). Workplace Trauma, a research unit on workplace trauma in South Africa, notes that 75% of those in the South African workplace have experienced bullying of some sort during their career (Workplace Strategies for Mental Health, 2020).

Shame appears to be a significant factor in the psychic life and behavioural patterns of organisations (Kukard, 2006). Major causes of shame relate to "loss of face, mistreatment by others, low work quality, exclusion, lifestyle and internalised shame on failure" (Mayer et al., 2017, p. 3).

Although everyone can experience shame in the workplace, minority groups, in particular black people and women, have been found to experience even higher levels of shame, with this increasing through intersectionality (Black women) (April and Mooketsi, 2010). Researchers have found that there are high degrees of race-based shaming and shame in South African and global organisations, the USA and UK in particular (Kukard, 2006; April and Mooketsi, 2010; Hartling et al., 2015; Mayer et al*.,* 2017; Daniels and Robinson, 2019).

April and Mooketsi (2010) found that the South African work environment and the global work environment were generally more supportive towards men, and in fact tend to shame women, and identify them as failing to deliver on their professional and/or female roles (beauty, femininity, softness, motherhood, etc.). This research suggests that female executives experience both existential and episodal types of shame (see earlier section on shaming and scapegoating 2.3.1.8) and this causes behaviours such as avoiding people who are perceived to be critical, behaving tougher than what one really is, and avoiding situations where one could be perceived as weak. They note that experiencing shame tends to lead one to think of oneself as smaller than or inferior to others. In other words, shaming encourages objectification and inauthenticity. The researchers found that

> *Executive women who are type-A personalities and who want to succeed at everything that they do, may be susceptible to shame because often, their work and being seen to be more than capable in their work are very important parts of their self-identity, who they think they are, and who they wish to project for others to see. So, when they get it wrong, or do not succeed, a deep sense of failure is internalized and could manifest as shameful thoughts and/or shameful behaviour* (April and Mooketsi, 2010, p. 85).

Thus, the more successful women leaders are, the greater the likelihood that they will experience shame.

Scapegoating in organisations

Boeker found that scapegoating was highly prevalent in organisations, even at senior levels. His research explored CEO firing as a result of organisational under-performance. He found that scapegoating a senior leader was a viable and common strategy for CEOs to use in order to retain their jobs (Boeker, 1992). Scapegoating and the objectification and fear resulting from this practice are thus likely to support leadership stuckness.

Corporate psychopathy

I have included a very brief section on corporate psychopathy within this section because corporate psychopaths are often those responsible for scapegoating and shaming others. For example, a study by Wellons notes that the one percent of the staff population in the sample group of organisations who

were psychopaths were responsible for 26% of the reported bullying within the organisation (Wellons, 2012).

Although one percent of the general population is considered "certifiably psychopathic" (Morse, 2004, unpaginated), this group is over-represented in the corporate context (Wellons, 2012). There has been a growing awareness of the problem of corporate psychopathy in the last decade (Babiak and Hare, 2007; Boddy, 2011) as researchers have begun to understand the costs of narcissistic, sociopathic and psychopathic leaders to the short and long sustainability of organisations.

Of importance to this research is that corporate psychopaths tend to foster a culture of bullying, have poorer management skills, and contribute significantly to creating an environment where employees do not feel heard or appreciated (Wellons, 2012). In effect, corporate psychopaths create an environment where stuckness is possible and even likely because they are likely to bully and shame others.

A critique for the view presented on organisational systems that support stuckness is the argument of free will. Why do leaders allow themselves to be bullied and why do they stay in an environment that harms them? The answer to this may relate to what resources and support they perceive to be available, and whether they believe that they are in fact responsible for creating the situation themselves. Once again these are contextual issues that mediate and nullify the positivist argument of free will.

2.9.3.3. Stuck organisations

There is a wide range of literature relating to stuck organisations. In fact, there is a whole field of organisational research devoted to ensuring that organisations do not get stuck (Organisational Development).

Much literature focuses on organisational identity and how a fixed identity can potentially cause stuckness, and loss of profit through an inability to adapt to emerging market and product conditions. This research includes the infamous case study on marketing myopia by Theodore Levitt (Ng, 2016), Gestalt work on resistance (Critchley and Casey, 1989), organisational transactional analysis (Goldstein, 2009), and others.

There is also significant research on organisational learning as a way of ensuring that the organisational identity and activities adapt to the environment on an ongoing basis. Examples of these approaches include Argyris (double-loop learning) (Argyris, 1976), Senge (the learning organisation) (Senge, 1997), Bateson (feedback loops) (Bateson, 1972), cybernetics and system thinking (Arif, 2016; Vahidi et al., 2019) and complexity theory (Snowden and Boone, 2007).

This doctoral research focused on the individuals within the system, and the data was produced by gathering the perceptions of one person from each organisation. This is not sufficient to analyse the aetiology nor type of stuckness prevalent in the organisations under discussion. Thus, in this context, it

is sufficient to note that organisations do in fact get stuck in meaningless and pointless undertakings that are more about retaining old identities than responding to the market, and in doing so may provide a ripe context for individual stuckness.

Absurdity and meaninglessness in organisations

Two sources of organisational stuckness from an existential perspective are those of organisational absurdity and meaninglessness.

While there are many organisational practitioners and leaders concerned with creating meaningful employment, the problem of meaningless work continues in organisations. Meaningful work is understood to bear fruits in terms of productivity, commitment, health, and in relation to ethical behaviour (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2018). Without meaning, work becomes soulless and one dies even though one continues to work (Camus, 1995/2012).

Blomme uses the work of Camus to explore this phenomenon in organisations, noting that the "absurd organisation is a place where we are confronted with the pointlessness of our actions" (2014, p. 71). He continues that Camus does not see harder work as an antidote to absurdity and meaningless, as it "will just bring despair, disillusionment and ultimately alienation … and carries us even farther away from our quest for human dignity" (Blomme, 2014, p. 71). The antidote lies in being more aware of the existential anxieties that assault us, being creative because the act of creation is the only source of real meaning, denying the power of the organisation to direct our lives, and working with others to recreate human dignity in our organisations (Blomme, 2014).

This section notes that organisations can offer meaningless work, or work that is only meaningful in terms of the salary generated. While being able to provide for oneself and one's family is meaningful, the existential view of Hannaway is that work should offer intrinsic meaning (2019; see also Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2018) (see section 2.9.4.4). When it does not do so, the onus is on the individual to create meaning, and if this is impossible and the individual cannot make sense of meaninglessness, then this can create stuckness (section 2.3.3).

2.9.4. Leadership

A very broad definition of leadership has been provided in the first chapter: leaders are people in leadership roles and the act of leadership is what leaders do in those roles. This section describes aspects of the leadership literature that are relevant to the data, notably current ideas about what a leader does, and then broader versions of what leaders do, notably leadership as identity work, leadership as relationship work, and leadership as meaning work.

2.9.4.1. A black-and-white view of what contemporary corporate leaders do

This research has described the focus of corporate leadership as creating profit (section 2.9.3). This can be done by various means, depending on leadership style, for example setting goals, aligning people, serving people, leading from the rear, inspiring people, or even policing people. However, if we were to identify the desired outcome of all these forms of corporate leadership, it is to create profit (Daskal, 2018), and with this orientation comes the possible ills of objectification and using people as tools and assets.

While this is a very black-and-white version of what leaders do, there are strong indications within the literature that the leadership role is broader and includes more ethical, human, and relational aspects. Other ways of understanding the leadership function are described below.

2.9.4.2. Leadership as identity work

There is a growing body of work exploring leadership from the perspective of identity, noting that leadership identity formation is a central aspect of leading and leadership development (Sparrowe, 2005; Haslam et al., 2011; Petriglieri and Stein, 2012; Nicholson and Carroll, 2013; Ibarra et al., 2014; Moorosi, 2014; Marchiondo, Myers and Kopelman, 2015; Yeager and Callahan, 2016). Marchiondo et al. (2015) note that leader identity is socially constructed, occurring iteratively between leaders claiming leadership and their followers granting it. This means that leaders construct their leadership identity contextually, that every new leadership context requires an identity adaptation, and that this is based on leaders claiming aspects of leadership and followers granting it.

Leadership identity as introjected from the corporate context

A Heideggerian perspective would suggest that leaders fall into the corporate context when they join organisations and the facticities of the context demand attunement. Heidegger would argue that leaders merge in some way with the context in a process of worlding (Heidegger, 1927/2008; Polt, 1999; Steiner and Reisinger, 2006; Heil, 2011). It can be argued, therefore, that this is the normal process of being socialised into a system so that one can function within it.

Piccorelli and Zingale (2012), building on the work of Fromm (1965), note how corporate employees may internalise the values and consensus behaviours of an organisation as a way of surviving and getting ahead in that system. In this way staff limit their identities to the corporate identity and police themselves around this. While this is done voluntarily, it can lead to a level of stuckness and anger as one's own identity is constrained (Piccorelli and Zingale, 2012).

Petriglieri and Stein describe this as over-identification with the organisation that can lead to several negative consequences, including a reduction in willingness to question organisational or leadership

decisions, exposure to identity-based threats, the creation of inter-personal conflict, and toxic cultures (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012).

Similar are comments by Wharne on emotional labour. He explores emotional labour in a study on resilience in healthcare practitioners where an employee is required to "display feelings such as friendliness, cheerfulness, confidence, care or concern for others and this is at a psychological cost for them" (Wharne, 2019, p. 24). He continues that the cost is increased stress, fatigue, and disassociation. Wharne notes that this is a form of depersonalisation where one is separated from one's own subjectivity and this is replaced by a corporate code.

Projective identification of the unwanted self

Petriglieri and Stein (2012) explore the way in which leaders consciously and unconsciously construct identities that embody and represent the desired identity of the group that they lead.

They ask the question: what happens to the unwanted aspects of the leader identity? They suggest projective identification as one of the ways in which leaders unconsciously "remove" intolerable aspects of their identity to defend against envy or enact the need to dominate and control others. Projective identification occurs when the negative parts of a leader's identity are split off and projected into others, maybe even other leaders. Unfortunately, when this occurs, leaders are unlikely to "work effectively with those who embody their unwanted selves" (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012, p. 33). The individual projected upon may attempt to redirect the projection back into the projecting leader as a form of retaliation. "The result is that both sides spend much energy attempting to lodge the projections into each other, while on the surface their relationship appears stuck and ossified" (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012, p. 34). This can lead to ongoing, mutually damaging struggles and, in some cases, toxic cultures that are based on the unconscious behaviour of protecting one's own identity through manipulating others (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012).

2.9.4.3. Leadership as relationship work

The theme of leadership as relationship work is a core focus for leadership practitioners (Korotov et al., 2007; Mayseless, 2010; April et al., 2011; Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2015; Daskal, 2018). Implicit in this literature is the humanistic and neoliberal idea that better relationships with staff will improve performance and render more profit (Nour, 2012).

The literature on authentic leadership as a way to support relationships is abundant, especially existential leadership literature (Ilies et al., 2005; Steiner and Reisinger, 2006; Lawler and Ashman, 2012; Gardiner, 2015; Tomkins and Simpson, 2015). Most, if not all, of this literature is however seated in the neoliberal idea that authentic leaders produce better relationships which produce more money.

2.9.4.4. Leadership as meaning work

Hannaway, citing Jean Lupman-Blum, offers an existential definition of leadership: "the ongoing excavation of the leadership concept is part of a deeper search for the meaning of life, a search for how each of us mere mortals fits into the larger picture" (Hannaway, 2019, p. 15).

There is a great deal of emerging literature around leadership as meaning work. Examples of exploration include servant leadership (Greenleaf as described in Smith, 2005); steward leadership (April et al., 2011); and purpose-driven leadership or distributed leadership (Bresman, 2015). Petriglieri (2007) notes that leaders need to explore the meaning of leadership and how this is expressed in the world.

My sense is that although meaning may be foregrounded, neoliberal principles of shareholder value and humans as tools always lurk in the background. An example of this is an article in Forbes where leadership gurus Dave and Wendy Ulrich note, "making meaning makes money" (Ulrich and Ulrich, 2010). In this instance meaning making is a way of making money and not an end in its own right.

2.9.4.5. Leadership development and support structures

While there are many leadership development activities, I would like to focus on formal leadership education, leadership coaching, and leadership psychotherapy. I have not included leadership development programmes, which often include a psychoeducation component (McDermott et al., 2011; Moorosi, 2014). These have been excluded as this data was not collected in the research. The intention for this section is to provide the reader with some understanding of the ideological orientation of business support systems and how they impact on how leaders treat themselves and others.

Business Schools and Master of Business Administration (MBA) degrees

There is much that could be said on the nature of business schools and MBAs.[8] I will therefore use the emerging data to include only the most relevant literature for this research. Before doing so, it is useful to note that the MBA or executive MBA is still considered globally to be a basic entry requirement for corporate leadership and that there are hundreds of MBA schools around the world catering to this market (Find-MBA.com, 2020). Although no two MBAs are alike, there are some essential similarities. These are discussed below.

Business schools and MBAs tend to teach business leaders that their role is "to maximise shareholder value" and not to focus or orientate around creating businesses that positively affect people and society

[8] I have an MBA and have taught leadership on the UCT MBA for ten years, at Rotterdam Erasmus University (Netherlands) and at GIBBS (SA). I am the Knowledge and Research Director for a leadership development company, have been a reviewer for the European Management Review and acted as co-supervisor for MBA students undertaking research. I have worked in leadership development for over 20 years. I am able to make comments about the MBA system based on this experience. This is appropriate in the context of grounded theory (Ramalho et al., 2015).

(Quartly-Janeiro, 2018). Within this world view is the idea that staff are employed to create this value and there is a cost-benefit approach to this relationship. This is in line with the neoliberal view of humans as assets.

Heil (2011) observes that corporates use staff as tools to create shareholder outcomes and questions whether business schools are in fact appropriately positioned to "build" leaders of people (ontologies), as this requires a human-centric orientation. He comments that most business schools take a positivist approach to making sense of the world and that this denies or minimises human ontology in the leadership process. Heil (2011) observes "Mintzberg[9] made the even more radical suggestion that MBA programmes are fundamentally unsuitable to create managers and that MBA graduates have a misguided idea of management as being predominantly decision making and analysis (Mintzberg, 2002) which are the result of regarding corporate management as a science" (Heil, 2011, p. 27).

This theme is explored in Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2015), who comment that

> *business schools might be complicit in a growing disconnect between leaders, people who are supposed to follow them, and the institutions they are meant to serve. We contend that business schools sustain this disconnect through a dehumanization of leadership that is manifested in the reduction of leadership to a set of skills and its elevation to a personal virtue. The dehumanization of leadership, we suggest, serves as a valuable defence against, but a poor preparation for, the ambiguity and precariousness of leadership in contemporary workplaces* (Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2015, p. 625).

My experience of being educated in and teaching in business schools suggests that although there is an increasing humanistic focus in leadership education including an increasing requirement for self-reflection, these courses are often drowned out by the more quantitative courses that dominate the MBA and Executive Education curriculum.

Leadership coaching and leadership orientated psychotherapy

Leadership coaching

The field of executive coaching is relatively new and is considered a critical tool in a leader's toolbox (Bozer et al., 2014). There is a very wide variety of coaching approaches, for example GROW, ontological, integral, existential, evidence-based contextual coaching, Lacanian, cognitive behavioural coaching, developmental coaching, and many others (Lodwick, 2015). Broadly, coaching aims to provide leaders with emotional and cognitive support and enhance their capacity to perform within the system of business. This is the source of much ideological confusion within the profession as emotional and cognitive support works best through a phenomenological or hermeneutic frame, while it is believed

[9] For non-leadership readers, Mintzberg is a global expert on strategy, culture, and leadership. His thinking has shaped and continues to influence how business makes sense of itself. Mintzberg's work is considered mainstream.

that performance support tends to work best through the current business sense-making frame, positivism. Lodwick found that most coaches tend to work within the positivist frame, where people are considered the objects of study, understood to be fully knowable, made up of units that can be described, and whose relationships are stable, comprehensible, and describable (Lodwick, 2015). She continues that coaching organisations including the International Coaching Federation (ICF) advocate a closed system, and a mechanistic and positivistic approach to coaching because business understands this to equate to professionalism as per the dominance of this type of thinking in the world of business (Lodwick, 2015).

Existential coaching as expressed by the NSPC also intends to "help workers and executives to flourish and address specific problems in business" (Van Deurzen et al., 2019, p. 224). However, because the approach is rooted in philosophy and not positivism, it "takes the focus away from purely practical or cognitive goals, and into the realm of meaning-making, psycho-education, and philosophical awareness of one's life" (Van Deurzen et al*.,* 2019, p. 224). This form of coaching deals with each client as a human and not a tool, explores their humanity through existential dilemmas and paradoxes that exist within their lives, builds meaning and sense-making skills, and de-pathologises anxiety, failure and stuckness. Below is a quote from Sasha Van Deurzen-Smith describing the broad range of existential coaching orientations and demonstrating how this form of coaching tends to more than just performance issues. These include

- *The Nietzschean coach who works with clients on owning their individuality, and courage to stand out from the herd*
- *The gentle, phenomenological coach, who uses imagery and dreamwork to foster greater understanding of our being-in-the-world*
- *The Sartrean coach who focuses on ownership of choice and freedom, and how we find ourselves in Bad Faith*
- *The coach who focuses on existential crisis, and how we use despair and change to become more ourselves* (Van Deurzen-Smith, 2020, unpaginated).

Leadership psychotherapy

There was very little literature available on psychotherapy positioned directly for leaders. A clear example is the work of Manfred Kets de Vries and his colleagues at Insead Business School in Fontainebleau and elsewhere (Korotov, Florent-Treacy, Bernhart, Petriglieri (G and G), Stein). Kets de Vries and his contemporaries have been working psychoanalytically and with object relations theory with leaders since the early eighties (Kets de Vries and Miller, 1984; Kets de Vries, 1985, 2012; Korotov et al., 2007). This work explores the self, and the understanding and processing of childhood patterning, particularly the way in which this manifests in leaders and organisational contexts (Kets de Vries, 2006, 2009; Korotov et al., 2007; Petriglieri and Stein, 2012).

While existential psychotherapy does not have a school of psychotherapy directly focused on leaders and organisations, the existing approach can be applied to these stakeholders.[10] There are many varieties of existential therapy, including daseinsanalysis, existential phenomenology, logotherapy, existential humanistic and existential-integrative therapy. They each have different orientations, but all use existential philosophy as the core therapeutic way of being (Van Deurzen et al., 2019). This means that there is a focus on supporting an emergent identity, putting relationship at the centre, and working with meaning.

2.9.5. Conclusion: Understanding the system of business

This section is intended to help myself and the reader understand the context in which the leaders in this research experience stuckness. The corporate context and the leaders leading this context form the other half of the stuck relationship and it is for this reason that the context has been explored so extensively. In this section I have been exploring factors that may be useful in understanding the contexts of the research participants and in particular how these contexts may or may not contribute towards leadership stuckness.

The review has shown that the broader neoliberal context and the shareholder systems and organisations have an orientation towards using leaders as tools to generate profit. Within this context, ontological richness, relationship, and meaningful work become undervalued. This same orientation is perpetuated by some MBAs and some coaches because they prioritise performance over human subjectivity. Existential coaching and psychotherapy with their strong focus on building inner worlds, supporting engaged relationships, and helping people to find meaning may offer some promise in helping leaders to avoid or get out of stuckness.

2.10. Summary of gaps in the literature

The objectives of this literature review were to understand the existing body of knowledge on stuckness, to locate information that would provide insight on the research findings, and to identify where additional knowledge could be useful (what is missing) (Ramalho et al., 2015).

As noted in the introduction, the research aims to provide an existential account of leadership stuckness and, more specifically, a theory about the process of stuckness, including an existential definition. As a secondary aim, I would like to fill out some gaps in the broader literature on stuckness and leadership stuckness in particular.

[10] I have been working informally with leaders in an existential and psychotherapeutic way since 2017 and based on this experience believe that this approach would be useful.

2.10.1. Gaps in the general literature on stuckness

This literature review revealed that there is extensive literature available in the field of stuckness; however, this literature is not viewed through the lens of stuckness but rather through a variety of different lenses, including objectification, racism, trauma, addiction, shame, and bullying, etc. This review has organised these lenses under the terms, sources and "underneath" this, the mechanisms of stuckness. The research will explore whether these mechanisms of stuckness play a role in generating sources of stuckness for leaders. This includes what sources of stuckness need to be activated for leaders to get stuck.

Very little information on context was identified in the literature on the process of stuckness. This research takes the approach that stuckness is socially constructed and thus context/others are the other part of the stuck leadership position. Understanding the context and others is thus critical for understanding stuckness. This is an area where this research can provide insight.

Linked to the context and missing from the literature on the sources of stuckness is an answer to the question, why do people stay in stuck situations? This is another area where this research can contribute significantly.

This review has presented quite extensive accounts of the experience of stuckness as drawn from the different mechanisms of stuckness, including objectification, addiction, etc. Also presented was the disadvantages and value of stuckness to the stuck individual, organisation, and society, making this data now available for comparison with the findings of the research.

The review of existing definitions of stuckness through an existential lens revealed the need for a more appropriate definition that acknowledges the context more fully, notices the sources of stuckness more precisely and reveals the value of stuckness for leaders.

2.10.2. Gaps in the leadership stuckness literature

Petriglieri's work, a paper on leadership impasse from 2007, comes closest to providing a coherent and full view of leadership stuckness. He works from a transactional analysis and leadership development orientation, not an existential orientation.

While the paper provides some idea of the process of stuckness and release, it is insufficiently detailed in terms of sources and mechanisms of stuckness as well as the experience of the process. Petriglieri acknowledges the relationship aspect of stuckness and it may be useful to develop the context more fully, especially in terms of the impact of neoliberal capitalism. Although some of the intrapsychic processes are described briefly as causing the stuckness, it would be useful to understand more about why the client stayed stuck. An existential definition of stuckness is not provided by Petriglieri.

2.10.3. Conclusion: Summary of gaps in the literature on stuckness

Significant gaps have been identified in the existing literature on leadership stuckness. This research can make a solid contribution to enhancing knowledge in this field in the specific areas listed below which include the objectives for this research.

1. Understanding the process of stuckness for leaders including the sources and mechanisms of stuckness
2. Understanding more about the role of context in stuckness
3. Understanding why leaders stayed
4. Understanding the experience and value of stuckness for leaders
5. Understanding the types of stuckness events
6. Building an existential definition of leadership stuckness

3. REFLEXIVITY

3.1. Introduction

My experience and orientation towards stuckness and leadership stuckness is detailed in this section because I bring this into the research process and, in particular, how I make sense of the data. This is appropriate in the context of constructive grounded theory (the methodology used in this research) (Ramalho et al., 2015).

Writing this doctorate has created a deep understanding and respect for Poggenpoel and Myburgh's (2003) view that the researcher can be the greatest risk to qualitative research if reflexivity is not acknowledged and worked with. Constructive grounded theory also highlights the interviewer's contribution in the interview process, the construction of codes, and the meaning making of the data (Charmaz, 2006), and strongly suggests active reflexivity processes.

Without strong parallel reflexivity processes, this research would have rendered completely different results. For example, I suspect that I may have "blamed" the participants more; perhaps highlighting their materialism, inauthenticity, laziness, or inability to adapt as primary findings, and minimised the role of the context in their stuckness. Conversely, I may also have argued that the corporate context was solely to blame with its oppressive focus on profit. It is for this reason that the reflexivity section, often included in the chapter on methodology in other doctorates, is granted its own chapter.

3.2. Reflexivity activities

Before describing the impact of my reflexivity processes, it would be useful to provide a list of the numerous activities I undertook in relation to reflexivity. These included writing a diary, particularly after interviews (Mortari, 2015), drawing, playing with data, and writing up my own stuckness, and interacting with my supervisors and other researchers and professionals working in the field (Mortari, 2015). I presented my findings to organisational development (OD) professionals within my own business and to a South African OD forum of 34 people. I also explored my research in teaching MBA electives at the University of Cape Town on stuckness from 2016 to 2020 and in the work I did in corporates. These explorations are documented in Appendices C and D.

Initially, I reluctantly undertook reflexivity processes, not really understanding their value to the research. As I started to understand this value and started to analyse the data, my reflexivity activities increased.

3.3. Stuckness in my life

As I noted in the introduction, the idea for this research came from my life and my struggles with my own stucknesses, not just relationships but work, busyness, avoidance of dependency, ways of being in a group, unhelpful ways of living and more. I was an active person who tried hard to unstick herself in an autonomous kind of way, but after each stuck event, I always seemed to land up with a similar sort of narrative about an unhelpful and abusive world in which I had been bad in some way and needed to redeem myself.

My pattern (as is starting to emerge now after working on this for four years) was to enter relationships with a person or organisation and be so grateful for the relationship that I would over-deliver. This over-delivery took the form of achieving goals including intellectual prowess, financial success, healing and helping others, but most importantly, denying my own value and internalising badness projected on me from others. This was particularly painful in high blame contexts (narcissistic friends/family, classes, corporates). Typical projections I would carry included the emotional one, the dizzy one, the childish one, the shameful one, the unsuccessful one, the sexual one, the drunk one and the one with the messy/dirty house. I was a particularly good projection screen as I had some measure of these traits anyway and was always more concerned with relationships than success or winning. Critically, I would happily take on these versions of me as if they were all of me, forgetting that I was also neat, clever, successful, abstemious, and organised.

Typically, my pattern would be to get angry at some point, feeling that I was unappreciated, wondering whether I would be "allowed" to be successful at anything or why neither I nor others could understand what good I could bring. The anger then tended to result in the loss of relationship, which further amplified my shame, badness and need to redeem myself. And the cycle continued until I would leave; physically, emotionally, or both. I would leave with a very heavy heart wishing that the world were more supportive and I less bad. I moved from job to job and partner to partner, repeating the pattern.

During the last five years of completing this doctorate, I continued my patterns of stuckness. Neither the literature review nor the interviewees seemed to offer me a doorway into changing the sclerotic patterns in my life. COVID arrived and amplified every relationship difficulty, and I oscillated between being a rescuer, a victim, and a perpetrator. Each time I got myself stuck I would take Sartre and Biko to heart and blame and shame myself. Needless to say, this did not help and the stress it caused needed alleviating through other unhelpful means, which of course create more shame and blame.

And then I saw the movie *Lamentations of Judas* (2020) and the "pennies started dropping". Below is a quote from the reflexivity writing from August 2020 under COVID lock-down.

> *Judas's Lament tells the story of child soldiers from Angola, recruited by the Apartheid government and who had betrayed their families and country in wars in Southern Africa.*

During this time, they committed many acts of inhumanity and brutality. After the wars ended these people were shamed and tortured, killed and isolated because of the atrocities they had committed in war. Many became alcoholics, perpetrators of violence and few were able to redeem themselves to a point where they could re-enter society and life. They currently live in isolated camps for their own protection and for the protection of others. Every year, they recreate the betrayal of Judas, which the film depicts. Someone acts as Jesus and someone as Judas and the whole village plays a role in narrating the story of betrayal which takes place at many locations in the village. No-one dies but it is very moving as an act of repetition compulsion.

The ex-soldiers were interviewed by the film makers about free will and responsibility. On the one hand interviewees noted that they had free will, could say no to their handlers, and could do as they wish. On the other hand, they noted that they were just following orders. They did not see the contradiction or that they had been used by the Apartheid government.

The broader sense they gave was that many of the ex-soldiers understood what they had done as individuals, and had taken on the responsibility for their inhumanity including the associated shame. Few saw the role of the system in creating their inhumanity. I wondered how they lived with that level of shame, thinking that I too would drink heavily and commit aggressive acts (and I have done both) if I felt shamed and excommunicated as they did.

My compassion for these soldiers and their difficult lives led me to a new level of compassion for myself and I finally allowed myself to see the role of the context in creating my stuckness. I saw that childhood and contextual patterns in my family had constructed much of my behaviour and that my responsibility was not for the patterning but rather for their dominant role in my life. I noticed too how my own judgement and shame at my behaviour cultivated more shame and led to the continuation of the troubling patterns. Shame begets shame begets shame.

I realised that I had carried the burden of my badness alone and that it had become too heavy to bear. I needed to place some of this burden on my background and the act of doing this was a form of redemption for me. I was not all bad and it was not all my fault and I did have some places of being good from which to reconstruct a more balanced identity. What a relief. I also had some level of understanding that this redemption process needed to include others, and that their humanising influence could help me take some of this burden off my shoulders and site it where it should be, outside of me.

Critically this interpretation led me to reconsider the relationship aspect of stuckness and the role of context in someone getting stuck. Furthermore, the idea that somehow the context could push responsibility for a stuck event into a person and thereby avoid responsibility.

I poured over my literature review and realised that this contextual aspect was completely under-developed. I then went back to the literature and realised that even in definitions that focussed on the intra-psychic individual processes of stuckness, the relationship and context was there, but very often hugely minimised. This was clearly a gap in the literature that I hope to amend because it is so very crucial in allowing people to move through stuckness into more fluid relationship with life. It is also, as the reading later revealed, a critical aspect of how systems/people stay stable and fixed in the face of identity threats by challenging individuals.

A second area of learning was that you can't get out of stuckness alone, you need others to support and humanise you in the process. It's a relationship that gets you stuck and a relationship that gets you out.

3.4. My shift in world hypothesis

World hypothesis is the term used by Lodwick, building on the work of Pepper and Tsoukas (Lodwick, 2015). It refers to the philosophical and methodological roots of how we make sense of the world. Lodwick notes four such roots: formism, mechanism, organicism and contextualism. Without providing extraneous detail, this doctorate produced a huge shift in the way I make meaning. Prior to this research, my meaning making was probably orientated around an organicism way of making sense of the world, which values a system approach where the world is understandable and has purpose in its change. I have moved to a contextualist approach where universal principles fall away, and the context is inextricable from the event (no subject/object separation). This leads to "understanding the world via subjectively interpreted particular moments" (Lodwick, 2015, p. 41). This approach is in fact Heideggerian in nature, related to his notion of Dasein and Worlding (Heidegger, 1927/2008) (Definitions of Dasein and Worlding are included in the literature review section 2.3.1.1).

3.5. Critical learnings from reflexivity processes and how they changed the course of my research

The most critical reflexivity learnings are described below, with Appendices B and C providing more detail. Please note that these are my reflexivity insights and that these still need to be explored in the data before they can be considered valid for others.

Prior to this research, I believed that stuckness was a sign that something was going wrong or that I/the person was at fault. My reflexivity processes suggested that stuckness is probably a notification from ourselves that things need to change and, as such, is a sign that the "system" for keeping ourselves on track is working.

A second belief that I had prior to the research is that stuckness is an intrapsychic process in which the individual is at fault, either through not being authentic or through not taking responsibility for their lives. My therapy and experience in the world suggested to me that stuckness is a relationship that requires more than just an individual to take hold. The context, be it a person or an organisation, plays a critical role in causing stuckness.

I used to believe that in the case of stuckness it is up to the individual alone to pull themselves out of stuckness. However, my experience of *Lamentations of Judas* (described in section 3.3) presented the idea that in most cases the individual cannot pull themselves out of stuckness on their own – the system or other person(s) in the relationship needs to play a role.

My MBA and coaching experience in corporates encouraged me to think that the positivist, corporate system is set up to prevent and avoid stuckness by taking a scientific approach to management and leadership. However, I have been wondering whether it is in fact this very same system, especially the

positivist and scientific approach adopted by business, that appears to cause stuckness. A second idea emerging from reflexivity processes is that leadership stuckness is an integral part of stabilising this positivist system in organisations in the face of chaos and volatility, because it offers the opportunity to expel the distasteful part and retain the rest as if it were immaculate (splitting).

My limited understanding of stuckness prior to the research led me to believe that stuckness is a binary and discrete place, as is unstuckness. Over time, I have moved to understanding that stuckness and unstuckness are a centre of gravity, a fluid and normal response to the world. There are degrees of stuckness, which can vary in complexity and depth.

Initially I could find very little information on stuckness, but later found that if one expanded the idea of stuckness to objectification, oppression, shame, scapegoating, trauma and addiction, then there was extensive information available. Stuckness is in fact a vast field of research.

The section above details six perspectives that changed hugely over the course of this research due to reflexivity processes. These shifts altered the course of this research significantly.

3.6. Conclusion

I have described how the reflexivity processes have made conscious and clear the assumptions I had about stuckness. This has allowed me to bracket these assumptions out more fully and view the findings in a more “objective” and Husserlian way (Van Deurzen, 2009).

Indeed, Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2003) are right: the way I was thinking about my life had influenced how I made sense of the literature and data. I could have been the greatest risk to this research. Without the reflexivity processes described above, the research would have been contaminated with my subjectivity and the results would have been very different (Ramalho et al., 2015).

4. METHODOLOGY

I would like to provide an existential account of leadership stuckness and more specifically a theory about the process of stuckness, including an existential definition. As a secondary aim, I would like to begin filling out some gaps in the broader literature on stuckness and leadership stuckness. The objective of building a theory has specific implications relating to methodology, and this is discussed below.

4.1. Determining an appropriate ontology and epistemology

Ontology in social science research refers to how we decide what exists. There are three types of ontological position: realism, idealism, and materialism (Snape and Spencer, 2003). Realism suggests that objects exist outside of humans as objective entities, idealism posits that we can only understand what exists through the human mind and thus all objects are socially constructed. Materialism puts forward the idea that material or physical things are real and exist outside the human mind but that beliefs, values or experiences that arise from the material world are socially constructed and do not have an impact on the human mind (Snape and Spencer, 2003).

Stuckness as a phenomenon tends not to have a physical material quality. The research design needs to be congruent with the researcher's beliefs and the object of their study. Thus, the most appropriate ontology for this research is that of constructivism, which approaches phenomena as being socially constructed and as such emergent in their nature.

A positivist epistemology would not be appropriate because it assumes one scientific truth is possible, sometimes seeks to reduce complex inner experiences to numbers and is deductive in nature, that is, it tests theories rather than creates them, as I would like to do in this research (Bogdan and Taylor, 1998).

A constructivist epistemology makes the most sense for this research and the existential paradigm in which I work. This is because this approach assumes that people construct reality and meaning and that this meaning is emergent, socially constructed, idiosyncratic and context related (Creswell, 2013, Charmaz, 2006). I want to explore the inner subjective world of leaders and understand "…ideas, feelings and motives" when they are stuck (Bogdan and Taylor, 1998, p. 4), and to build a theory and process of stuckness and release. This research would thus be inductive in nature, describing processes and experiences rather than testing a hypothesis (Creswell, 2013).

4.2. Determining the right methods

Research methods that stood out as useful for this research included hermeneutic phenomenology (HP), ethnographic research (ER) and grounded theory (GT). The table below illustrates my criteria and process for identifying the right research method.

My research requirements	HP	ER	GT
Acknowledges the constructed nature of reality	Yes	Yes	Yes
Provides a technology that describes the experience of stuckness	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ensures that contextual and cultural aspects are acknowledged	Yes	Yes	Yes
Studies and maps processes	No	No	Yes
Locates the research in a social context	Yes	Yes	Yes
Values and appreciates humans' idiosyncratic natures (treats humans as humans)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Enables the creation of a theory of release	No	No	Yes
Uses a sampling process aimed at depth of data rather than representativeness	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2: Determining the right methodology

Data for this figure drawn from Glaser, 1992; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013.

GT was developed by Glaser and Strauss as a credible and rigorous process for building theory from data. It is interpretivist in nature in that it integrates and interprets a variety of sources of data. GT is especially useful for understanding human behaviour (Creswell, 2013; Glaser, 1992).

There are three types of GT: firstly, purist GT where the researcher's role is to simply code and analyse while ensuring their own prejudices are removed from the work (Glaser, 1992). Strauss and Corbin (2008) use a more pragmatic approach that includes analytical tools and principles and the researcher is directed to utilise additional theoretical and methodological research to provide perspective to the research process (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). A constructivist approach to GT, as per the work of Charmaz, focuses on phenomena and views data as the outcome of shared experiences between the researcher and the interviewee (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). Meaning is thus co-constructed, emergent, fluid and potentially ambiguous; information can change when we explore it with another.

My sense is Charmaz's approach is most appropriate for my research because it acknowledges that data will be co-constructed during the interview process in the discussion between the interviewees and myself. This approach also places more emphasis on the inner life of the participants and as I have noted above, an understanding of this is critical to my research.

4.2.1. Critical components of constructive grounded theory (CGT)

Charmaz (2006) and Sbaraini et al. (2011) note that the critical components of CGT include an openness to what is emerging in the study because this method is an inductive process. The immediate and ongoing analysis of the data is another characteristic of CGT, where analysis occurs in parallel to the

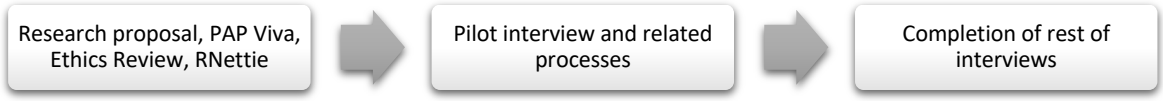
data collection process. This allows for theoretical sampling (see section 4.3.1.1), where the choice of participant is determined by the emerging narrative and the need to explore specific aspects of this narrative. The researcher therefore does not collect the same data from all participants and the analysis does not draw on all participants' data equally for all parts of the emerging theory. This means that data saturation, which occurs in other qualitative research methods, does not occur in this method.

The coding process breaks the data down into smaller components or codes that can be studied for relationships and compared with other phenomena. As the researcher analyses the data, they write memos that document their experience of the codes and suggest ways in which the codes are related or may be combined. The codes are ultimately combined into a substantive theory, which consists of a set of concepts and codes that are related to each other in a specific way. It is understood that despite reflexivity processes, the researcher influences the way in which the codes are seen as being related and wound into a theory. The resulting substantive theory is understood as "fallible, dependent on context and never completely final" (Sbaraini et al., 2011, p. 3).

4.3. Research processes

My approach is based on discussions with my supervisors and the process laid out in Charmaz's book on constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2006). To represent this process relatively accurately, I have divided the activities and their outcomes into two orders, linear processes that are completed and from which I have moved on, and iterative processes that are returned to again and again and adapted and changed over time in a mutually supportive way. This is in line with Charmaz's view of the process of GT (Charmaz, 2006). I have included in Appendix D a reflexivity piece noting how the iterative nature of GT interacted with my symptoms of attention deficit disorder (ADD) and how well matched this relationship was.

Linear processes providing discrete and complete outputs



Parallel, iterative, and mutually supportive processes of development

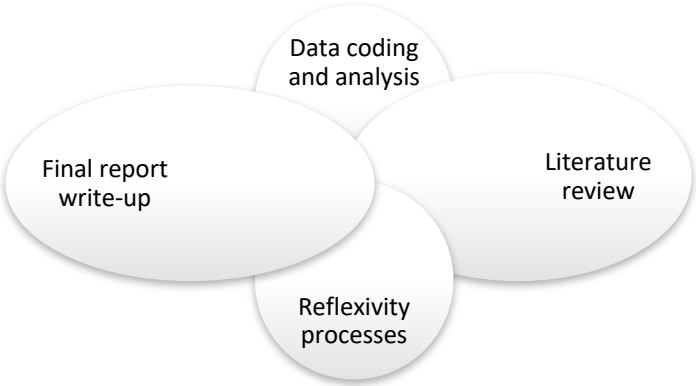


Table 3: Overview of research processes

Specific aspects of these processes are dealt with below. The literature review process is dealt with in the literature review section, although it may be important to note at this point the iterative nature of constructing this review and that its final form was influenced by the data and my reflexivity processes.

4.3.1. Participants and sampling activities

4.3.1.1. Sampling strategy

The sampling strategy was theoretical sampling, which is seen as an implicit and critical aspect of working with GT (Creswell, 2013). Simply put, this means that the sampling strategy follows the needs of the emerging theory. As per this process, each interview was analysed and coded individually and directly after the interview. The resulting data was then consulted to identify where the additional data was needed in order to build on the emerging narrative. As a result, ten interviews were conducted and each provided different types of information on the process of stuckness (Breckenridge and Jones, 2009). For more information on sampling decisions taken after each participant, please see Appendix E.

Please note that the sample size was limited to ten people as is considered sufficient for a doctoral piece of work. Data saturation did not occur, although there was a surprising amount of data coherence that will become clear in the findings section (Creswell, 2013).

4.3.1.2. Participant criteria and recruitment processes

Aside from having to be able to contribute to the emerging story, the criteria for participants were as follows: participants needed to hold or have held a senior leadership role, either as a board member or senior executive in a corporate business; they needed to be at least 35 years old and have had at least ten years of leadership experience. This would allow them to have broad experience from which to draw and allow for the possibility that they might have more mature insights. It was preferable that participants had experienced their moments of stuckness in a large corporate. Participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any point.

No racial, gender or sectoral requirements were initially stipulated, but as the research went on, I put racial requirements in place. This process and decision making for it are recorded below in section 4.3.1.3.

Participants were recruited from my personal and professional networks, using a snowball strategy but also considering theoretical sampling requirements to identify participants who would contribute to the emerging narrative (Charmaz, 2006). This process is recorded in the section directly below this. Participants were referred to me through friends and coaches and networks in which I participated.

Paperwork relating to confidentiality and voluntary agreement to the research process are included in Appendix H.

4.3.1.3. Final sample group

Below is a summary of the final sample group. Please note that I have used pseudonyms instead of real names.

	Age	**M/F**	**Race**	**Sector**	**Role**	**MBA?**	**Coaching?**
Nettie	45-50	F	White	Financial	Senior Executive	MBA	Yes
Paolo	55-60	M	White	Retail	Senior Executive	MBA	Yes
Archie	70-75	M	White	Manufacturing	Senior Executive CEO	MBA	Yes
Sandra	45-50	F	White	Retail	Senior Executive	Dip. Business	Yes
Juliet	45-50	F	White	Retail	Senior Executive	MBA	Yes
Astrid	50-55	F	White	Financial	Senior Executive CEO	MBA	Yes
Stephen	45-50	M	White	Financial	CEO	MBA	Yes
Richard	45-50	M	White	Financial	Senior Executive	MBA	Yes
James	55-60	M	White	Advertising	Senior Executive	MBA	No
Willem	45-50	M	Coloured	Media	Senior Executive	No	Yes

Table 4: Final sample group

Please note where there are two roles recorded, this is because the transcript dealt with events in both roles.

A note on the racial profile of the sample group

Nine of the ten interviewees are white, and one is a coloured person (in South Africa this means a person of mixed race). The research took place in South Africa, a country whose history has created a highly sensitive environment for racial dynamics. This doctorate was completed with a UK-based institution where there is less of a push for racial balance in sample groups than there may be in the South African context.[11]

For a variety of reasons, some of which relate to my own white race, I had easier access to white people, and using a snowball method of obtaining participants meant that white people referred white people (Creswell, 2013). These results also speak to the untransformed nature of senior leadership in South Africa and as such this sample group is a microcosm of a macrocosm with white South Africans holding 65,6% of top management positions and 53,7% of senior management roles in SA (BusinessTech, 2020).

However, as the study developed, I became increasingly curious about these very same white people narrating stories of being outsiders in white organisations. Previous research had suggested that it is black, indian or coloured people that are more likely to feel like outsiders in South Africa's white organisations (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1999). This was interesting to me as there was clearly something other than race at play in feeling like an outsider. It is for this reason that I continued with white participants and did not actively seek participants from other race groups. Thus the sample strategy moved to a more purposive orientation despite its origin in snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013). This final sample group allowed me to remove the often-dominating racial dynamics from the outsider conversation and reveal other more subtle undercurrents that had previously been hidden.

The one black/coloured participant brought a racial perspective to the discussion, leading me to wonder whether the results would have been the same, different, or amplified had the sample group had mixed or 100% black people. This is an area for future research.

4.3.2. The interview process

4.3.2.1. The interviews

I interviewed ten senior executives face-to-face either in their offices or my own for at least 60 minutes. The interviews were recorded with the consent of participants on otter.ai. Otter transcribed the sessions

[11] This comment is informed by discussions with Dr Kath Hall from the University of Cape Town and Professor Noleen Murray from the University of Pretoria. Both have extensive experience in UK and American universities and supervise PHD students on an ongoing basis (Cape Town, 11 September 2020).

and presented a transcript that needed further formatting. The transcripts were stored on a password protected computer with paper documents housed in my office at home in a locked room.

4.3.2.2. Questioning strategy

I used a semi-structured approach to the interviews, beginning always with the opening question, "Please can you tell me about a time when you have become stuck in your leadership role or stuck in resolving a problem at work?" to initiate the conversation and following this up with more tailored and responsive questions that would allow the participant freedom to respond and describe any stories they felt pertinent (Breckenridge and Jones, 2009). I tried to avoid "why" questions because, as psychosocial scholars note, these types of question can be perceived as accusative and invoke anxiety in the participants (Baker and Kelan, 2019).

4.3.2.3. The transcription process

Although otter.ai transcribed the interviews I had to review the transcripts to ensure accuracy and anonymity. I decided to retain any swear words in the text because they added context and flavour to the words. After this process I sent the script to the interviewee. Only one interviewee requested changes to the script and these related to typos and titles of people mentioned. The final scripts were numbered line by line and loaded into NVIVO, a qualitative software programme, for the next step in the research process.

4.3.3. Coding, memo writing and theory formation

4.3.3.1. Hermeneutics of faith and suspicion

Josselson (2004) elaborates on Ricoeur's hermeneutics of faith and hermeneutics of suspicion that form two strategies for making sense of interview transcripts. If a researcher adopts the hermeneutics of faith (restoration) approach, one takes the transcript at face value, giving full value to the words used. If the researcher uses the hermeneutics of suspicion (demystification) approach, the researcher will seek to delve "below" the words, problematise them and seek explanations that are not in the text.

While it is possible to include both approaches in a research project, it is very difficult to present voices as true while at the same time decoding them for hidden meanings. This research tended to take the position of the hermeneutics of suspicion or demystification, as Josselson (2004) terms it. If I had taken the former approach, the research **may** have had the outcome that stuckness was created purely by a context, with the leader playing no role in enabling this stuckness situation. This notion would not fit with the idea of stuckness as a relationship and with the literature and the data.

Using this approach meant that I had to pay extensive attention to reflexivity because I was claiming a meaning different from that directly presented by the interviewees in the text (Josselson, 2004).

4.3.3.2. Coding

Coding and data analysis occurred after each interview. Coding allows the researcher to define what is happening in the data and start to make sense of what it means (Charmaz, 2006).

Coding processes used included line-by-line coding, thematic coding, and incident coding. For line-by-line coding I coded each line individually; for thematic coding, the codes were often longer because they described whole themes, for example themes of feeling angry. The longest codes were incident codes, which described whole events. All these codes were placed in one and not three sections in NVIVO. The codes used were generally gerunds, as suggested by Charmaz (2006).

After each interview I coded the data and used this to inform the selection of interviewees and the questioning strategy as per theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006).

Ultimately, I went through two full coding processes using NVIVO. When I initially examined the first coded data (500+ codes) for all the interviews, I was disappointed. The coded data did not live, it was boring to me and the insights felt negligible. I felt angry at the participants and disillusioned by the research (see Appendix D). I tried to start aggregating codes into narratives and theory but there were gaps, and I was not able to see any emerging narrative.

On the recommendation of my supervisor, I reluctantly recoded everything, this time looking for a whole new range of factors, including the external context, the role of childhood, ideas about corporates and how leaders are "bewitched" by corporates. This time there were almost 400 codes which I then grouped together into four key areas of research, a process informed by reflexivity processes, the literature, and the data. After this work, the data began to weave itself and the narrative started becoming visible, exciting, and alive. At this point I started to coagulate the codes around the emerging narrative, all the time checking backwards and forwards with the interview data to ensure that I was faithful to the original data.

4.3.3.3. Memo writing

I also wrote memos after each interview, from time to time after supervision sessions, and whilst coding. These memos were both by hand and electronic in NVIVO. The memos clarified my experience in the sessions, including helping me to bracket out any feelings or thoughts from the session. I also used the memos to identify the kind of information that would be useful to generate in the next interviewee (as per theoretical sampling – see section 4.3.1.1 and Appendix E) and started to link codes in relationships that became suggestive of a theory.

4.3.3.4. Theory development

After each interview I coded the data and wrote memos. I drew maps, and compared maps and data in a process known as constant comparison (Charmaz, 2006). There appeared to be significant areas of commonality in some places and this was further explored through theoretical sampling, more data analysis, and the creation of data hierarchies, leading to an emergent narrative. For example, when I explored what the participants brought to the process, it was clear that they shared some personality characteristics and patterns of socialisation and I organised these in a data hierarchy and table. Strung together, these patterns then presented a theory about what the participants brought to the stuck situation.

I developed these data hierarchies for four areas, including the process of stuckness, the context of stuckness, the participants and the experience of stuckness, and why people stayed stuck. An example of a data table is included in Appendix F. I have not included all the tables because this would have been too cumbersome. These are however available on request.

4.4. The pilot interview

An initial pilot interview was conducted that revealed several findings that I used to inform my subsequent interview questions and coding process. The most important learnings from this process included that stuckness is a spectrum with many shades between stuckness and unstuckness, that the stuckness that occurs is a stuckness of relationship, that there are both inner and outer activities that create stuckness, and that stuckness can be a gateway to a more satisfying life. More details on this pilot interview and related findings are included in Appendix G.

4.5. Ensuring the rigour of this research

According to Cypress, 2017, there is some debate, complexity and confusion around achieving rigour in qualitative research. She recommends that researchers use the term rigour instead of trustworthiness in their research. She posits that rigour refers to the precision, truth and exactness in research and builds on the concepts of reliability and validity in research.

Cypress comments that "Reliability is based on consistency and care in the application of research practices, which are reflected in the visibility of research practices, analysis, and conclusions, reflected in an open account that remains mindful of the partiality and limits of the research findings." (Cypress, 2017, p.256). It is this transparency that that allows other researchers to assess the reliability of the research. For this author, "A valid study should demonstrate what actually exists and is accurate, and a valid instrument or measure should actually measure what it is supposed to measure" (Cypress, 2017, p.256).

To ensure reliability and rigour in this research I have undertaken a number of processes. Firstly all transcripts were sent to participants to check that I had accurately captured their experiences, only one was returned with changes that were mainly typos in nature. As per her recommendations I have had extensive and prolonged engagement with the material, reading and re-reading the texts, mapping, journaling and coding all of the data twice. I triangulated my findings through discussing them with peers, supervisors and others. I have provided a "thick" description of my methodology including the limitations of this research and in particular around theory development so that researchers have sufficient information on which to judge this project (Cypress, 2017, p.258). Lastly, as has been noted in the Chapter on reflexivity I have paid specific attention to reflexivity and ways in which I learned to bracket my own assumptions out of this research.

4.6. Ethical considerations

There were a number of ethical considerations for this research. These included structural and process issues, issues related to power in the interview process and the creation of safety and support for participants. I have also included in this section a note on the rigour and reliability/trustworthiness of this research.

The structural processes put in place to manage confidentiality have been detailed in my ethics application, including the use of an anonymous code to "name" participants, anonymising data, the confidential storage of data, and the use of a password protected computer and locked files for paper documents. Additionally, all participants were also able to withdraw from the study at any point. Debriefing was offered to all participants although none of my participants required after-care. Two participants noted that they would discuss the interview and transcript with their therapists. The venue for the interviews met the health and safety requirements of Middlesex University for off-site interviews.

An important area of ethical concern is that of power in the relationship and whether the interviewee may seek to please or validate the interviewer in some way by thereby providing unbalanced reporting. Furthermore whether the interviewee may seek to position themselves in a certain way in the interview. I have tried to eliminate these kinds of bias through adopting the hermeneutics of suspicion (section 4.3.3.1) and using Cypress's (2017) guidance around establishing rigour in qualitative research.

I wanted to be very careful and ethical in the way that I interpreted the data, even though I adopted an approach based on the hermeneutics of suspicion (Josselson, 2004). To this end I tried to respect the participants' experience of the event and at the same time uncover any hidden meaning in a way that

was not accusatory to the participants. Linked to this is the need to provide similar care with the descriptions of the context.

Less easy to provide was self-care and support for myself, which I also noted in my earlier research documents as being an ethical concern. This was not always well managed, and I am grateful for my supervisors' focus on self-care and reflexivity as a way of combating some of the blindness I incurred as a consequence of overwork and bad lifestyle choices. The reflexivity commentary in Appendix D illustrates this.

4.7. Conclusion: Methodology

The research used a CGT approach which recognises the constructed nature of reality. The methodology associated with this approach was used to provide data from participants that could be analysed and linked into a narrative that could provide insight into my research questions and aims. Participants were identified based on their capacity to add to this insight. The final sample group of ten senior executives had a racial bias that was useful to highlighting more subtle outsider dynamics than those anticipated from a more racially balanced sample group. The pilot interview provided significant useful data for the final research project but also alerted me to my own bias in data analysis and meaning making. Critical parts of my methodological thinking included ensuring the rigour of the research through processes of reliability and validity.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction

This section presents the research findings with the analysis accessible in the following chapter. It is structured in a similar way to the literature review, exploring the participants first, the context second, third the process of stuckness including why they stayed, followed by the experience and impact of stuckness, including recommendations for working with stuckness. Last is a description of definitions of stuckness as provided by the participants. This section is included last (unlike in the literature review) because it draws on the data that precedes it.

5.2. A methodological reminder

It is useful to reiterate the earlier point in the methodology section that this research did not seek to validate a hypothesis or create statistically generalisable positivist findings. Instead, the research was seeking to create a theory of an existential approach to leadership stuckness and a definition of leadership stuckness.

The findings themselves were generated through coding and memo writing (Charmaz, 2006). The choices of where to focus and what to amplify or diminish were determined by my experiences in the interviews, my reflexivity writing, conversations with co-workers and supervisors and the literature review. The iterative nature of the research process and sampling strategy invited me to seek certain data that I believed would be useful in understanding stuckness, for example the personality and backgrounds of the leaders who got stuck.

This is not a positivist research project that seeks to generalise results to a broader group based on a representative sample. This sample group is not representative of any population other than its own. Furthermore, dealing with participants as statistical units may invite the same objectification that this research seeks to avoid (Wharne, 2019). To this end, I have used pseudonyms, not numbers, with the intention to support the reader to experience the participants as human beings rather than numbered research subjects.

Numbers can however have some validity in suggesting the prevalence of findings in the sample group and this may be useful in understanding the strength of an experience or theme within this group. The findings will thus take the form of quotes from participants as well as broader themes generalised from quotes of participants. I also include, where relevant, the numbers of participants who were in alignment with a factor/statement/history/experience. I do this not to create “objective” quantitative data but to indicate the strength of a statement within THIS sample group. While this is not critical for this kind of

research, it is of interest because it is suggestive of the strength of an idea and thus useful for decision making regarding integration within the broader narrative of this research.

It would thus be useful to describe the way in which comments are referenced in this section. The participant's pseudonym refers to the participant, (number) denotes the number of participants who made a preceding statement or shared an experience, and when there is a direct quote, this will be referenced as Pseudonym: 56 with the 56 referring to the line number in the transcript.

5.3. The participants

This section provides an overview of the types of stuckness events articulated by the participants, followed by an exploration of the participants' backgrounds and personalities. Appendix F contains the coding table for the participants.

5.3.1. Final sample group

Although the final sample group is provided in the methodology section, it is useful to repeat some of the patterns within this group. These include

- ten senior executives, including 3 CEOs
- nine white people, one coloured person (mixed race)
- six male executives, four female
- five in the 45-55 age group, four in the 55-65 age group, and one in the 65 plus age group
- eight MBAs, one post-graduate diploma in business
- nine people had coaches
- sectoral mix: four finance sector, three retail sector, one manufacturing, one advertising, and one media sector

5.3.2. Stuckness events experienced by the participants

In this research I understand stuckness as an event that occurs as a result of a series of causal processes (mechanisms). The events themselves do not occur in a binary way but on a continuum. Despite this, participants were able to describe stuckness events.

Participants experienced several stuckness events, each of which had a process that differed in complexity and severity. This is indicated in the table below where the term **complex** relates to the number of people and contexts involved. Incidents between two people in one location are not seen as complex, while incidents between a leader and an entire executive team or organisation are seen as very complex. A complex event may also refer to a person describing stuckness in more than one place in their lives, for example their work and home life.

Severity relates to length of the stuck event and the severity of the outcomes. Although the findings note that it is not always clear when stuckness events begin or end, this research uses the length of a stuckness event as provided by the participant. When this event is described as completing in under a year, then the event is seen as less severe than a stuckness event lasting several years. Severity also relates to the outcomes of a stuckness event. More severe instances are when a person leaves or loses their job or gets divorced. Examples of less severe instances may be when a person changes their role within an organisation.[12]

The stuckness events recorded by participants included the following:

Pseudonym	Number and type of stuckness events
Nettie	One severe and complex event in a corporate
Paolo	One severe and complex event in a corporate
Archie	Two corporate events One complex event in life
Sandra	Three events in two corporates, one severe
Juliet	Four events – two were relatively simple events involving one location, two were complex and involved multiple locations
Astrid	One severe and complex event in a corporate
Stephen	One event in a corporate One complex event in their spiritual life
Richard	One severe event in a corporate
James	One event in a corporate
Willem	Two events in a corporate A complexity of stuck and severe events in life as a whole

Table 5: Stuckness events

This table indicates that stuckness was experienced by all participants, some recording more than one event. Further to this point, Stephen notes that "you make a choice and then get constrained and then make another choice and get constrained so stepping out … [is necessary] (pp. 843-845). This comment relates to stuckness and fluidity being an ongoing cycle in life.

5.3.3. Participants' backgrounds and personalities

Below are the findings from the ten participants and these disclose many similarities in the history of the participants. The sample group is not representative of any group, but itself, and yet the level of coherence between the stories is still interesting and is explored more fully in the analysis section.

All participants were successful senior executives, nine of whom were working in blue-chip multinationals in South Africa and eight of whom had an MBA. Most of the participants were between 45 and 60, placing them at the prime or towards the end of their careers. Nine were white people and

[12] This definition is very pragmatic and not based on literature because no literature could be identified in this regard.

one was of coloured ethnic heritage. The majority came from lower middle- or working-class backgrounds (6 people) and had experiences of being outsiders as children (5 people).

Quotes include:

Participants	**Quote**
Archie: 326, 974	*we were lower middle class … I was extremely successful if I might say, in every single job.*
Astrid: 84-85	*Provided a description of growing up poor on a small farm and that … I've always been quite successful.*
Paolo: 631	*Prior to this, when I grew up, you know, walking to school, and I would get beaten up by XXX culture people.*
Willem: 1192, 1154 173-174, 187, 206-210	*fuck yeah, I was always an outsider, I was always called an outsider because I feel I have been made an outsider, but I also have made myself an outsider.* *And to be honest with you actually I really very much ran away from the coloured identity in xx cape where I grew up… and almost created a persona that was completely the complete opposite of that person … when you're a kid and you're watching TV and stuff, whatever you always saw that you know it would be white people driving these fancy cars and living in these ideal worlds or whatever and that was that ideal life.*
Stephen: 736	*And so I don't like, I don't feel deeply part of a white South African crowd that I don't want to be associated with the idiots in it.*

Table 6: Quotes – Participants' backgrounds

Interestingly, many participants described having absent, critical and/or domineering mothers. Participants noted that "my mother was extremely critical, very domineering" (Sandra: pp. 189-190), "My mother was Attila the Hun" (Archie: p. 275), and "my grandmother was also a bit of a battle axe" (Willem: p. 863). Seven interviewees noted that they grew up quickly and had to be autonomous at an early age, either because they went to boarding school at a young age (Richard), they had to live with relatives away from immediate family (Astrid, Willem), were bullied (Paolo), or were emotionally separated from their mothers (Archie, Sandra, Juliet, Astrid, Willem). Sandra notes "I stood on my own two feet from a very young age" and "I had a habit of rescuing myself" (p. 317).

Most report being conformists, good children (7), who worked hard (6), who were self-critical (7), and who were not emotional (6). They all valued control and independence as a way of being successful. Seven participants expressed a sense of not always being good enough or needing to do/be something in order to be good enough.

Astrid comments:

> *I've always felt a little bit inferior because you know I do not come from money or a family that's connected. My education was in a little school in the middle of a YYY province. No one's ever heard of*

> *it. I went to PPP University that is really not the best university. … So that's kind of the pattern of my life that I've always wanted to prove myself and don't just walk in anywhere and accept that I'm OK. I always have to prove that I'm OK. … Some was never good enough ... That I don't think I'll be loved for who I am, I'll be loved for what I do in a way* (Astrid: pp. 256-237).

Nine participants noted that they were more rational than emotional. Juliet commented "You know, I think for a lot of my career feelings didn't enter into the equation at all. In fact, I was perfect for that environment, for their corporate environment" (pp. 286-289). Stephen consistently noted throughout the interview that he was not emotional nor valued angry emotions as a decision-making tool. "So emotions for me. … I'm not an expressive person when it comes to emotion" (pp. 105-106). Most were straight talkers (6) who considered themselves to have strong personalities (7) and higher standards than others (4).

Quotes include:

Participant	***Quote***
James: pp. 318-319	*I went to boarding school from the age of eight, went home 3-4 times a year, the first few years were difficult.*
James: pp. 304-305	*and my sister rebellious, you know, but I was certainly not rebellious, we did not give our folks a hard time.*
Archie: p. 279	*No, no, no. I was a complete conformist.*
Juliet: pp. 275-279	*How did you respond to stress in your childhood? Yeah, we just carried on. I'm not even sure. I don't even think I was aware of the level of resilience that was required.*
Richard: pp. 110-111	*And I also enjoy being committed to something like I really enjoy the intensity of work.*
Stephen: pp. 101-106	*I'm not emotional – I consider that a massive boundary … I place a really high bar on internal metrics of control, and responsibility and acting in the right way. So, I hold myself to the extremely high bar, and so, emotions for me. You should notice I'm not an expressive person when it comes to emotion.*
Archie: pp. 67-68	*I need to control and when I don't, and that pisses me off.*
Sandra: p. 376	*I had a lot of enemies, people didn't like being spoken to directly.*
Archie: p. 742	*I have a very strong personality.*
Stephen: pp. 537-538	*My coach said … you have an inner judge that judges your actions much harder than anybody else.*
Willem: pp. 600-604	*So, I don't know what that story is – there is a deep insecurity – there is a deep issue of self-doubt and there's also a deep issue of fear of failure as well, but sometimes I even think that is also fear of success even manifesting itself was a fear of fear of failure to what if I do, you know, succeed.*
Juliet: pp. 807-812	*Yeah. Because it's terribly unrewarding not satisfying everyone else's needs. Yeah. Because you are having no value. Yeah. And that's how what my esteem was built around. Being in service.*
Astrid: pp. 380-381	*It's a whole generation of people that is just always working hard and trying hard to be Okay.*

Willem: pp. 772-773	*I question myself. No, God and also imposter fucking hell that seriously*

Table 7: Quotes – Participants' personality

Two participants noted that they were addicts; one had been to rehabilitation for alcoholism and the other was receiving therapy for alcohol, drug and shopping related addictions. Paolo, Willem, and Archie noted that they had experienced bullying as children, and Astrid and Willem spoke of trauma as children.

5.3.4. Conclusion: The participants

The sample group was selected for their experiences of stuckness and so it is not unexpected that the participants all experienced stuckness events during their lives. While some participants referred to one event, the majority described more than one event. These varied in severity and complexity.

All participants described themselves as senior executives who were successful and capable in previous roles and thus expected to do well in the new environment. They saw themselves as conformists (good children), successful, strong, competent, rational, autonomous people who had learned to get on with life on their own from an early age.

Regarding backgrounds, there was a broad pattern of participants coming from less affluent backgrounds with difficult and demanding mothers/caregivers where love was provided conditionally on the production of the required performance. Most participants considered themselves outsiders with a pattern of self-criticism and shame that had led to them needing to prove themselves. Most participants valued rational ways of being in the world, had completed an MBA and used the services of a coach.

Two participants indicated that they had a history of addiction, two of trauma and one of bullying.

5.4. The reported context in which stuckness occurs

It has been noted that this research views stuckness as a relationship (section 1.2.1). As a result, it is important to explore the context and other players in the stuck relationship.

5.4.1. The sample group of organisations

The table below provides an overview of the organisations in which the stuck event occurred.

Participant	Sector	Country of origin: SA	Multinational	Listed, Blue Chip
1	Finance	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Retail	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Manufacturing	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Retail	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Retail	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Finance	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Finance	Yes	Yes	No
8	Finance	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Media	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Media	Yes	No	No

Table 8: Sample group of companies

Most of the organisations were listed blue-chip companies originating in South Africa and had been successful enough to grow into multinationals. Most participants worked in the finance sector, then retail and media, with only one participant from the manufacturing sector.

5.4.2. Organisational cultures described by the participants

Please note that these findings are not objective descriptions of the context in which the stuckness event occurred. These contexts are co-constructed in the interviews, based on the individuals' experience of the context and the interviewees' questioning and responding. When reading the data below it is important to thus reflect on the possibility, even likelihood, that the context may be described more negatively than it may in fact be.

All participants described their organisational context for stuckness as adversarial and negative in one or more ways. This included having entrenched and stuck ways of doing things (6), a total dominance by senior leadership (8), ongoing competitiveness and conflict (often covert and political rather than active and transparent) (7), leadership bullying (7), cronyism (7), lack of racial transformation (2)[13] and sexism (all women in survey: 4). Participants saw other leaders and leadership as a whole as creating problematic toxic organisational cultures where the requirement to fit in was seen as more important than the requirement to make profit (8). It was felt that organisational cultures encouraged competitive, win-lose behaviour where survival was based on keeping your mouth shut and acceding to the

[13] The lack of racial transformation was noted by the one coloured participant and by one white participant. Typically, white people do not notice transformation as actively as people of colour (Saad, 2019), as is borne out by this research.

CEO/Board/Shareholder requirements. It was noticed by participants that this phenomenon was even more important at higher levels of leadership.

Quotes from Paolo, Nettie and Richard include:

Participant	**Quote**
Paolo: pp. 775-785	*And there are all these stuck systems that create so much inertia in organisations, and inertia in organisation means no money…. I'm the boss I am most senior – you must shut up – you just do. Even if the financial manager is strong, ethical, he just collapses and signs, and off goes the funds…. The ecosystem is what determines the rules of the game and then the individual within that domain. But until the system collapses, you have no chance of doing anything.*
Paolo: pp. 387-389	*If I keep on rewarding you, and I keep on rewarding you, and all of a sudden you're implicated in something you would never stand up against me.*
Paolo: pp. 393-401	*They set up structures on how to how to work together – networking … So in the town S, university, you come from certain schools. And if you come from a certain hostel, you're always going to protect one another, come what may be right or wrong, or whatever. That's it. And they will support each other. And that's their domain. And when you have that type of power, you can then dig yourself into position quite easily. If you have a few cronies around, even more so. So, it's not about sound decision making, but really about power.*
Nettie: pp. 163-173	*You will be protected no matter what happened, even if you are accused of sexual harassment, people will be asked to send you messages of support because you are definitely not guilty, even though there are ten people who say you are, it sounds horrible now that I say it, how can that happen in a company, but loyalty became an absolute limiting value in the business… At some point I was really anxious because the previous guy was exited….If Exec X can't work with you anymore then he will exit you…*
Richard: pp. 40-44	*Hierarchical, very inward focused not externally focused not focused on competitors not focused on customers very antiquated theories around leadership – command and control.*

Table 9: Quotes – organisational culture

While most participants described implicitly and explicitly that they had friendships in the organisation, there were also difficult relationships characterised by a lack of caring and inauthenticity. Nettie notes "Line Managers don't care about staff anyway – they don't give a fuck. They don't give a fuck about your career or your life – 90% of them don't – you can send them through how many workshops and work with them a million times for 30 years it will still be like that they don't give a fuck" (pp. 782-785). Astrid comments "He was my closest colleague for nine years … for me because he's a closed book, almost sometimes to the point where you felt he was sometimes a little dishonest … just never knew where you stood with him" (pp. 349-350).

All of the female participants experienced sexism. Sandra commented, "you are just a woman, no matter how intelligent you are, you must just get back in your box" (pp. 77-79). And when things were

pressurised, male colleagues would say “And look at that women – look at her – she can’t cope with the stress” (pp. 643-644).

Astrid also referred to the old boys’ club, saying “It just didn't do me any favours. It made things worse. Because often and especially in the boys’ club they don't want to hear things like that. They don't, they want someone to stand up and keep on saying the same thing over and over and not be challenged on it because they do not want to be judged, the boys do not challenge each other” (Astrid: pp. 645-650).

These negative experiences were amplified by difficulties in defining executive performance (Paolo) and the fact that performance was assessed by the very same person one had to comply with (Paolo). Lastly, three participants (Paolo, Archie, Astrid) noticed the lack of appropriate leadership oversight by the Board, who could be deceived by the CEO. Paolo commented on this:

> *What benefit is there of a non-executive board, if they're not actually keeping that personality in check. So, what they do is they have a relationship with him, he actually keeps the board away from meeting everybody else. So, there's a total disconnect, this board should actually know, at least up to a certain level, what is happening across the business* (Paolo: pp. 842-847).

Nettie and Astrid described experiences of absurdity and meaningless behaviour from corporate leaders. Astrid commented that “one day you’re fantastic and the next day you’re just nothing” (pp. 355-358). Nettie noted several events where an action was taken as directed by the CEO and recalled the next day.

Three participants did describe positive experiences with their boss. One was assisted in overcoming her alcohol addiction (Sandra), one pushed to achieve more for themselves (Willem), and one participant had leadership support in changing jobs when they experienced stuckness (Richard).

5.4.3. Conclusion: The reported context in which stuckness occurs

The context as reported by the participants was of autocratic senior leaders bolstered by cronyism and bullying, using less senior leaders to satisfy their needs and those of the shareholders. For many of the participants, this was a system where might is right.

These systems, as described by participants, found it hard to tolerate difference (gender/racial difference/difference of opinion) and even very senior leaders were described as being rewarded for their silence and compliance. In fact, there was a sense that the more senior one is, the more you are required to merge with the organisation and take on values, behaviours and attributes that are considered appropriate by the senior leadership and the organisation.

While some level of friendship and collegiality was reported by participants, there were significant references to a competitive culture characterised by a lack of caring and inauthenticity. The cultural and leadership style issues described above were considered to be exacerbated by difficulties in defining executive performance and the fact that performance was evaluated by the same people who required

compliance. Executive oversight through board members or shareholders was considered complicit or insufficient by the interviewees.

In effect, the organisations, as reported by the participants, were stuck in old ways of doing things, held in place by cronyism and fear and a lack of clarity about how performance is understood and managed. There was an element of absurdity and meaninglessness about how bosses responded to staff and the nature of their directives in managing the organisation.

5.5. The process of stuckness

Below, I have documented the findings of the process of stuckness, as manifest in the data. This data has been organised into ten steps in a process including the following:

1. Entering with hope
2. Getting into relationship
3. Performing in relationship
4. Experiencing a rift in the relationship
5. Confusing identity and performance
6. Watching others watching
7. Becoming scapegoated
8. Understanding why they stayed
9. Completing or transforming the process
10. Returning and integrating

5.5.1. Entering with hope

Most of the participants indicated that they had felt very positive about their new jobs when they voluntarily entered the organisation, although many did notice that they came from a less privileged background than their peers (7), had a different home language and culture (4), and were less confident (2). One participant noted that the organisation oversold themselves to recruit him. Only Nettie noted: “I did not like the business from the start to be honest” (Nettie: pp. 110). Sandra, Astrid and Nettie stated that the organisation said that they wanted them for who they were, for their difference.

Additional quotes include:

Participant	**Quote**
Astrid: pp. 215-218	*My second language is English, I am xxxx. So, all of that, and then you walk into this organisation that is all from school B (posh school for wealthy kids) and xxx university. Yes. And they make it well known that they all come from money and they all come from that. So, you just socially … I felt like even more of an outsider. And again, it's something that you want to overcome, and you want to prove yourself. It just drew me in in a way.*

Willem: pp. 587-599	*There are young white kids who have now come in afterwards, coming in at a lower level, and these guys have more of a mandate of self-empowerment than I have.*
Sandra: pp. 782-789	*The MD said we need people like you – I said you can't move this business forward. Because they have got all old white men, one woman, one person of colour – They don't understand South Africa at all because they are all living in Apartheid, the world has moved on to a different place. I think that they probably realise. He said that we need more views in this organisation. Without people like you how will we ever move forward?*

Table 10: Quotes – Entering the organisation

5.5.2. Getting into relationship

The new leaders went through a process of socialisation upon entering the organisation. This included tacit and explicit learning around what to wear, how to be, what values to embody, what issues to drive, how to deal with conflict, where the power lies, and much more. A critical part of this is the process of embodying the organisational identity in some way. For four of the participants this meant suppressing aspects of their identity based on, for example, their femininity (Sandra, Astrid, Nettie, Juliet), their race (Willem), their language of origin (Nettie, Archie, Astrid, Willem), and their rural backgrounds (Willem, Astrid). Astrid explained that she had to suppress her X culture of origin to the point of policing her partner regarding this at work social events. For Nettie, Paolo, Archie, Sandra and Astrid this also meant moderating their straight talking and assertive style.

For Astrid, this process of moving away from self and adapting oneself to the identity and behavioural requirements of the organisation was fuelled by the sense of not being enough as she was. She commented:

> *I've always felt a little bit inferior because you know I do not come from money or a family that's connected. My education was in a little school in the middle of YYY province. No one's ever heard of it. I went to PPP University that is really not the best university. But it's a bit of a drug. It's a bit of a drug. If only I can do better then I'll be good enough. So that's kind of the pattern of my life that I've always wanted to prove myself and don't just walk in anywhere and accept that I'm OK. I always have to prove that I'm OK. And this place in a way fed that monster. That monster that exact monster was what's being fed here. And you get drawn in because you just always do more and more and more and try on and on and on. Some was never good enough. And so, I think that is what happened to me was that is the very thing which is true to my human being. That I don't think I'll be loved for who I am* (Astrid: pp. 256-237).

Juliet noticed her willingness to adapt herself to others, including organisational identities, and was enabled in this by her limited access to her feelings. She comments, "You know, I think for a lot of my career feelings didn't enter into the equation at all. In fact, I was perfect for that environment, for their corporate environment" (Juliet: pp. 286-289).

Paolo did not moderate his style and was more forthright and oppositional than others on the Executive Committee. He notes below that he survived, un-edited, and in his role, because he was a specialist in

an area not understood well by the business; he delivered significant value for the business and he had the support of the chairman of the board.

Quotes include:

Participant	**Quote**
Sandra: pp. 653-654	*And they want that because you have got charisma. And then they get you in the organisation and then they try and model you*
Astrid: pp. 215-218	*For nine years especially in the beginning they would say to me you are so unlike us. You know can you just like you know stay in your little box because otherwise you don't really hit it off. I mean in the way I behave – you are not really like us…*
Astrid: pp. 121-122	*became this thing where they kept on saying well if only you were not you if only you were more like us.*
Willem: p. 462	*You walk through these offices and all still lily white – it's terrible*
Nettie: pp. 926-928	*In that corporate world, it kills you because you just could not be yourself every time. So, if you were to be yourself you would lose a lot.*
Astrid: pp. 490-492	Talking about her husband – preparing him for corporate events: *...I was always like, oh you know, that he can't reinforce the fact that we are XXX or this and that.*
Paolo: pp. 229-262	*I operated outside the culture with different rules. I came from a different domain. I had more XXX education. … Look, I didn't have the fear. Yeah. And I said, Yeah, so you know, I have something to say. If I don't put it on the table, then what's the value of my being here. But that was my perspective, you know, others… Maybe they had families and I, you know, was alone, I didn't have that same pressure in life. Tough, you know, three kids arrive. Big bond. So, What's the worst that they can do to me, arrest and kill me? But I'm going to speak, I'm going to do something. And … I survived purely because I was a specialist within the domain. So, I looked after the supply, I had my own my own domain, which kind of grew over time, and it added benefit to the business, no one understood it, no one wanted to understand it. And so, I grew a group of people, which was quite a sizable one, and dominated the South African, let's say, XX market by changing the strategy, it was a strategic move. So, I was left on my own, two is I had support and I had the chairman's support in that what I was doing was an initiative that would have brought change within the group and Company S. … And then the person that actually understood what it was all about that acted as kind of the go between … So, you know, maybe that relationship helped to keep me on the side, building things up, proving your value, proving the value, making sure – It was only when CEO left. And the new CEO took over, that he didn't like me, and he wanted to get rid of me…*
Astrid: pp. 257-259	*And some of the traits that the public thought were fabulous, such as natural charisma and your persona … [I] had to dumb that down to fit in.*
Archie: pp. 775-776	*I mean sometimes I had to shut up. Yeah, yeah let other people do the talking.*

Table 11: Quotes – Adapting to the organisation

The quotes above also describe participants' thinking about why they were willing to adapt themselves so fully to the identity requirements of the organisations. These relate largely to the belief that this was a normal socialisation process, that they as senior leaders needed to embody the identity of the organisation in some way and that they were not good enough in their natural format to be accepted into such a prestigious context. Juliet felt that she was disconnected from herself, not really sure of who

she was and what she wanted, and as a result was more willing to adapt to what others wanted from her. Furthermore, participants wanted to be in relationship with the organisation because of the perceived benefits in terms of income, status, and developmental opportunities. Only one participant did not adapt himself because he was confident in his specialised and non-replaceable utility and had the protection of the chairman.

5.5.3. Performing in relationship

As indicated above, a deal is struck between the individual leader and the organisation, and this works well, at least in the initial stages.

For all participants this was a period of excitement and success with an implied positive future. During this time most of the interviewees built up a new business or created significant new parts of the existing business (6). The work was challenging but rewarding and there was meaning in the work through pushing themselves, being successful, and having some level of community within the workplace. Those who stayed over a year developed emotional attachments to their work, the new businesses they created and the people in them (9).

Quotes include:

Participant	**Quote**
Sandra: pp. 40-51	*I mean obviously I worked for Company XX very well, the organisation is quite forward thinking in itself even though it's not always – they make you believe, they build this business on its values and they make you believe that you are so important and they grow you as a person that you feel like I'm growing and I'm bettering myself – I'm growing as a human being and in that I deliver the basics to the business. Because they love me. It's not really love, and we know that. But its lovely to have and it gives you a sense of being cared for. Because in fact it's a values-based business, it's all about integrity, quality and all those good things and you have to live that on a daily basis. Even though we know at the end of the day it's about the bottom line.*
James*:* pp. 563-569	*XXX person was there to support, you know, the momentum was there, and you had a team of let's say, mavericks around instead of almost like the dirty dozen. And each one of us had something to home in and specialise on. We would meet in the corridor and make a decision, get going and off it goes.*
Nettie: pp. 149-150	*For me it was a lot about our wonderful story which was really inspiring*
Willem: pp. 525-528	*It's a shit fucking market I really mean having said that we've not done badly I mean I just closed off the 1.6 million rand deal, so it was just me we're not doing badly actually compared to everyone else.*
James: pp. 245-261	*Absolutely, I think it was because the team was bonded, because MM person, she essentially for a long time was my boss and we were joint MDs … we complement each other completely, so she was a very touchy-feely emotional person and I was completely opposite, we worked incredibly well together. And we would give each other really hard feedback, I Iearned a helluva lot from MM and she learned a lot from me. Yeah, it was great…*

Paolo: pp. 242-243	*And so I grew a group of people, which was quite a sizable one, And dominated the South African, let's say, XX market by changing the strategy, it was a strategic move…*

Table 12: Quotes – The successful merged relationship

For some participants (2), despite the success and meaning in their work, these years were beset by ongoing requirements by more senior leaders and peers for them to further adapt who they were. Astrid noted the stress at what she experienced as pressure to have to be "acceptable" to the organisation and how at times this anxiety caused her to need anti-anxiety medication. She explained that she continued to adapt herself and jump through considerable hoops including an MBA in order to continue operating in a system where she was seen as different, and less than. "Because I never felt myself worthy not for a day not ever ever ever ever. I always felt a little bit stupid, not good enough, not poised and graceful enough and a little bit too hectic for them, a little bit too challenging for them" (Astrid: pp. 199-202).

As a last point, the length of time participants experienced this successful relationship is not clear in the participants' minds, who did not always notice when the process of stuckness started. However, there were comments by some participants that suggested that the length of this period of success varied hugely: for Nettie and Astrid, a fairly short period of time (maybe the first year), but for Paolo considerably longer (maybe up until 10 years). For some participants such as Nettie, the process of stuckness began almost on arrival within the organisation, while for others such as James, they only began later. The reasons for this are discussed in the analysis section.

5.5.4. Experiencing a rift in relationship

Nine of the participants observed that their stuckness was catalysed by a change of leadership (James, Paolo, Sandra), a change of ownership (Nettie, James), promise of a new role (Astrid, Willem) or a change of context (Archie). These participants noted that this external change required some adaptation that they could not or would not make, and that this non-adaptability made it impossible for them to continue as before in the organisations/contexts. To this end, James noticed that he probably would not have got stuck and would have stayed had he been able to adapt to the new organisation (pp. 133-136).

Interviewer: "Do you think – maybe if you had changed your identity to match global, you would have stayed?"

James: "Yes, I think I wasn't a global person" (pp. 133-136).

Quotes include:

Participant	Quote
James: pp. 33-35	*And then we had a hostile takeover that got taken over by this massive English company. Yeah, and then I felt like I should leave, yes, because of the size of the company it became more bureaucratic. I didn't have the freedom that … that I was used to. So, I didn't agree with all the decisions that have been made. So, to implement someone else's decision you haven't bought into them, I find really difficult.*
James: p. 76	*With the merger we lost our team identity*
Astrid: pp. 30-33	*I was being kept there by ongoing promises of you're going to be then the next CCC. Oh, you're going to be the CCC next year. Oh, so just be patient and just wait. And then suddenly one day I knew. My boss has been the one that has strung me along…*
Paolo: pp. 154-157	*Here is an organisation that has been progressing for decades, all of a sudden, you know, a change in culture and changing how people engage within the organisation gets people to just bottle up like a mussel or to move aside or to leave the organisation.*

Table 13: Quotes – Identity shifts

Juliet described four incidents of stuckness, and this longer-term narrative is useful to explore because it speaks to stuckness patterns within one individual. The first event narrates her transition to university; a context where she had no friends, struggled with the practicalities of life and where her parents were unable to help her. The second was while travelling abroad and she became aware that the people she was living with had different values to her, and that she could get stuck living the unambitious and drug-fuelled life that they were living. The third example was in an unsatisfying relationship, with children, where she was the primary wage earner and she had to endure less meaningful work in order to provide for the family. The fourth experience of stuckness she described was post-divorce when the children had left the home, she had left her unfulfilling job, had a new relationship but seemed to be repeating the same earlier unsatisfying relational and behavioural patterns. It can be argued that each of these examples describes how the context had changed but her patterns of behaviour had not; in essence her identity had become stuck and non-adaptive to the new circumstances. Most of the identity shifts she then went through took some time to implement (1-3 years). The instances when she was able to respond quickly were where she removed herself from a context (unambitious and stoned friends) and where she had planned for the divorce and knew what she needed to do for the survival of herself and her children. In the last instance, she notes that it was an inner identity shift and the lack of responding adaptation by the external context that caused her to feel stuck.

Quotes include:

Participant	Quote
Juliet: pp. 48-58	*I kind of finished school and went into university and none of my old life came with me. Yeah, all of a sudden, I was in an environment where I wasn't, I wasn't familiar. I wasn't learned in any way. And I didn't have a license. I was catching a bus and it was pretty fucking depressing. And I couldn't help myself. My parents weren't able to help me. It kinda just unfolded. And It took about a year to adapt and find my place…*
Juliet: pp. 12-18	*I was sitting in a room in the sticks with a whole lot of stoners. And I can remember sitting there recognising that stuckness was coming towards me, I'm thinking, Oh, I see what's going on here. All of these people are stuck. If I stay, I'm going to end up like them. And I literally packed my bags and left the room…*
Juliet: pp. 84-88	*So we split up, I went into survival, keeping things together. But I'd been ready for a shift and a move for a long time. And I had to actually just again, like when I was in my early 20s, just be okay with the compromise.*
Juliet: pp. 95-116	*I'm not the same person I was at any level. So how do I step out of this world? It's almost like the last four years I've been stuck in a … groundhog, groundhog day keeps repeating the same? It's really weird for me, because I think for years and years and years, I got in my car and drove to the same office and basically largely did the same shit all the time, and then worked for me.*

Table 14: Quotes – Four stuckness events in Juliet's life

Critically, it is at this point that the participants' relationship with their context begins to become disconnected.

5.5.5. Confusing identity and performance

As the process continued, the relationships started to suffer even more.

Astrid's story provides clarity on how the relationship between the context and the individual continued. She describes a very difficult three years of stuckness where she was promised a senior role if she completed a number of tasks, including an MBA, performance targets and, less explicitly, shaping an identity that was more in line with the organisation and brand.

Astrid's experience of double bind communication has two aspects to it. Firstly, that senior leadership, in her opinion, never did intend to give her the job and that she was being played to perform and toe the line, and possibly even to act as an alternative candidate to give the impression of a fair race.

The second aspect relates to the feedback she was given by senior leaders (CEO and Board executive). The feedback and tasks allocated to her can be grouped into two: performance requirements and identity requirements. Performance requirements relate to what to accomplish and identity requirements to how to be. Astrid's understanding was that she delivered and often exceeded her performance targets. She noted that identity targets were less easy to specify, and might be understood as a form of discrimination

and thus illegal under South African law. It is thus likely, in her view, that it was for these reasons that leadership focused on performance in feedback, and not identity. Despite this, she felt that it actually was her identity and non-compliance with the CEO and the system that was of the greatest concern to leadership, and the real reason, according to Astrid, that she did not get the job. The analysis section presents some interpretations of how and why Astrid would express her experience in this way.

Quotes include:

Participant	**Quote**
Astrid: pp. 32-34	*I was being kept there by ongoing promises of you're going to be then the next CCC. Oh, you're going to be the CCC next year. Oh, so just be patient and just wait just wait. And then suddenly one day I knew. My boss has been the one that has strung me along…*
Astrid: pp. 131-137	*The worst is that by then I was so pulled in I actually thought I could become that person that would not challenge stuff, the person that will not challenge, the person that will step in line and do what the XXX wants me to do. And it is 100% not me. I think I would have been desperately, desperately unhappy.*
Astrid: pp. 43-45	*And yet, somehow, I was holding out for it. I kept on saying. This is my job. This is what I'm going to get. This is what I deserved. I felt I deserved it.*
Astrid: pp. 57-65	*It was like just don't give up, I just don't give up. I don't know, if I believe in something and if I believe I deserve something I'll stay, and I'll fight through it. But I think what was hard was that on the one hand I believed I deserved that and on the other hand I was, I almost needed it to prove that I was worth it. It was this thing that you allow them to almost emotionally abuse you in the process because you keep on thinking that.*
Astrid: pp. 361-368	*It's a perfect system of abuse? It makes promises to people around. You know when you get to be one of the selected few to take all your money and become a shareholder Yeah you know. That's utopia. But then it happens even more then because you have even less chance to get out and break free and run again.*
Astrid: pp. 184-187	*Yes, it's just always lining up a narrative and he was trying to get that narrative into my head as much as into his own. Almost you know trying to justify what you knew was inevitable and that I just didn't see.*
Astrid: pp. 81-99	*You come back with the action and there's almost no acknowledgment of it. It's almost as if it doesn't count. They say you've got to achieve. This you do. And then life just carries on as if nothing has changed. And the goalposts just kept on moving and I just kept on ticking those boxes one after the other. So, there is this constant play between you deserve it and you don't. You don't really until you've crossed a few more, achieved a few more things.*

Table 15: Quotes – Double-bind communication with Astrid

Nettie, Sandra and Paolo narrated experiences where they believed that they were forced to comply with the executive leaders. Nettie commented, "…this director said if you don't do things the way I want I will just appoint my own HR exec, which he could do, in a real company he could not do that but in our company he can" (pp. 14-17) and that "I have a mandate as long as I do what he wants to do" (p. 71). Sandra noted, "It's a very corrupt business which completely goes against my grain. I am going in there every day doing stuff that I would never do in my personal life" (pp. 629-630). Once again it

is not performance per se that is under discussion but compliance with senior leadership and the system. The reasons why participants chose to continue to stay in these difficult relationships are noted in a later section (5.5.8.2) in the findings and also in the analysis section (6.4.3.2).

Below are examples of bullying, abusive and manipulative communication from bosses.

Participant	**Quote**
Sandra: p. 253	*Let me be the stuck person and maybe just go to work every day and let me be a miserable woman in an environment where men are pigs…*
Nettie: pp. 366-368	*…it was the time when Oscar Pistorius shot his girlfriend* [Oscar defended himself by saying it was friendly fire]. *He said no don't take it personally it's just friendly fire…*
Nettie: pp. 355-366	*And I walked up and I said to my CEO I'm not sitting on that forum – I'm officially over it because he will look at your page report. Turnover down 10% and he will take one little thing and he will focus on the one thing and try to humiliate you in front of the crowd. And I said you know what, PX, you're disrespectful and patronising and I really get furious when we work our butts off at this company because we do. I've never worked as hard in my life. We work our butts off and you can just never appreciate anything. And it's like you come here and you try to humiliate or belittle or whatever and just over it.*
Stephen: pp. 332-334	*…he would manipulate a situation in a way that I consider highly inappropriate and cross the boundaries of questioning my moral values…*
Stephen: pp. 328-331	*There were two parts – there was a bit of I don't need you and to be shouted at, shouting at me in a restaurant right so that, in terms of my DNA makeup I'm not emotional – I consider that a massive boundary, if I raise my voice next to you. So, that is a major aggression for me, related to me, and then he would accuse me of the things that he's actually guilty of.*

Table 16: Quotes – Abusive and manipulative communication with bosses

Nettie, Willem and Paolo spoke of absurdity and meaninglessness in relation to directives from their superiors. Nettie spoke of absurd and contradictory instructions, for example give all staff shares and then the next week all shares are bought back from staff by the organisation. She notes too how the company leadership spoke of their staff as their primary assets, what/who they valued most of all, but at the same time were reluctant to show care. Nettie notes: "Line managers don't care about staff anyway – they don't give a fuck. They don't give a fuck about your career or your life – 90% of them don't – you can send them through how many workshops and work with them a million times for 30 years, it will still be like that, they don't give a fuck" (pp. 782-785).

Three participants indicated that their bosses accused them of "crimes" that in fact they (the bosses) were committing (Nettie, Astrid, Paolo).

Some transcripts (3) suggest that it is at this point that participants started to feel the pain of their stuckness, but this is not clear for all participants.

Despite the pain of the situation, most participants carried on working hard. This was their response to the difficult situation. Astrid, in particular, pushed herself through a global MBA and came out top of her class.

5.5.5.1. Leadership development interventions

It is interesting that the vast majority of participants had a coach and went through an MBA. It was not clear in all cases whether the coach and the MBA were recommended by the organisation as a result of perceived "problems" with the individual or whether the individual decided to take these steps either before the stuckness event or as a way to help themselves through this or another event. The only clear example is that of Astrid, who had to complete an MBA and take on a coach in order to continue to be in the running for the senior role.

5.5.6. Watching others watching

The findings from this stage explore the responses from other people in the organisation, noticing that more relationships were beginning to fall away.

Generally, participants depicted incidences where bosses, peers and other staff were not helpful in the process of stuckness, and might in fact have been politically opportunistic. This behaviour was understood to have been related to the reported competitive culture within the organisations. Participants also explained that others watched and were too scared to stand up for them or believed that they (participants) were at fault. Sandra noted that her colleagues in the organisation had lost themselves and were "bewitched" or "dead", and that this made them unresponsive when she asked for help.

Quotes include:

Participant	**Quote**
Sandra: pp. 574-584	*It's just like she is dead, like a machine, come to work every day and physically she went from a vibrant person to dead. After a few months you could see she had moved on and within herself and you could physically see it in the way she looks and carried herself. By the time I left she was actually looking 15 years older. And she was tired, she walks in, she actually is heavy on her feet, dragging herself. She was very different.*
Sandra: pp. 591-598	*I said how is everyone and how is PPP and he said, PPP has got no emotion and PPP only cares about the money – he shook his head, he said PPP will never leave, it's all about the money. That's why she stays there regardless of what happens to her, it's all about the money. Dead…*
Sandra: pp. 709-713	*And I spoke to PPP and said this is affecting my health and ethically I can't keep coming to work and asking suppliers for money – this is starting to affect me personally – I know she does not care but I had to say it and I said it is affecting me personally and she said nothing. She did not know what to do…*

Astrid: pp. 567-568	*It's quite shocking how long very senior successful people would actually drink that Kool-Aid and pretend it's ok.*
Paolo: pp. 520-526, 535-536	*And that's what I would see around the table with my colleagues is that they wanted to do certain changes and things and never got to it. But they wanted to keep the job because they have family out there and at some point they find it's not easy to jump ship, I think when you're young, you can jump ship and get to a new organisation. But what I found is people with families, people that have never been in the organisation for over a decade become locked in.*
Paolo: pp. 535-537	*They have no ability to see that there are options, believing that there's more pain if they leave, it's easier to carry on.*
Nettie: pp. 643-645	*All of the things that you stood up for, all the fights you fought for people and you were just wiped off the slate.*
Paolo: pp. 294-297	*He manipulates them and none of them can stand up. And anyone that does stand up, he put so much pressure on them that they inevitably leave the organisation and find jobs elsewhere.*

Table 17: Quotes – The role of others

Nettie and Astrid, however, both recorded experiences where their peers came to them and expressed envy at them leaving the system. Nettie explained: "I think there's something in the system because now only do I realise that I'm not the only person feeling like that. And people there are almost like wow you broke free, you got out. How did you do it?" (pp. 327-330).

Lastly, three bosses did assist their staff in working through stuckness. This is explored more fully in the section on the relationship completing or changing (section 6.5.9).

5.5.7. Becoming scapegoated

During this stage of the process, participants experienced a growing separation in their relationship with their organisations and other staff. Descriptions of Nettie, Paolo and Willem's increased alienation from the organisation and its leadership are included in the table below.

Participants noted that both parties were extremely frustrated at this point and expressed this through a variety of behaviours, both passive and active. This included starting to build an incriminating narrative of the other party (Nettie, Astrid, Paolo) matched by an inner parallel world of self-criticism.

In most cases (8), participants started to become identified as the problem in the system, as the scapegoats for a wide range of ills within the organisation. Their performance and ethics were questioned, and others started to move away from them. Participants noted that they lost their reputation for performance and became known increasingly within the system as the cause of trouble, the scapegoat.

Quotes include:

Participant	Quote
Nettie: p. 54	*…and so, it became an issue and eventually he ran his show and I ran my show*
Willem: pp. 1152-1161	*Sometimes I wonder … because I feel I have been made an outsider, but I also have made myself an outsider in a way too, because when my back started playing up I negotiated a thing that I could work from home, but then I kind of pushed it further…*
Astrid: pp. 634-636	*I would say disruptive things just because I wanted to shock them and get them to realise. I started to question their values openly…*
Nettie: p. 224	*…he was saying like he feels like it's impossible to work with me because I just say no to everything.*
Paolo: pp. 28-30	*…there was no way to challenge a group that had an intent to wipe you out.*
Astrid: pp. 184-187	*Yes, it's just always lining up a narrative and he was trying to get that narrative into my head as much as into his own. Almost, you know, trying to justify what you knew was inevitable and that I just didn't see.*

Table 18: Quotes – Increased polarisation

By this time participants had compromised their own inner world, lost their positive working relationship with the organisation, and reported being alienated and isolated from others.

5.5.7.1. Why did they stay?

Participants reported that they stayed in the stuck position for long periods of time. Astrid noted that she stayed for 11 years and Nettie that she stayed for nine. Nettie commented: "And I am absolutely pissed at myself for trying to keep making it right because it's been nine years" (pp. 878-879).

James recorded that if he had not been retrenched, he might have stayed even longer, "I don't know how long I would if I hadn't been retrenched, I don't know how long I would have been there. Yeah. You know, I know in hindsight, I hope not for long because I don't think it would have been good for me" (James: pp. 172-176).

The reasons why participants stayed varied hugely and included staying for the money, status, because they could not find a replacement, to look after others, to get the big job and then change the system, and an inability to conceive of life after this organisation. Astrid described the allure of top management and the system being addictive (like a drug), and Sandra expressed the idea of being bewitched by organisations.

Juliet, exploring her stuckness, noticed that she created a system around the stuckness holding it in place, composed of friends, work and a lifestyle, and it was this that enabled her to stay in her unsatisfying relationship/marriage for 20 years. She also noticed that she had put herself on the side,

and it was this lack of presence in her life that enabled her to stay in the untenable situation. By putting herself on the side, Juliet meant she stopped being herself, feeling as much and it was this that prevented her from changing her situation. Stephen noted that he struggled to be assertive and take control of his life and that this kept the stuck situation in place.

Quotes include:

Participant	**Quote**
Juliet: pp. 231-240	*… in order to stay in the status, you kind of leave your world. Go to the side of it. Does that make sense? And then somehow in the being on the side that enables me to stay there? Yeah.*
Stephen: pp. 91-94	*So, it took me three years to resign because they didn't find a replacement. There wasn't somebody else could take the team of seven or eight people that I led at the time would disappear within the firm.*
James: pp. 223-227	*The team was huge. I mean it was, I mean that the guys were all absolutely incredible. We used to have such fun and we were so good for each other. And so definitely it was the team, it was a huge thing that kept me there.*
James: pp. 211-213	*I think it's part of the ego as well, so they will get fancy titles you know the global this and that and the next thing in there and they travel all over the place.*
Astrid: pp. 244-247	*You know I was in a way also financially worried about whether I was going to survive and be OK. Because you know I look after a lot of people and my family.*
Nettie: pp. 421-423	*Every year I think it's not a good fit for me. It's not a good fit. But over time I earn more money and get more shares.*
Stephen: pp. 173-177	*But I also have resistance to exercising that authority or … and I would rather convince people to do things than tell them how to do it. So, the current actually analysis is actually some of those decisions are just me shying away from just exercising ownership – no authority.*
Astrid: pp. 226-227	*But it's a bit of a drug. It's a bit of a drug. If only I can do better, then I'll be good enough.*
Astrid: pp. 691-695	*They hope that one day they'll be the one person that's chosen for it. It keeps them there, keeps them hooked. And deep down some of them feel, If only I'm in top management I'll be able to change it. I was there, it's just not possible.*
Astrid: pp. 230-236	*I always have to prove that I'm OK. And this place in a way fed that monster. That monster, that exact monster was what's being fed here. And you get drawn in because you just always do more and more and more and try on and on and on. Some was never good enough. And so, I think that is what happened to me was that it … the very thing which is true to my human being.*
Astrid: pp. 690-691	*The allure of being in top management in the organisation keeps them.*
Astrid: pp. 27-29	*And on top of it I had no idea where to go. I had no idea whether there was life after Company*
Sandra: pp. 50-52	*Even though we know at the end of the day it's about the bottom line, we are all intelligent enough to know that but it's almost like we are bewitched.*

Juliet: pp. 218-226	*Yeah, it's amazing… a fucking … created a whole system around it. Friends work a lot of work.*
Paolo: pp. 520-526, 535-536	*And that's what I would see around the table with my colleagues is that they wanted to do certain changes and things and never got to it. But they wanted to keep the job because they have family out there and at some point they find it's not easy to jump ship. I think when you're a young people, you can jump ship and get to a new organisation. But what I found is people with families, people that have been in the organisation for over a decade become locked in.*
James: pp. 118-127	*Because, because I needed the money. The money was good, because to a certain extent it was still part, a lot of the old team, and I had worked with people, I had great relationships. And I know that I'm not a person who likes change. I like sticking to the stuff that I know … I know … I know that. I think for those reasons I stayed. And … and I suppose to a certain extent if I am realistic, I mean, I've probably like the certain extent liked being on a global platform and being recognised for what we've done in South Africa and taking that stuff to other countries and things like so. From an ego point of view, I think I liked that, so there were some things that I liked about it.*

Table 19: Quotes – Why participants stayed

Many participants experienced self-criticism and shame at this stage and responded to this by working harder and/or by having emotional outbursts (Nettie, Astrid and Paolo).

Nettie noticed the absurdity in the system, and the way in which decisions were made only to be revoked. She started to focus on double standards and liberties taken by senior leadership, as did Sandra. Astrid started wondering whether the senior role she had been promised offered her a meaningful life. James noticed that he had become a cog in a machine and that his work lacked meaning despite his overseas trips and excellent pay check. Willem became disillusioned and worked from home most of the time. Stephen ruminated over actions that could be taken but did not take them.

5.5.8. Completing or transforming the process

This is the last stage in the cycle of stuckness, the point at which the relationship completes or transforms. Once this stage is complete the participant re-enters the cycle either within their existing organisation or begins a new cycle with another organisation.

5.5.8.1. Role of the individual

The table below describes how the relationship ended between the 10 participants and their organisation/context. Please note that for some participants there are more than one ending included in the table below, because their transcripts recorded more than one stuckness event. It is interesting to note that leadership or organisational responses to resolve the situation accounted for 5 of the 13 events involving corporates. In most instances it was the participant who left.

Participants	Endings	Participants	Endings
Nettie	• Dismissed for fraud	**Astrid**	• Headhunted
Paolo	• Resigned with no job to go to	**Stephen**	• Fought the battle, won, and stayed in the role
Archie	• Resigned (twice) • Started own business	**Richard**	• Supported by boss to move jobs
Sandra	• Supported by her boss to stay and resolve the issue • Resigned with no job to go to • Resigned with a job to go to	**James**	• Retrenched
Juliet	• Left the situation • Stayed and adjusted over time (2 events) • Resigned with no job to go to	**Willem**	• Pushed by boss to resolve things • Resigned with no job to go to • Died – possible suicide

Table 20: Quotes – Reasons for leaving

As noted earlier, three participants did receive assistance from their bosses: one was assisted in overcoming her alcohol addiction (Sandra), one pushed to achieve more for themselves (Willem) and one participant had leadership support in changing jobs when they experienced stuckness (Richard).

Quotes include:

Participant	Quote
Sandra: pp. 430-439	*So, she came and she's supported me. But she made it tough – she made me sign this letter – she can be very very gentle and caring but she can be completely transactional. You know, she came in and said I have given you a chance – deliver. This is what you have to do – she made me sign this letter – she even said that if I hear you have not been to meetings you will get fired. And I signed it and it was not through fear. I just knew that it would be ok. And she actually took me under a wing and guided me to see something new. I'm going to show you who you are. She was a great part of my life.*
Willem: pp. 639-641	*I had a similar struggle in old job, and I had a boss that realised that there was a me that actually can do it and he pushed me a lot. And he pushed me a lot and really drove me.*

Table 21: Quotes – Helpful bosses

5.5.8.2. Role of and impact on the organisation

The stuck situation and the departure of the individual was generally perceived by the reporting participants as negatively affecting the organisational culture. Work became secondary as the individual and to some extent those around them became embroiled in politics or tried to avoid becoming embroiled in politics.

Nettie narrated how the experience of stuckness affected her performance, in particular, that she focused on playing politics and not performing. She spoke of "fighting for the passage talkers" (204-206) instead of for herself. She also noticed that others found her difficult to work with and how the conflict between

her and the CEO created and/or amplified silos within the organisation as departments aligned themselves along this divide.

James noted that his team "used to cause a lot of trouble, we used to stand up for things because we've been used to it … we couldn't give a damn what policy you have" (pp. 137-142). He also noticed how those that stayed within the organisation "don't have a team anymore – they feel as though they are individuals in a big corporate environment, because they can't make their own decisions, they don't have that team anymore" (James: pp. 234-237).

Quotes include:

Participant	**Quote**
Nettie: pp. 204-212	*But I think in HR it's easy to fall into that trap, to fight the good fight for the passage talkers who don't do anything and because they know how you feel because I am an Enneagram XXX and I am vocal and I don't try to hide my body language and everybody knew about the conflict, obviously everybody comes to say fuck I can't believe that etc. etc. etc. I will never fall into that trap again. They rev you up. Yes and get me more convinced to fight for it because not only is it not good for the business – it's not good for my own credibility and the credibility of my team or for the business and so it becomes bigger and bigger in your mind…*
Nettie: pp. 84-87	*Absolutely. And it means you start to focus so much energy on the wrong stuff, all this little crap conflict politics instead of the stuff that will take the business forward…*
Nettie: pp. 734-735	*An absolute sick system and there are so many good people there and they are all going to leave.*
Astrid: p. 41	*It became a hostile place too.*

Table 22: Quotes – Impact on the organisation

5.5.9. Returning and integrating

As mentioned above, there were three instances where the interviewee stayed in the organisation but in a changed role, one that offered more potential and less stuckness. This moved these individuals back into the cycle again. For these two people, time spent at this stage was limited as they moved swiftly into a new role.

The time spent in this stage for others was longer, ranging from a month (Astrid) to a more long-term state of considering when to re-enter the system, as experienced by Juliet (over three years). During this stage, Juliet focused on her children and building a new partnership, uncertain whether she would re-enter the corporate system again and if she would, in what form. This was a process of integrating her experience and exploring what it was that she really wanted from life. The person that remained after this experience was very different from her earlier self.

This stage in the cycle can often be a positive experience, as in the case of Astrid, Stephen, James, Archie and Michele. However, this is not always the case, as with Nettie, who felt lost and full of regrets. This is the time at which one makes sense of what has happened, evaluates the impact on one's life, and decides how to go forward. It may also include bringing in old identities that have been ignored and foregrounding these as options for the future. For example, Nettie notes that she was considering going into the picking business (antiques and restoration) and was considering opening a shop.

Additional illustrative comments include:

Participant	Quote
Nettie: pp. 769-772	*But I like the picking business. I like buying old and restoring and selling. I already spoke to the guy and he said I could stock his stuff because there is no one there stocking his stuff.*
Nettie: pp. 780-781	*I've lost so much in nine years. I became this fucking HR EXEC where I had to run all this operational crap of which 30% adds value.*
Juliet: pp. 128-132	*I just think I'm going to be a very different person when I step back into the world. In fact, I have my doubts about that. And I'm wondering what tension that would create if I go back to my old tough corporate world?*

Table 23: Quotes – Coming back to me

This is the stage at which participants recover from the difficulties of being stuck, bring back parts of themselves that have been lost, explore what is meaningful to them, and revitalise or build new relationships and consider how they want to go forward.

5.5.10. Conclusion: The process of stuckness

The participants entered into the relationship voluntarily and for many with a sense that they might not be good enough or fit in completely. They understood that they would have to make compromises in how they were in the world in order to fit in, and they considered this a normal part of being socialised into an organisation.

In the case of some participants, this adaptation was fairly extreme, with them feeling that they had to suppress aspects of themselves and, in one case, their partner, including their gender, race and rural origins. This adaptation was fuelled by a sense of being inferior or not being connected to feelings which may have enabled more of a return to self. Paulo was able to be in the system in a less moderated way because he had very specific and measurable utility as well as the protection of the chairman.

Participants adapted their identity to the organisation because they saw financial, status and developmental benefits to being in a productive relationship with the organisation. Implicit is the belief that they could not be in this productive relationship without adapting themselves more fully to the

identity and behavioural needs of the organisation. This was the moment in which they narrowed their identity to meet the requirements of the context.

As described by participants, once bonded, the relationship between the individual and organisation tended to render many successful outcomes. Broadly, participants provided utility through their performance and in most cases kept their individuality in check. For the participants in the study, this lasted from between a year and nine years. For some, such as Astrid, this experience was marred by the sense that there was a continuing demand from the organisation to adapt herself towards the organisational identity.

Some of the participants spoke to a change in the external context that was not matched by a change in the identity of the participant as the starting point of the stuckness event. For Nettie and Astrid, however, they indicated that the perceived demands for identity shifts occurred earlier and thus the process of stuckness was experienced as starting earlier. Juliet spoke of an inner identity shift that was not matched by an outer shift. In her case, the non-adaptable external context was undermining her capacity to express herself fully in the world and this resulted in an experience of stuckness.

The identity shift meant that the pair (participant and context) no longer dovetailed each other, and that an adjustment would be necessary for the relationship to continue to produce utility both in terms of performance and in terms of broader existential needs for living life in a meaningful and related way.

The participants presented the organisational culture and leadership at this stage in the process as political, with double-bind communication, manipulative, abusive and absurd directives that resulted in panic and confusion in themselves and others. Nine participants described the environment as hostile and unsupportive. Participants noticed that their relationship with the organisation had begun to become troubled.

At this stage there was some confusion about the nature of the relationship problem. The interviewees understood that some adjustment was required from them but were not always sure whether this was a performance or identity adjustment. Because the requirement to fit in, be more like the rest of the organisation, could be considered illegal, most identity change requirements were expressed by organisational representatives as performance requirements. Leadership development initiatives, often focused on enhancing performance, were also enrolled at some point, further increasing the confusion about where “improvements” were considered desirable and necessary by the organisation. The interviewees’ response to the situation, as articulated by the interviewees themselves, was to continue working hard or work harder. It was interesting to note how the participants described themselves as victims of a bad and demanding organisation, working harder and harder to please the insatiable organisation.

Although performance was identified by organisations/ more senior leaders as being the problem, it was in many cases actually identity issues that were problematic for the organisation (according to the participants). Because the wrong issue was identified as needing remedying, there was little that the individual could do about changing the organisation's and leadership's view of their performance. This perfectly lined up the individuals for scapegoating, as we see occurring in the next part of the process.

Other staff, leaders and in some cases participants' bosses watched what was happening in the relationship between the individual and the organisation. Few participants experienced support from others during this time, because as the interviewees noted, others were too fearful of becoming tarnished by the conflict or were politically opportunistic. There were, however, three bosses mentioned who did assist their staff. It was at this stage that participants started to experience more fully a dislocate in their relationships with their colleagues.

The participants stayed for a long time after they realised that they had become stuck and the situation became painful (up till 11 years). The reported reasons why people stayed related to money, the need to prove themselves, no-where to go to, and being bewitched or drugged by corporates. The psychological processes of being alienated from oneself and not having full access to one's feelings also helped to keep people in these stuck positions.

According to the participants, as the stuckness set in and relationships between the two parties became more polarised, the participants began to be identified by leaders and colleagues as the scapegoat, becoming isolated and in some cases vilified. Those around them were opportunistic, fearful of the consequences of standing up for the scapegoated individual or believing that the individual was at fault and thus deserving of the treatment they received. To exacerbate this loss of relationship within the organisation, there was a growing sense of meaninglessness in work and a growing awareness of the absurdity of the activities of the organisation.

The findings suggest that in most cases it was the stuck individual that ended the relationship. In three examples a boss had supported the process out of stuckness and in two the organisation had actively, and using legal means, removed the individual.

After the participant left, the organisation continued to operate but according to the interviewees there were scars left on the culture. These included an increase in politics, amplified work silos, and a loss of team culture, all of which were considered by the interviewees to affect performance negatively.

5.6. The experience of stuckness

This was not a phenomenological project in terms of objectives and methodology, and thus there is less detail pertaining to this than one might expect in such a project.

It is difficult to be specific about what participants experienced at each stage of the process because participants tended not to be clear about this. The variety and overlapping nature of feelings experienced during stuckness make it difficult to organise the data neatly. To resolve this problem, I have tried to broadly organise the data within Van Deurzen's four worlds (2015). I note that I have tried to broadly organise the data, because it is not always clear as to where to allocate certain experiences; for example, boredom and bewitchment, experiences that could be understood as both a psychological and a spiritual experience.

5.6.1. Physical dimension (Umwelt)

Sandra noted how the experience was negatively affecting her health and Nettie commented: "I nearly had a stroke at work, my hand went like this (shaking) for four weeks" (84). Sandra also noted how people appeared dead, with stooped backs and dragging their legs. Absolute exhaustion was how Juliet described her experience of stuckness.

For Sandra, stuckness was a process of continually moving from one job in one business to another.

5.6.2. Social dimension (*Mitwelt*)

The participants felt a growing sense of isolation and disconnection from their peer groups as the process of stuckness took place.

Astrid noticed how angry she became at others, particularly strangers. At work she felt under pressure to behave as if everything was normal, because if she did behave in a coherent way (for example angry), this would have been used as evidence for her unsuitability as a leader. This was a source of frustration and anger for her. She experienced a sense of social shame as many people in the organisation knew she had been in the running for the big role for years, and thus often asked her how it was that she did not yet have the role.

Astrid, Nettie, Paolo, Sandra and Willem felt disrespected, bullied and angry. Paolo, in particular, felt targeted by his leader and peers and that they wanted to get rid of him. He felt scapegoated and targeted. Many of the participants spoke of feeling isolated from others, although in the case of Willem it was an isolation that was comforting and not threatening as was the case with the others.

Nettie spoke of passive-aggressive behaviour in supporting those who were fighting her "enemy", the CEO.

Those participants who reported battling with their autocratic leaders experienced the sense that the leaders believed that they had no right to act in an autonomous way (5).

5.6.3. Psychological dimension (Eigenwelt)

Astrid spoke of self-destructive feelings, self-criticism, shame, anger, and resentfulness. She noted that the process made her feel unworthy and less than others. This relates to her sense of shame for not winning the leadership race because the implication was that she was not worthy of the role. She also noted that she was fungible, replaceable in the leadership race that the organisation had constructed. This was an experience for others too, for example James and Paolo.

A number of participants spoke of feelings of depression and anxiety (Astrid, Nettie, Juliet, Willem and Stephen). Juliet reported being disconnected from her feelings and herself. Sandra felt bewitched and Astrid drugged by corporates.

Nettie, Paolo and Astrid noted that they felt side-lined, isolated, ignored and identified as the difficult person in the system. Willem isolated himself in his flat, comforted by his isolation rather than victimised by it as was the experience of other participants.

Nettie and Astrid, in particular, experienced guilt for having reduced their lives to the current situation and for not having taken responsibility for reading the signs and moving sooner. Both experienced a sense of disbelief that they had allowed this to happen to them.

5.6.4. Spiritual dimension (Überwelt)

Sandra speaks of people being bewitched by the corporate system or dead in it. This refers to the experience of having one's mind controlled by another or deadened in some way. In both instances she referred to a loss of self-authoring and a diminishing of an independent inner life.

Many participants experienced a sense of destroying themselves – both Nettie and Astrid commented that the situation was "soul-destroying" (Nettie: p. 36, Astrid: p. 600). Nettie, Paolo, Astrid and Stephen felt that their integrity was questioned by senior leaders and began to do this to themselves. Willem explained that he became depressed and this felt as if he was entering the void. "All of this stuff in the last few years has come out from that need to fill that void" (pp. 30-31). He commented as well that he felt suicidal.[14]

James experienced a loss of passion for his work, feeling like a "cog in a wheel" (p. 267) rather than a person delivering human value. Linked to this is Juliet's experience of putting oneself on the side.

[14] Willem died before this research was submitted. There were many circumstances around his death that pointed to suicide although cause of death was determined to be COVID related. He was a very unhealthy man of about 250 kg who appeared to have deliberately exposed himself to COVID infection.

Nettie, Willem, Richard, James and Astrid noticed a loss of meaning in their work. They lost the sense that their work had significance and value in the world either to themselves or to others. Their experience was one of meaningless absurdity.

Willem spoke of a sense of boredom, "boredom, constant boredom or something … well it's just not being pleased with what you have or peace with where you are in your life or what is it exactly (pp. 158-160). Richard reiterated this experience of boredom. Both inferred a sense of being stuck in recurring and unending boredom and a longing for something more.

Additional quotes include:

Participant	**Quote**
Astrid: pp. 599-606	*So, I was self-destructive, and it was never going to be good for me in the long run. I was angry and I was resentful and how many in the last two three months mornings I woke up thinking, I can't get out of bed, I can't go to work, I don't wanna go there. Driving there I was so angry at every poor person that was just driving slower than on 140 kph or doing anything stupid. How many times I caught myself screaming at people while I was in the car.*
Astrid: pp. 615-618	*It was horrible. And it was because you needed to keep your poise there all the time. You couldn't show how hurt you were or how bad it was. And it just played out in uncharacteristic ways.*
Astrid: p. 408	*… process of almost self-destruction*
Sandra: p. 709	*And I spoke to PPP and said this is affecting my health*
Nettie: pp. 33-35	*And really if you just want me to do what you want me to do, find somebody else to do it because that is not meaningful work for me.*
Nettie: pp. 33-35	*You start to question your integrity*
Nettie: p. 85	*I feel like I have regressed and let myself down.*
Juliet: pp. 819-822	*So Yeah, fatigue is insane. I haven't experienced this in many years, like a falling asleep at my desk. I have to stand up and work and working twice as slow as my normal…*
Juliet: pp. 231-240	*When you get stuck in order to stay in the status, you kind of leave your world? Go to the side of it. Does that make sense? And then somehow in the being on the side that enables you to stay there? Yeah.*
James: pp. 91-96	*The passion wasn't there, and the sense of ownership wasn't there, you became just a cog in the wheel – you were not master of your destiny.*
Willem: pp. 992-1000	*I mean, that was the ultimate thing, I suppose it was ultimately … it's not the hurt that creates the stuckness. … the hurt creates the anger, the inability to take the step because you are too worried about that. The hurt and the other side – once you take the lead. I equate safety with the dullness. Oh, yeah itts safe but it's not exciting…it leaves a lot of space for you to enter the void. Yeah, a bit of a conundrum what a quagmire – Jesus*
Willem: pp. 289-294	*I was kind of shake shook and basically shaken into a point of like two years ago I had to go to therapy because I kind of had a little bit of an almost suicidal kind of streak thing. But it was also very much driven … it was moving to DM job, a lot of it came back to identity, you know, my identity was stuck in my old job,*

Table 24: Quotes – The experience of stuckness

5.6.5. Conclusion: The experience of stuckness

Stuckness tends to be experienced when the situation becomes painful and this pain highlights the stuckness situation in a pronounced way. There are impacts across all four worlds, including health problems; a sense of being dehumanised, depressed, even suicidal; an experience of having one's soul destroyed; and losing meaning are just some more existential examples of what it feels like to experience stuckness.

5.7. The value of stuckness

Broadly, participants found the experience unpleasant when they noticed their stuckness more fully. These included a reduction in performance, a loss of self-esteem, a sense of unhappiness and meaninglessness, a sense of disconnecting from oneself, and a waste of time. Nettie and Astrid also commented on the negative impact on their partners and families.

However, many participants did notice positive impacts later, after the event. These ranged from learning one's own attachment patterns, learning to trust oneself more actively, learning to fight for oneself, maintaining perspective, and ensuring that one takes responsibility for one's own life. Juliet noticed feeling her feelings more fully, and that following these more actively could be useful in ensuring that she made more satisfying choices for herself. James noted that he was able to survive financially as a result of staying in the stuck situation.

Quotes include

Participant	**Quote**
Richard: pp. 128-134	*I think I did a bad job; I just found it incredibly boring and unstimulating. So that was quite a miserable time for me.*
Sandra: pp. 855-857	*I was brought up in an abusive relationship – it was what was normal for me. I did not know how to be a different person, and to a point in my career I let that happen there as well. I just knew how to be that.*
Astrid: pp. 238-243	*I think that's what happened to disconnect me. I mean I think the last six or seven months I was so disillusioned that I became so angry. And that scared me too because of the sudden disconnect which I think happened for my own survival. It was so severe that it turned me to someone that I was not.*
Nettie: pp. 84-87	*…. absolutely. And it means you start to focus so much energy on the wrong stuff, all this little crap conflict politics instead of the stuff that will take the business forward,*
Richard: pp. 95-105	He provided a long description of the learning that when one works incredibly hard and is only focused on work, you lose the broader perspective and focus on small events and daily survival instead of taking a more strategic perspective.
Astrid: pp. 404-421	*I mean I think I've learned a lot about myself in that process of almost self-destruction for the sake of getting something. I'm far more capable now of drawing the line on what's good for me and what's not good for me. What's bad for me now? I mean I got all drawn into working 18 hours a day, no exercise and bad eating and no sleep. And when I realised that I was on this path of self-destruction I could draw the line and say sorry. I want to be here for a long time. I know I*

	won't be able to survive this. So, I've got to make some transformations and I made them, and I did that drastically. And it was okay. So, I think it has … it's taught me that point of tolerance because I've promised myself I will never ever ever go there again for no company for no money for nothing. And so that taught me something about me.
Astrid: pp. 238-243	*I think that's what happened to disconnect me. I mean I think the last six or seven months I was so disillusioned that I became so angry. And that scared me too because of the sudden disconnect which I think happened for my own survival. It was so severe that it turned me to someone that I was not.*
Sandra: p. 206	*It's almost like my eyes opened and I actually quite liked me. That's what happened.*
Stephen: p. 385	*The journey for me was I decided to trust my intuition.*
Juliet: pp. 698-70	*I'm not sure. But I do think one of the tipping points is feelings. Because if you … if you … if you stay with your own feelings, they might lead you somewhere. But instead, you move to other people's feelings. And look after them. In that same way, potentially, as a child does that.*
Juliet: pp. 286-289	*You know, I think for a lot of my career feelings didn't enter into the equation at all. In fact, I was perfect for that environment, for their corporate environment.*
Stephen: pp. 837-839, 843-845	*I need to rebuild my next freedoms … you make a choice and then get constrained and then make another choice and get constrained so stepping out …* [is necessary]

Table 25: Quotes – The value of stuckness

The last comment by Stephen speaks to the cycle of fluidity and stuckness, that the cycle is continuous, and that one must continually step into taking responsibility for oneself, and that in some sense stuckness is an invitation to become more self-authoring.

5.7.1. Conclusion: The value of stuckness

There were significant negative impacts of getting stuck, as reported by participants. These included a reduction in performance, a sense of separating from oneself, a loss of self-esteem, and a waste of time.

Participants did, however, report that there was significant value in getting stuck, mainly in relation to getting in touch with their inner lives as a rudder for guiding their lives. This included reviewing their patterns of relationship and deciding to make a change, standing up for themselves more and not displacing their anger by fighting for others. There is a strong sense within the transcripts that stuckness is a call to self-authoring and living a more meaningful and satisfying life.

5.8. Recommendations for working with stuckness

Although recommendations are usually placed after the analysis section, I have included these here as they form part of the findings. These are explored more fully in the section on recommendations at the end of this document (section 8).

Participants offered advice on working with stuckness. These related to building and appreciating our inner lives, and ensuring that the corporate context valued staff as individuals and valued difference.

Quotes include:

Participant	***Quote***
Juliet: pp. 698-699	*I'm not sure. But I do think one of the tipping points is feelings. Because if you … if you … if you stay with your own feelings, they might lead you somewhere.*
Astrid: pp. 609-611	*Working with people where I have a voice that is valued is where I have stayed in my jobs longer.*
Astrid: pp. 713-715	*I think it's all about who leads and whether whoever leads creates that space for people to truly be able to challenge and have opinions and be themselves. When organisations want you for who you are, and they prevent you from being that person because it's too much of a threat or it's too hard to whatever … I mean that is just bad.*
Paolo: pp. 537-552	*But if you say what kills organisations, it's the people in positions of power and the board of a company needs to ensure that they are connected with each of the levels within the organisation, that the CEO is not the single individual that decides and runs the show. Because his rule and decision making, knows his style of management and decision making could be flawed. Which means that you don't have a sustainable firm and sustainable sustainability is what it's all about. In other words, will the firm still be there in 20 or 30 years? And how do you protect jobs, because your time short? You know, in my domain, I probably had, let's say, direct maybe 15,000 people, and indirect contracted with maybe another five to 8000 people, you know, that are dependent on the system that keeps on going. And then of course, company itself had 150,000 people. So when you say, yeah, how do you protect jobs out there? You know, as a manager, how do you take the responsibility? Some people can take it lightly. It's about me rather than, you know, a system called the firm.*

Table 26: Quotes – Recommendations for supporting leadership fluidity

5.8.1. Conclusion: Recommendations for working with stuckness

An important finding early on in this research is that stuckness is a normal process that happens to everyone and is part of being human. This has implications for how one works with this phenomenon and this is dealt with more fully in the section on recommendations (section 8). Other recommendations from participants related to letting people express who they are, allowing differences of opinion to co-exist in organisations and supporting leaders to support others who are stuck.

5.9. An existential definition of leadership stuckness

Participants provided many definitions of stuckness, including an inability to have traction in achieving what you want to achieve, despite trying very hard. Some participants mentioned not growing or learning and an inability to change one's negative behaviours despite trying very hard as definitions of stuckness. For others, stuckness meant a harking back to and longing for a previous context that has departed and, of continuing to operate as if one is still in the old context. One participant mentioned the

loss of meaning as a definition of stuckness. It is interesting that the experiences generally speak of being stuck in one place. However, the last experience, as noted by Sandra, is that of continually moving on, which is also an experience of stuckness.

Selective quotes include:

Participant	**Quote**
Astrid: pp. 20-23	*This is my definition of stuck. I felt stuck when I was in this financially as well as lifestyle very comfortable space. I felt stuck because I wasn't growing. I wasn't learning. I wasn't challenged. And I needed that.*
Archie; pp. 28, 67-70	*Stuck means I'm not involved. I need to control and when I don't and that pisses me off. I need to have control. But yeah, because if I put my energy and effort in there, I need to have the ability to press the button and pull the lever otherwise, I'm just wasting my time I may as well be a sheep, sitting in the field somewhere.*
James: pp. 367-380	*I think insecurity drives a lot of this behaviour, this very bad behaviour in a corporate environment because people get so kind of tied into their role and invested in reporting to a level one manager or whatever, it is that they lose – they stop really working on their own, up their ability to create value in corporate*
Nettie: pp. 416-417	*What drives me so nuts is part of my stuckness is I know my own patterns but can I just fucking can get over it. Break it. I know that is virtually possible.*
Richard: pp. 202-205	*It was a team stuckness as well. It was really if you speak to any of the guys who… A couple of the guys are still there, you speak to them and ask, So how's it going, they say it's not like the old days, the fun we used to have but some of them are still there…*
Sandra: pp. 27-29	*Yes, I have chosen to keep moving because I have not found a fit because I just haven't found a fit. That's because I keep going to work for people that are stuck.*

Table 27: Quotes – Definition of stuckness

5.9.1. Conclusion: An existential definition of stuckness

In summary, the definitions of stuckness provided by the participating leaders focused on not having growth, traction in the world, control of the world, harking back to a more positive past and repeating old patterns. One participant noticed that stuckness for her was moving on continually, rather than staying to face and resolve issues.

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The objectives for this chapter are to integrate the reflexivity learning and the literature review with the findings and to provide a substantive theory on the process of stuckness as well as an existential definition of stuckness. Alongside this, I provide some insight into the gaps in the literature as identified in the literature review, including:

- Understanding more about the role of context in stuckness
- Understanding why leaders stayed
- Understanding the experience and value of stuckness for leaders
- Understanding the types of stuckness events

6.1. A methodological reminder

Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) notes that data is co-created in the interview, both by the participant and by the researcher. The knowledge emerging from this analysis is generated through an iterative relationship between the literature review, the data, and the researcher. This was further triangulated through discussions with my peers and supervisors. However, even with this triangulation, it is the researcher that is the sieve through which the literature and data is processed, and it is the researcher who chooses to foreground or fade specific aspects of this. These decisions are informed by their background, personality and experience in the world as organised and understood through the reflexivity processes (Ramalho et al*.,* 2015).

As noted earlier in section 4.3.3.1, this research has followed the hermeneutic approach of suspicion and as such seeks to unearth further meaning that resides outside the words. Within this view is an assumption that interviewees – and interviewers as well – may seek to express the data in specific ways and this will have an influence on what emerges. Participants may seek to please the researcher or represent themselves as less at fault. It is also possible that interviewees may also exaggerate the toughness and unfairness of the context in which they became stuck (Charmaz, 2006).

To ensure that the research has rigour, I have followed the processes for managing validity and reliability of the research (section 4.35). This includes triangulation, prolonged engagement, the provision of a dense description of methodology and extensive reflexivity processes.

6.2. The participants

The aim of this section is to understand what the participants brought into their relationship with the corporate entity, including more senior leaders.

Below, I describe particular qualities relating to the group of senior executives interviewed as described by themselves. These qualities have been identified as important in understanding the process of stuckness based on the literature review, my reflexivity processes, and the findings themselves. These qualities are also more common amidst the sample group. This prevalence of common traits is discussed in the sections below.

6.2.1. Doing to be loved

Many interviewees had difficult and demanding mothers/female caregivers where love was provided only when performance was delivered. Although one cannot attribute attachment patterns without an assessment, it is useful to consider the notion that most of the participants are likely to have conditional attachment patterns. This is where childhood socialisation creates the relationship recipe of needing to deliver something performative in order to receive love. The data suggests this in two ways: firstly, by the descriptions from some participants of their childhoods, and secondly that most displayed the typical patterns of behaviour and personality characteristics associated with conditional attachment patterns. This includes a significant focus on control, performance and autonomy, a rational and intellectual way of making sense of the world, less comfort in expressing emotions, and a stoic approach to life (Hinojosa et al., 2014). With this attachment pattern, it is not enough to just be, one has to deliver in the required way, and one gets used to adapting one's performance to meet the needs of others.

It is possible that these attachment patterns led for some to existential and episodal shame and the need to prove themselves (April and Mooketsi, 2010). Bedrick (2020) notes that shame causes us to lose trust in ourselves, seek direction from outside, see ourselves as to blame and as a result easily carry the projections of not good enough and failure from others. It is likely that it is this demanding and self-critical relationship that some of the participants had with themselves that led them to keep trying even though the context made performance impossible.

The backgrounds of participants suggest the presence of the mechanism of objectification where the child is required to present a tailored version of themselves in order to be loved. As such the child becomes to some extent an object of performance (Sartre, 1943/2003, Fanon1986). Alongside this too is the sense of shame when they are unable to live up to this essentialised version of themselves.

6.2.2. Being the outsider

Five participants told stories of being the outsider as a child. These related to their demographics (ethnicity, race, language), their socio-economic status, their parents, their success, and their outspoken way of interacting with the world. Being an outsider is another mechanism that can create of stuckness because one is led to want to lose part of oneself in order to fit in and because the feeling of being lesser than may create behaviours that may not serve the person (van Duerzen, 2015).

This experience continued into the organisation in which they became stuck. They noted that they came from less affluent backgrounds than the people in the organisations that they worked in, were a different skin colour, spoke a different language at home, or were too outspoken. As Van Deurzen notes, this can put pressure on people to conform and try to fit in by adjusting themselves, which is what the interviewees in this research did (Van Deurzen, 2015).

6.2.3. Trained to be the successful executive object

The participants were either at the peak of their career or towards/at the end of it. All had had many years in the corporate context where they would have been trained and rewarded to deliver utility to the CEO and shareholders. Several of the interviewees indicated that they had achieved this form of success. The identities described in the interviews were of strong, conformist, rational and competent people. If Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger were to reflect on this presentation of the participants they would be likely to suggest that they existed within the world of the crowd, herd or Das Man (Van Deurzen, 2009).

It could also be argued that the identity presented by the participants was an essentialised identity constellated around success and competency and excluding aspects of identity that did not fit within this required presentation (Sartre, 1943/2003; Biko, 1978/2004; Fanon, 1986; Heil, 2011). It is also useful to note that most participants had completed an MBA and had a coach. The literature review suggests that many MBAs and some coaches may encourage leaders to think of themselves as objects of utility, focusing on their performance and not their inner worlds (Lodwick, 2015).

It is clear from the interviews that participants saw themselves as successful executives with significant experience in leadership. This may have been a function of the co-creation of data in the interview but there is still sufficient evidence in the findings to point to a predisposition to the objectification of oneself as a successful executive. This is an example of mineralisation as per Van Deurzen (2009).

6.2.4. Performance prioritised over relationship

The research did not collect data on the nature of interviewees' relationships outside the corporate context but it is clear that those they experienced within the corporate context were often utilitarian and superficial in nature. It is also reasonable to argue that these success-orientated senior executives may have placed less priority on relationships both in terms of time and in terms of energy. It is possible, therefore, that the most energy and time-consuming relationships these individuals had were with the organisation in which they worked. This seems even more likely when one examines the participants childhoods of doing to be loved.

This lack of relationship support may also have contributed to the participants' dependence on the organisation and their career as a source of self-esteem and self-respect and increased the sense of shame if they "failed" or did not fit in as required.

6.2.5. Capitalist forms of meaning making

With reference to meaning-making capacity, it is reasonable to assume that these leaders focused on materialist, hedonist, and self-orientated versions of meaning. The drive to self-actualise and achieve in the world was a particular focus for these leaders and this would lead them to prioritise this form of meaning above most others (Vos, 2020). It is useful to note that this form of meaning making has an impact on our mental health and can result in existential crises, the internalisation of blame, a sense of helplessness, fatalism, depression, and anxiety (Vos, 2020). This is exactly what the participants experienced (described in experience of stuckness, section 5.6).

6.2.6. Conclusion: Primed for stuckness

This analysis suggests that the represented leaders were primed by their education, background, attachment patterns, conformism, outsider status, and experience in organisations to essentialise and objectify themselves into the successful executive. This tendency is likely to have been exacerbated by the kind of meaning sought by the leaders, their childhoods and relationship patterns, sense of shame, and a sense of needing to prove themselves to others at the expense of their own inner worlds.

The commonalties between participants are in fact fairly startling, for example their relationships with their mothers/female caregivers and their predisposition to seeing themselves as the good person. It is possible that this is a function of the co-creation of data or their desire to position themselves as the good person or the victim of the situation. If being a good person and a victim underpins their narrative, it may be an attempt to locate the blame for their stuckness in the organisational context. This strategy would limit their own responsibility for the relationship break-down and allow them to retain the binary identities of being good and a victim of a bad organisation. These binary identities are a form of essentialisation and bad faith and as such would probably be a causal factor in their stuckness. This is also an example of splitting as per Spinelli's description (2005) (see section 2.3.1.9).

6.3. The context

As noted earlier (section 1.2.1), this research views stuckness as a relationship and thus the research needs to cover the others in the context as they form the other half of the stuck relationship.

The system of business in this research includes the broader ideological system in which businesses operate, and the organisations themselves, including the shareholders, board, executives, and staff. It is thus appropriate to begin this analysis with the broader neoliberal milieu for this research.

6.3.1. Humans as assets or tools or objects

Neoliberal sense-making is a way of understanding the world based on the view of humans as vehicles of utility, as tools/assets or objects and as a result it tends to discount the value of inner worlds. Individuals are encouraged to take personal responsibility for faults of the system and this enables the system's longer-term sustainability in its current form (Wilson, 2018).

This same attitude is expressed through shareholder and board structures in the described organisations where the participants provided utility by creating shareholder value/wealth. Here leaders are fungible, and vulnerable to bullying as a result. This vulnerability is further amplified by the idea that the corporate context is the perceived best place to earn a living and get ahead. The system appears to offer freedom to the leaders but actually offers chains (Wilson, 2018; Vos, 2020).

The findings suggest that the above conditions were in place in the contexts described by the individuals. They spoke of the need to perform and to fit in, identity-wise, to narrow down their idiosyncratic natures and present an identity that was in line with the corporate brand and way of being.

6.3.2. Bullying and shaming cultures and leadership

The broader impression from the interviews of cultures and leadership in these organisations is that of stuckness characterised by sedimented ways of leading, cronyism and bullying (section 3.3.3.5). The requirement to fit in and comply with more senior leaders is prioritised above all else, apparently even profit. This is supported by De Haan (2016), who suggests that the need to fit in and comply with Board/CEO/executive leaders increases, the more senior one becomes.

CEOs and bosses were inclined to blame and shame the leaders below them when they behaved autonomously or when a scapegoat was needed (Boeker, 1992). Individuals were made to feel responsible for failures that were caused by the system and more senior leadership in that system. Some CEOs were described as blaming others for their own failures, an example of projective identification of the unwanted self, and of scapegoating (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012). It is possible, even likely, given the descriptions of bullying in the organisations explored, that there was a level of corporate psychopathy in play. This would support the interviewee leaders' experiences of being bullied, and not being heard or valued for their humanity (Boddy, 2011).

Women, who by their very gender tend not to fit the masculinised versions of leadership identity in South African organisations, would be likely to feel this pressure more acutely (April and Mooketsi, 2010). The four women in the study felt prejudiced and "outsidered" against because of their gender.

The culture appeared to be toxic and stuck (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012).

As noted in the section on the participants (section 6.2), the interviewees tended to present themselves as the good ones and victims in this situation. This could orientate them towards describing the system as more negative than it possibly was. It is however notable that South Africa has very high rates of workplace bullying (75% of people have experienced it – Workplace Strategies for Mental Health, 2020), suggesting that even if their account was negatively orientated, there is likely to be some element of truth to it.

Overall, this suggests a context where senior leaders are prompted to narrow themselves down into a palatable version of themselves to get ahead. This was a process where the gaze and the internalised gaze (Sartre, 1943/2003; Fanon, 1986; Hook, 2004; Piccorelli and Zingale, 2012) moulded and carved away the broader identities of leaders, leaving a narrow and limited version of them that was compliant and palatable to the CEO and the organisation.

6.3.3. Limited and superficial relationships

While some level of friendship and collegiality was reported by participants, there were more examples of political opportunism, competition, a lack of caring and inauthenticity. This suggests that relationships in the organisations were typically not meaningful nor humanising in nature.

Relationships did appear more meaningful at the beginning of the process of stuckness, but by the end most leaders felt isolated and alone, unsupported within a harsh system. This speaks to the fragility of human relationships in the organisations. There were some examples, however, where relationships were strong and supportive, for example in their team or the example of three bosses who assisted three interviewees to exit their stuck positions.

6.3.4. Absurdity and meaninglessness

The stuckness mechanisms of absurdity was a factor within these environments, both in the way people were treated and the directives given (Blomme, 2014). There were examples provided of commands given and then rescinded the next day, of investments made and wasted, of projects started and then deliberately stalled for political reasons. The lack of clarity regarding performance, and the self-referential reporting lines would amplify this experience.

It is likely that much of the absurdity found within the study organisations relates to the toxic, political, and competitive nature of the cultures where senior leaders could act on a whim, change their minds, waste resources, and hide failures without being held to account. Part of the reason for this is the fear in the system where one may be replaced if one is too challenging.

6.3.5. Conclusion: The context

The descriptions of the organisations provided by the participants are particularly negative. As has been noted above, this may be a function of their experience in the organisations and the possibility that they were positioning themselves as the good one and the victim in the situation. Their views are however supported by the fact that South Africans do experience very high levels of workplace bullying.[15]

When this research describes the process of stuckness below, it becomes clear how these workplaces were primed for stuckness. This emerges, in particular, in the way in which humans were used as tools/assets, objects narrowed to the required dimensions, where relationships were superficial and fickle, and where the environment showed characteristics of absurdity and meaninglessness.

6.4. Theory one: The process of stuckness

As noted in the objectives of this research, I would like to provide a theory of the process of stuckness.

6.4.1. Introduction to the three losses

The literature review identified a range of sources of stuckness, including the narrowing down of our inner world and the loss of our capacity for self-reflection. A second source relates to the nature of our relationships, and a third to having meaning in one's life.

Chapter 5 on findings introduced the research data and described the broader process of stuckness. Once analysed, this data revealed that the processes of stuckness as recorded by the participants were in fact the same as the three sources of stuckness identified in the literature review. Furthermore, it was found that these mechanisms of sub-processes occurred in a certain order. It is for these reasons that I have entitled these three mechanisms as three losses of stuckness. This is described in more detail below. I have included this section to clarify the links between the literature review, the findings, and the analysis for the reader.

6.4.2. The process of stuckness

In Table 28 below, the process of stuckness is organised around the three losses of stuckness. There are sub-categories within each section that relate to the findings. I have taken the 10 steps described in the section on findings (5.5), interpreted and grouped them, and then provided group headings in this analysis chapter. The actual process remains the same.

[15] The Zondo Commission 2021 into fraud and corruption in South African organisations recently noted that bullying was rife in South African organisations and one of the mechanisms through which fraud was enabled (Richard Calland interview on Zondo Commission, 13/02/2021).

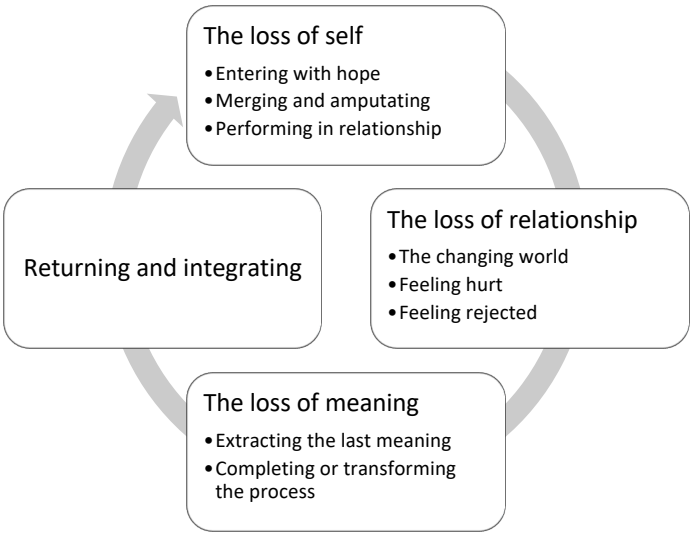


Table 28: The process of stuckness

6.4.3. The loss of self

6.4.3.1. Entering with hope

The participants entered into the relationship voluntarily and, for many, with the concern that they might not be good enough or fit in completely. The findings suggest that participants understood that they would have to make identity compromises to fit in, and that they considered this a normal part of being socialised into an organisation. At this point it can be argued that none of the losses of stuckness that would occur within the organisational context had occurred yet. However, as the section above has shown, participants had already experienced some level of these losses outside of the new organisation because of their childhoods, education and training, and experience in other organisations. As noted above in this chapter and in the literature review, these senior leaders had already experienced a level of essentialisation into objects (Fanon, 1986; Biko, 1978/2004; De Beauvoir, 1949/2015; Mbembe and Dubois, 2017), assets and tools (Heidegger, 1927/2008), doing to be loved, being the outsider (Van Deurzen, 2015), performance over relationship, mineralisation (being the successful executive object) (Van Deurzen, 2009), a reduction in relationship orientation (performance orientation) and capitalist forms of meaning making (Vos, 2020).

6.4.3.2. Merging and amputating

Primed for dovetailing

As described above, the situation is perfectly primed for a merged and enmeshed relationship between the leader and the organisation. The participants have a childhood socialised habit of objectifying themselves and viewing themselves through their utility only (see section 6.2). The context requires and rewards this objectification and self-alienation. Neither parties focused on relationships nor

meaning because they were orientated towards transactional performance to keep their job, please the shareholders and meet the requirements of the neoliberal system.

At this point, the relationship recipe between the individual and the system is constructed, emerging out of this "perfect storm" of dovetailing qualities. These are described in the table below and based on findings (5.3 and 54) and the analysis of these findings (6.2 and 6.3).

Participant	**Corporate context**
• Predisposition to understanding relationships as conditional and being loved as requiring delivery on performance targets	• Provides conditional relationships based on performance and identity alignment
• A need to prove self	• Offers an opportunity to prove self as measured through the hierarchy of an organisation, financial and developmental success
• Brings an inferior outsider status	• Promises to remove outsider inferior status if performance utility achieved
• Socialised and educated into viewing own value through the lens of utility (tool/asset/object)	• Requires objectification – leaders as tools/assets/objects
• Alienated from self through the process of essentialisation (reduced inner life)(ontological weakness)	• Does not see value in human subjectivity unless it can deliver utility (positivism)
• Prioritises work over relationships and deeper meaning	• Requires total commitment and offers the ultimate prize of corporate and financial success
• Individualises blame and locates in self or others (not in system)	• Creates system stability through externalising blame

Table 29: The relationship recipe for the stuck leaders and their context

Socialisation, fallenness, em-bankment, the gaze, and trying to be the insider

The literature review acknowledges the process of new leader adaptation to corporate cultures (Piccorelli and Zingale, 2012; Petriglieri and Stein, 2012). This adaptation is critical because leadership identity is co-constructed by leaders and followers. If leaders do not display the right attitude and behaviours, followers will not follow them (Marchiondo et al., 2015). The findings show that participants understood this trade-off and many were happy, at least initially to meet these expectations.

On a Heideggerian note, Heil explores the idea of individuals "falling" into organisations and the process of organisational socialisation that occurs through this process through selective reinforcement. He refers to Heidegger's idea of em-bankment, a mechanism of stuckness, which describes how identity and behavioural moulding creates humans as assets, as objects of utility. Em-bankment is the term used to describe the relationship between an organisation and its tools (humans) (Heil, 2011).

Another mechanism of stuckness and way of viewing this process is that it is the gaze in action as leaders construct their identity around the demands of the people around them (Sartre, 1943/2003;

Fanon, 1986). This could include both positive and negative projections that may start to mould the leaders' identity.

This adaptation of self can also result in the loss of self for the leader. Laing (2010), Ashman and Gibson (2010) and Spinelli (2005) note how leaders may split off aspects of themselves to fit the recipe for leader identity. The impact of this reduction of identity is, as Petriglieri and Stein comment, less willingness to question organisational or leadership decisions, and the creation of inter-personal conflict and toxic cultures (2012). This splitting can also result in the projective identification of disowned parts of self (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012).

Van Deurzen (2015) suggests that when one is an outsider, one should try to develop a new and transcendent identity rather than try to become an insider. She noted that trying to organise one's identity around fitting in and thus avoiding outsider status was another way in which objectification occurred. It is noticeable that most of the participants did try to fit in, as an insider, and did not build a transcending identity between their insider and outsider selves. This is also another example of the gaze in action.

It is thus through these processes of amputation that leaders become essentialised and reduce their capacity for self-reflection and an emergent identity. This loss of ontology and emergent identity is the first loss experienced by the participants. The data suggests that relationships in the new context are only emerging at this stage and that there is meaning and hope for the future.

Why did participants amputate their identity?

The interviewees chose to be in relationship with the organisation because of perceived benefits in terms of money, status, and development opportunities. These benefits are in line with Vos's (2020) capitalist meaning making that is materialist, hedonist, and self-orientated. In this sense the relationship/job appeared meaningful enough for individuals to compromise themselves to stay in it. I do not have data on why participants joined the organisation but the data on why they stayed (5.5.7.1) suggests that materialist, hedonist, and self-orientated meaning was a significant factor. The interviewed leaders understood that some sort of identity adaptation would be necessary for them to be effective in the culture of any organisation and thus constituted part of the normal socialisation process in joining an organisation.

The adaptation/amputation of leaders' identity would be further enabled by beliefs expressed from several leaders that they did not feel good enough, were outsiders, and needed to prove themselves. Additionally, the conditional attachment patterns represented in the group meant that the individuals expected to have to do something in order to be loved. They were used to having to adapt themselves to get ahead/be loved.

Juliet felt that she was disconnected from herself and her feelings, not really sure of who she was and what she wanted, and as a result was more willing to adapt to what others wanted from her. This is because the sense of not knowing who one really is opens up the opportunities for organisations to enter our inner worlds and tell us who we are (Bedrick, 2020). Leaders were happy to undergo identity adaptation and amputation because it seemed necessary, worthwhile and was how they were used to being in relationship.

6.4.3.3. Performing in relationship

The pair creates successful outcomes

During this part of the process, participants performed successfully within the organisational system. They were able to deliver the desirable utility to the organisation and experienced a sense of success and satisfaction. This could be considered self-orientated meaning as per Vos's work on Capitalist Life Syndrome (2020) (see section 2.3.3 and Appendix B). While this is a form of meaning, on its own and without existential or community forms of meaning alongside it, self-orientated meaning lacks solidity and is not sufficient as a basis around which to organise a satisfying life (Vos, 2020).

For the participating leaders, the notion of being an outsider was less conspicuous during this time. This was probably because their utility in delivering performance made up for any differences in identity, and these may have reduced anyway, because at this stage participants were in most cases less than insistent on retaining an individualistic identity.

Some participants did however hold a strong individual identity. In one case it was overlooked because of performance and the protection of the chairman of the board. Astrid and Nettie, however, despite reporting high levels of performance, noticed intensifying demands from the organisation to become more like others in the organisation. The length of this period ranged from a couple of months to a decade.

The amputation is successful

During this stage, individuals got used to their new identities and cemented them through processes of splitting, sedimentation, mineralisation and totalisation (Spinelli, 2005; Van Deurzen, 2009). In the final process of totalisation their new and amputated identity became a matter of fact, unchangeable and unadaptable. For most participants, the loss of self was worthwhile at this point. They had meaning, a sense of success, relationships and a feeling that they were getting ahead in life.

The data is not clear on how long this stage lasts. However, there were comments by some participants that suggested that the length of this period of success varied hugely: for Nettie and Astrid, a fairly short period of time (maybe the first year), but for Paolo considerably longer (maybe up until 10 years). For some participants such as Nettie, the process of stuckness began almost on arrival within the organisation, while for others such as James, they only began later.

6.4.4. The loss of relationship

6.4.4.1. Changing external world, stagnant inner world

Most of the examples speak to a change in external context that was not matched by a change in the identity and/or behaviour of the participant. The outlier is Juliet, who spoke of an inner identity shift that was not matched by an outer shift in her context. The shift meant that the pair (participant and context) no longer dovetailed each other, and that an adjustment would be necessary for the relationship to continue to produce utility in the forms desirable by each partner in the relationship.

It is at this point that the relationship begins to disconnect. This is because the relationship was designed for a previous context and no adaptability or emergence was built into this relationship of em-bankment (Heidegger 1927/2003; Heil, 2011). The participants lacked flexibility because their inner life had been "amputated" to fit the organisational identity as it was originally, and this meant their capacity for adaptability was limited. Objects cannot emerge (Sartre 1943/2003). In cases such as Juliet's, where her inner life changed and the context remained the same, this process happened in an opposite way (the context remained stuck). A metaphor for this stage is that of a plug that no longer fits the socket and thus electricity cannot flow.

6.4.4.2. Perceptions of performance

Participants noted that it was at this point that they experienced double-bind communication, and manipulative, abusive and absurd directives from senior leadership (see sections 2.3.1.8, 2.3.3.5, 2.9.3.2). This may have been caused by a variety of factors including the loss of relationship, or a drop in performance, or by long-standing identity issues, or for a variety of other leadership style-based reasons (bullying, psychopathy, etc.).

When commenting on who was responsible for the breakdown in the relationship, the participants tended to position themselves as the good person and exempt from culpability. This may be a function of splitting (Spinelli, 2005; Petriglieri and Stein, 2012; Baker and Kelan, 2019), where leaders unconsciously split off the negative parts of themselves and project them into the organisation and senior leaders. This could also relate to participants' histories of being the good child or related to the nature of the co-created story in the interview. While there is much in the data to implicate senior and other leaders and organisations in bullying, cronyism, and Machiavellian politics, it is unlikely that the participants did not play some role in creating the stuckness.

This perceived lack of culpability may have contributed to the stuckness, because without accepting their own role in the stuck situation, it would be difficult for the leaders to have agency in creating change. This blaming behaviour may also contribute to the creation of a toxic culture which could have further amplified the experience of being victimised (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012). There is plenty of

evidence in the research to suggest that toxic work cultures, bullying and shaming were the norm for the participants.

It is unclear whether the leaders blamed the organisation and senior leaders publicly. My experience with the data and in organisations is that this was probably not the case. This may be explained by the comment from Baker and Kelan that in a neoliberal system, individuals cannot point out that the system is flawed because they will be accused of not taking responsibility for their lives, not trying hard enough, and lacking the desire for self-improvement (2019).

It may be, however, that the participating leaders were not performing or were performing less well than they believed. The loss of relationship with their organisation and senior leadership may have meant that the interviewees had less traction in the organisation. This was because other leaders, including more senior leaders, became less supportive, and because the old ways of working were no longer functional in the new context (leader overdrive: De Haan, 2016). New ways of being had crept into the system and the leaders had not adapted their identity and behaviour to this.

As a result of corporates' belief that the problem related to performance, MBAs and coaching interventions were prescribed and these were willingly attended by the self-critical and ambitious leaders. However, these interventions may ironically have served to make matters worse. This was because these interventions tended to emphasise performative rather than identity factors and this may have resulted in the impoverishment of the leader's inner world and ultimately their adaptability (Lodwick, 2015; Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2015; Heil, 2011).

6.4.4.3. Choosing shame and not guilt

At this stage there was some confusion about what was wrong in the relationship. Some participants commented that they believed it was their difference in identity that was the problem. They also commented that they believed that the "organisations" stated that the problem was a performance problem although it really was a problem with them being different, an identity problem.

The research has suggested that organisations do value homogeneity because of the alignment it enables. Difference is difficult for organisations. Thus, it may be true that the organisation believed it was an identity problem but was unable to be direct about it because of legal reasons or because positivist systems, including corporate performance management systems, struggle to articulate qualitative factors such as identity.

Interestingly, the participants saw the organisational response as a rejection of themselves and not as a performance issue, because they generally believed that they were performing. In some ways, this is the difference between guilt and shame. Typically, guilt is an experience of doing something wrong and shame is an experience of being wrong (Kukard, 2006). The leaders felt rejected for who they were at

this stage, not guilty for poor performance. It is possible that this "flight" to shame rather than guilt may relate in some way to their early attachment patterns and believing that they were not good enough.

6.4.4.4. Noticing stuckness

There is some evidence that it is at this stage that the relationship starts to become painful, and it is through this pain that the participants begin to notice that they are stuck. This is however not true for everyone as some participants noticed earlier and some later than this that they had become stuck.

6.4.5. The loss of meaning

6.4.5.1. Becoming isolated

As the stuckness set in and relationships between the two parties became more polarised, the participants began to be identified by leaders and co-workers as the problem and scapegoated as such. The tool/asset could no longer be identified as providing performance-based utility. When this happens, the utility of the person moves from a functional to a symbolic nature, that of the scapegoat (see section 2.3.1.8). In this role the leaders were identified with all that is bad about and within the organisation or situation. Blame became introjected into the individual and out of the system (Wilson, 2018). The individual became isolated and further objectified. Others were able to freely project their gaze (Sartre, 1943/2003; De Beauvoir, 1944/2015; Fanon, 1986) and unwanted selves on these scapegoated individuals (Petriglieri and Stein, 2012).

The predicament of these leaders is not raised by those watching because they too are ontologically absent (amputated/bewitched/dead) and/or fearful of the consequences of standing up for the scapegoated individual. As Bazzano (2016) notes, people working within the neoliberal system become hardened to the plight of others and lacking in empathy. In this sense there are insufficient engaged relationships at work that could support the scapegoated individual. This allows the more senior leaders and the organisation to continue undisturbed, even with meaningless, self-serving, and absurd rituals and ways of being.

6.4.5.2. The last meaning is extracted

This shift towards being a scapegoat is confusing and difficult for the participants who try to defend against this by working harder and trying harder. They struggle to understand why they have no traction in the environment, why there is no support for them and why they seem to be held responsible for things they do not view as their responsibility. The situation becomes one of meaninglessness and absurdity for the individual. As Camus notes, working harder is not an antidote to meaninglessness (Blomme, 2014).

At this point, the three losses are complete. The individual no longer has access to their own full ontology and capacity for self-reflection, to full and engaged relationships within the corporate context and to meaningful work. Their capacity to adapt is significantly reduced and it just remains for the pair to extract the last traces of utility from the relationship before they part ways to try again.

6.4.5.3. Why did they stay so long?

Participants reported that they stayed in these stuck positions for long periods. Astrid notes that she stayed for 11 years and Nettie that she stayed for nine. Nettie commented: "And I am absolutely pissed at myself for trying to keep making it right because it's been nine years" (pp. 878-879).

Participants noted that they stayed for financial reasons, because they enjoyed the status and perks of the executive life style, because they could not find a replacement, to look after others, to get the big job and then change the system, and an inability to conceive of life after this organisation. Astrid described the allure of top management and the system being addictive (like a drug), and Sandra expressed the idea of being bewitched by organisations. This links to Juliet's comment that her lack of connection to herself and her predisposition towards stoically keeping going kept her trying and staying despite how bad things got. This was because she could always ignore her pain and focus on the good things in the situation. This reminds me of the comments made by Slaby (2010), citing Heidegger (1927/2008) and described earlier in this document (section 2.3.1.3) around the way in which being asleep can support stuckness.

As noted in section 6.4.4, some participants did not feel that they were responsible for the breakdown of the relationship and this may have been a factor in why they stayed so long; that is, because they did not cause the situation and they could not fix it.

Shame, self-criticism or not feeling good enough may have been additional factors in keeping the interviewees stuck as they tried to redeem themselves through hard work. April and Mooketsi (2010) note that A type female executives are particularly prone to self-criticism and shame.

Vos (2020) notes that capitalist meaning is not meaningful because it denies the critical aspects of our humanity, including higher level purposes, existential types of meaning, and social forms of meaning. When we attach to capitalism forms of meaning making, as the participants did, then we do not have a solid base of meaning from which to direct our lives. This could cause us to renew our focus on materialism and self-orientated forms of meaning which in turn may encourage participants to stay and fight it out because it seems worthwhile, at least in the short term. This interpretation is supported by Frankl's view that when the will to meaning is disrupted, as it was in these cases, then the will to power or pleasure which includes an orientation towards money will occur (Frankl, 1946/2006).

6.4.5.4. Completing and transforming

The data suggests that in most cases it was the stuck individual that ended the relationship. This was because the situation had become completely untenable to the participants and in some cases their families as well.

The individual's departure from the system suggests that in some way they felt responsible for the stuckness and this served to reinforce the perception in the organisation that it was the individual and not the system that was at fault. This is in line with comments earlier about neoliberalism (Wilson, 2018). Another way of viewing the interviewees' departure is that this was an act of self-remembering; that in fact their departure signalled that self-authorship was re-emerging in the face of the broken-down relationship.

While there were many recorded incidents that described how unhelpful others within the organisation were during the event, there were a few examples of bosses who supported the stuck participant to exit the stuck situation. These interventions by bosses had positive impacts, suggesting that others are useful and possibly required in the process of releasing stuckness. The services offered by others included direction, compassionate discipline, and a relief of the shame associated with being stuck. This links to work on shame where the antidote is exposure of shame to others and a reconnection with others (Bradshaw, 2005).

After the individuals had left their positions, the organisation continued to operate, although participants did note that they understood there to be an increase in politics and fear, amplified work silos, and a loss of team culture. Participants explained that this would affect performance at least in the future, if not immediately after the stuckness incident. It is possible that this interpretation would serve the participants.

6.4.6. Returning and integrating

This stage is the time at which participants made sense of what had happened, evaluated the impact on their lives and decided how they would go forward.

As mentioned above, there were three instances where people stayed in the organisation, but in a changed role that appeared to offer more potential for them. This moved them back into the cycle, with the possibility of losing themselves again. For these three people, time spent at this stage was limited, as they moved swiftly into a role. The time spent in this stage for others was longer, ranging from a month (Astrid) to a longer-term state of considering when to re-enter the system, as experienced by Juliet (over three years).

For many this was a positive and affirming experience of balancing, integration and connecting with self, for example for Juliet, who renewed relationships with her children and began a new relationship.

In effect, this was a time of return to self, return to others, and return to meaning, a time when the three losses were resolved. This is, as Biko (1978/2004) would say, a time of expansion of identity and the development of a much richer inner world that could create more agile and appropriate responses to the world.

6.4.7. Conclusion: The theory of the process of stuckness

This analysis has provided significant detail regarding the process of stuckness, the sources (the three losses), and the mechanisms of the three sources which make the process of stuckness possible. During stage one the participants voluntarily agreed to an amputation of their identity to fit into the corporate identity more fully. They did this for a number of reasons, many of which related to their childhood status as outsider, their attachment patterns, and their training in corporates and within the broader neoliberal leadership development environment. During this stage, the interviewees noted that they were successful and met performance requirements. Few noticed that they had narrowed down their version of themselves although some noticed that the organisations were requiring them to adapt who they were.

The second stage relates to the loss of relationships. This occurs when the environment changes and the participating leader does not, or vice versa in one case. This meant that the individual lost traction in the organisation and was no longer considered a performer. According to the interviewees, they were subjected to significant bullying and shaming at this stage and felt hurt and rejected as a result. This experience was confusing for the participants, who believed that the organisation was rejecting them for who they were and not for their performance. This was the stage at which most participants experienced pain and started noticing the stuckness.

During the third stage, participants lost their sense of meaning and purpose and turned to extracting the last value from the relationship, largely in the form of material or status rewards. However, this meaning was not meaningful enough to organise a life around and to suggest a way out of stuckness. Instead, this form of meaning just prolonged the stuckness.

For most of the relationships, it was the individual who took action and left, many with no jobs to go to. This reinforced the idea that it was the individual and not the system that was at fault.

The last stage was enjoyable for many participants and included integrating their learning, re-connecting to themselves and planning how they wanted to live their lives. In a sense this stage is the recovery of the three losses so that the cycle can begin again, but from an enlarged identity base.

6.5. The experience of stuckness

This is not a phenomenological project and thus the recorded experiences of stuckness are fairly limited. The data is is also unclear about what experiences occurred at which stages in the process. Lastly, it is important to note that for some people stuckness only tends to be noticed when it becomes painful, possibly only during the loss of relationship stage.

I used Van Deurzen's four worlds (2015) to organise the findings on the experience of stuckness. Reported experiences include physical manifestations, including a sense of exhaustion and experiences of shaking. This is in line with Bella's findings (2011).

Pertaining to the social world, participants described experiences of being isolated, side-lined, ignored, and scapegoated. All the female participants (April and Mooketsi, 2011) and some of the men felt disrespected, bullied, and scapegoated by their bosses and colleagues. Psychologically, the experience of stuckness included a sense of being shamed, inferior, self-critical, depressed, and anxious. The data bears out findings in the literature review as being related to the experiences of objectification (Biko, 1978/2004; Fanon, 1986; Nussbaum, 1995; Hook, 2008; Gibson and Beneduce, 2017; Naidu, 2020) and scapegoating (Naidu, 2020).

Critiques of neoliberalism note too that the experience of stuckness is isolating, fragmenting, and characterised by a sense of self-alienation (Petriglieri, 2007; Bazzano, 2016; Wilson, 2018). Mbembe and Dubois (2017) also note how this supports the creation of a false self. This is in line with Juliet's experience of being on the side of herself and how this prevented her from knowing and acting in her own best interest.

Two participants noticed the sense of boredom, being held in limbo, linking to Heidegger's concepts of boredom (*hingenhaltenheit, leergelassenheit*) where one abandons oneself and is left feeling empty (Heidegger 1927/2008). One participant noted that she had an experience of moving jobs a lot, and not settling anywhere for any length of time.

On a spiritual level, participants experienced a sense of being dehumanised, having one's soul destroyed and losing meaning (Camus, 1995/2012). One participant noted that stuckness is akin to experiencing the void. This links with Tantum's description of shame as an experience of the void (Van Deurzen, 2019).

The interviewees noted existential anxiety, regret and guilt about not having lived their lives more fully, as well as existential dissonance between who they once believed they were and who they appeared to have become during and after the incident of stuckness (Cole, 2016). Broadly, the experience of stuckness was recorded as deeply unpleasant, but perhaps it was this very unpleasantness that alerts one

to the real value generated by stuckness. Perhaps without this pain, one may fail to heed the call towards self-authorship that is embodied through the process of stuckness. This is described below.

6.6. The value of stuckness

Bella notes that her participants did not find value in being stuck while they were stuck (Bella, 2011). However, she notes that her participants understood the value of being stuck afterwards as moving them into a more authentic and inner aligned way of being in the world (Bella, 2011). This is very much in line with the experience of the participants in this study.

6.6.1. Disadvantages of getting stuck

Several disadvantages were identified, including experiencing pain and loss, a loss of performance, diminished self-esteem, a disconnect with self, a sense of frustration and anger, and the feeling that they were wasting time.

6.6.2. Benefits of getting stuck

The findings show significant benefits to getting stuck and these are confirmed by the literature. Interestingly enough, the participants did not explicitly state that the benefits included enhanced leadership skills, but this is implicit in the advantages described below.

6.6.2.1. Processing the past more fully

For three participants (Astrid, Michelle, Nettie) the process of stuckness was an emancipation project, through which they could examine their attachment patterns, patterns of shame and not belonging or feeling inferior, and work with these to diminish the control they had on their lives. As Hübl notes, unintegrated aspects of our pasts become the recipes for our futures (Hübl, 2020). Working through difficulties from our pasts allows us to live in the world as it is, rather than as it was, and this means we can be more effective and less stuck, both as people and as leaders.

6.6.2.2. Learning to safeguard and expand our inner world

The greatest area of value for the participants was in learning to safeguard their inner world through trusting themselves, feeling their feelings, standing up for themselves, and learning how to believe in themselves, even if their history and the current context was inclining them to believe the opposite.

This experience speaks directly to Biko's notion of acknowledging all of our identities, infusing these with pride, even though the outside world may believe these are identities of shame, and using this enlarged self as a way of moving forward with agility, dignity, and grace in life (Biko, 1978/2004). As Hollis notes, "Transformation is about enlargement" (Hollis, 1998, p. 84). Part of this process of building one's inner world includes building one's capacity to reflect, take feedback, and respond to

the environment so that we remain emergent, adaptive, and flexible. This is critical for our survival as humans and as leaders.

6.6.2.3. Learning to have better relationships

The process of stuckness forced participants to review their legacy relationship patterns as noted above. Furthermore, it invited people to understand their own needs, be more authentic in relationship, and work more effectively with feedback from others. For at least one participant, this resulted in renewed relationships with their children and a new intimate partnership.

The experience also impacted on their capacity to choose new employers more carefully, and to enter a new corporate system in a way that balanced organisational and individual identity more effectively. Astrid in particular notes how she felt more appreciated and valued in the new organisation because she had chosen an organisation with a culture that accepted her.

6.6.2.4. Learning to find and create meaningful meaning

Astrid, in particular, wondered in the interview how the stuck experience was able to dominate her life and remove from her focus other elements of her life that used to provide meaning for her. This meant that the struggle at work dominated her life and the pain of this, including the meaninglessness thereof, became overwhelming. This taught her to ensure that she retained a meaningful life outside corporates, but also to ensure that she only accepted work that was meaningful to her. Juliet decided to leave full-time employment in corporates and was currently seeking more meaningful work outside of these organisations. These examples relate to Vos's (2020) and Frankl's (1946/2006) comments about building meaning that is meaningful.

6.6.2.5. Conclusion: The value of stuckness

Although the experience of stuckness brought with it many unpleasant experiences, it was seen by participants as creating significant longer-term value in the form of self-understanding, self-direction, having better relationships, and building a more meaningful life.

These benefits relate to the three losses of stuckness because this analysis shows that stuckness allows us to understand and expand ourselves, create more meaningful relationships, and build a life more focused on meaningful meaning. In effect, stuckness is a process by which we learn how to live better for ourselves, including retaining our adaptive and emergent identity.

6.6.3. Stuckness events

The section below brings together themes from this research relating to the nature of stuckness events.

6.6.3.1. Everyone gets stuck from time to time

The participants were selected because they had an experience of stuckness. Interestingly, everyone who was asked whether they were eligible and wanted to join the study had an intuitive idea of what stuckness is and had at least one stuckness experience to offer. Five of the participants spoke of more than one event and Stephen noticed that he had moved from stuckness to expansion on an ongoing basis throughout his life. This suggests that stuckness is widespread, if not experienced by everyone.

The literature review (section 2.3.1) demonstrates how inauthenticity, bad faith, disengaged relationships, and a loss of meaning can create stuckness, and how these processes and thus stuckness can occur from time to time as a "normal" part of being human. For example, Heidegger (1927/2008) notes that one cannot be authentic all the time, and Sartre (1943/2003) suggests that one cannot be in good faith all the time. We move in and out of authenticity/bad faith/engaged relationships/meaning as we interact with the world and this is generally normal and non-pathological. There may be pathological versions of stuckness, for example those related to trauma, addiction, and death, but these have not been the focus of this study.

As has been shown above, stuckness is a way of ensuring that we adapt to the context and that we live our lives fully. It occurs when we become dislocated from ourselves and our context. This is, as suggested above, unavoidable and part of our human experience. This has implications for understanding leadership stuckness events as normal and suggests that the focus of a stuckness therapy should not be to avoid stuckness but to enable clients to pass through it more easily. In this case the focus would be on promoting more fluidity in our identities, our relationships, our meaning making, and in relation to our environments.

6.6.3.2. Stuckness is not binary and varies in complexity and severity

Stuckness events are a process, a cycle, and are not binary but rather exist on a continuum of less or more stuckness. They are supported by the sources and mechanisms of stuckness and the research suggests that for someone to get stuck, or at least feel stuck, they need to experience a loss of self and a loss of relationship.

The participants experienced a variety of stuckness events of varying complexity and severity. Complex events occurred when several people/locations were involved, and severe events referred to how long the events lasted and the impact on the leader's life.

6.7. Theory Two: An existential definition of leadership stuckness

Participants' definitions of stuckness focused on a lack of growth, having no traction in the world, not controlling the world, harking back to a more positive past, and repeating old patterns. One participant noticed that stuckness for her was moving on continually, rather than staying to face and resolve issues.

The value as described in this research relates to a reconnection with self, relationships, and meaning that manifest in a greater adaptability to the context.

Of the definitions identified in the literature, the one by Petriglieri appears to relate most closely to the journey of stuckness as represented in this research. He notes that stuckness

> *might result from socially rewarded ongoing progress experienced internally as purposeless activity. In this case, the opposite occurs. We feel stuck because, to gain social rewards, we are changing faster than we can make sense of or feel comfortable with. Stuckness, however, is not always a symptom of the timeless friction between the inner pace of the individual and the outer pace of culture. It can also represent the beginning of a solution to fragmented isolation by functioning as a pregnant pause in the reworking of a life narrative* (Petriglieri, 2007, p. 192).

The components of this definition include the following: a person, a context, and a problematic relationship between the person and the context (meaninglessness, inability to make sense of a situation) that can result in the formation of a new life narrative.

The definition I would like to suggest focuses on the processes of stuckness, including the three losses:

> *Leadership stuckness is generally a non-pathological, unavoidable, and recurring state in which a leader gets stuck in their relationship with their organisation and/or individuals in it.*
>
> *It occurs on a continuum with various levels of stuckness rather than a binary state of stuckness or unstuckness. Stuckness can last for years and many leaders do not notice their stuckness until they feel the pain associated with isolation and disempowerment.*
>
> *Stuckness emerges as a result of three losses – a loss of self and capacity to self-reflect, the loss of meaningful relationships, and the loss of meaning in work and lives. These three losses and the extent to which these are experienced is a function of leader attachment patterns, personality, as well as external factors such as the neoliberal and organisational context.*
>
> *The result of these losses is that the leader is unable to adapt to changes in their context, including changes in relationships at work. They begin to experience the pain of isolation and loss of traction in the world. The shift towards unstuckness occurs when leaders explore and develop their inner worlds more fully, enhance their capacity to self-reflect, deepen their relationships, and find a more meaningful existence in the world.*
>
> *The short-term experience of stuckness is unpleasant; however, stuckness can enable leaders to understand what they bring into organisations (identity, concerns, assumptions and orientations), adapt more fluidly to changing circumstances, and live their lives, including their leadership lives, in a more satisfying way.*

6.8. Summary of significant findings generated by this research

The aims of this research were to create a theory of stuckness, including the process and definition of stuckness. The literature review identified further areas where this research could contribute. These included understanding more about the role of context in stuckness, exploring why leaders stayed in the stuck relationship/context, describing the experience and value of stuckness for leaders, and documenting the types of stuckness events.

These are dealt with more fully below alongside other significant findings.

6.8.1. Creating an existential theory of stuckness: The three losses of stuckness

This research has produced an original theory on the process of stuckness. This is an existential theory organised around the notion of three losses. These three losses include the loss of self and our capacity to self-reflect, the loss of meaningful relationship, and the loss of meaningful meaning. The three losses are the sources of stuckness, and they occur in a particular order – first self, then others, and then meaning. This finding is particularly useful in determining where a leader is in the process of stuckness and in devising an intervention to support the leader to move through the stuckness cycle more easily.

The three losses result in an inability to respond to the world as it is; consequently, stuck leaders lose traction in their environments. Performance coaching and MBAs that are transactional in nature are likely to have little effect because they tend not to reinforce the stuck inner world, relationships, and meaning making capacity of the leader. This is a useful finding in the light of developing therapeutic interventions.

6.8.2. Understanding more about the role played by the context in stuckness

The literature review, reflexivity processes, and the findings confirm the critical role of the context in enabling stuckness for the leaders. The context, both inside and outside the corporate, actively encourages leaders to objectify themselves and reduce their inner worlds to narrow identities constellated around what a successful executive looks like. This ultimately reduces leaders' agility and their capacity to self-reflect. Secondly, the corporate context tends to be competitive and this undermines the possibility of deep relationships. The norm for many of the participants was superficial and fickle relationships. Lastly, there is a level of absurdity in organisations, probably created by the ironic combination of positivism and owners and leaders (shareholders, CEOs, senior leaders) acting with limited accountability and in their own interest. In these ways the context plays a highly active role in the stuckness partnership.

The research found that some "bosses" were helpful in getting leaders out of stuckness. This suggests that the context/others can play a useful role in helping leaders gain more control of their lives and that "bosses" or others could be supported in providing this service.

6.8.3. Understanding why leaders stayed

There were several expected findings related to why leaders stayed. These include the nature of stuckness (you can't move when you don't know you are stuck), staying for the money, others, status, or because interviewees did not know where to go. However, there were two unexpected findings; that

of interviewees being amputated, bewitched, drugged or dead, and the role of childhood experience and attachment patterns.

Being amputated, bewitched, drugged or dead implies a loss of oneself and one's ability to take control over one's own life. It could also speak to the notion that leaders experiencing this were controlled by others. This would mean a loss of self-direction, agency, and capacity to act in one's own best interests.

The conditional attachment patterns and the outsider childhood status of the leaders played a critical role in the leader staying in the stuck situation. These two factors encouraged leaders to work harder, adapt themselves more fully and feel shame when they experienced stuckness, rather than leave. The interviewed leaders also tended to have a habit of being stoic, persevering and of always being successful in the end. They continued with this recipe for success even when it did not work, instead of just leaving the organisation.

6.8.4. Understanding the types of stuckness events experienced by the participants

This research proposes that stuckness occurs more than once in our lives at diverse levels of complexity and severity. We move from fluidity to stuckness in a constant and circular motion. Fluidity is a time when we are self-authoring, aligned with our inner worlds, deeply relational, and finding meaning in the world. Stuckness is when we are more or less alienated from ourselves and our self-authoring, our relationships become disconnected and lack humanising content, and we struggle to find meaning in our lives. We do not always notice when we are stuck and it is often only when we experience pain that we know we are in a situation of stuckness.

We cannot always be fluid, or authentic, or in good faith, but there does come a time when the majority of our interactions with ourselves and the world are characterised by inauthenticity and bad faith, and this is when our stuckness starts to kick in. Stuckness is a natural and mostly non-pathological call to self-authoring. It starts quietly and if we are lucky and listen well, we will hear it. If not, it will have to speak louder and louder until the pain of dealing with it is less than the pain of experiencing it and we are forced to make a choice and act for ourselves. The opportunity offered by therapy is the ability to listen and hear before the voice and the pain becomes permanently damaging.

6.8.5. Understanding the experience and value of stuckness for leaders

The disadvantages of stuckness are clear and relate to experiencing painful feelings, performing less well, losing confidence, disconnecting from oneself and others and struggling with meaninglessness and absurdity.

The benefits of stuckness relate to reminding us of how to live well and to adapt to the current context, not remaining stuck in past patterns. Stuckness forces us to explore ourselves more fully and develop

our skills of self-reflection and taking feedback. This in turn encourages us to review our relationship skills and seek more meaningful relationships. Lastly, we are reminded to find more meaning in the world.

These skills of living better and more adaptable lives have benefits in terms of enhancing leaders' ability to know their impact on others, adapt to others and changing contexts, build more meaningful relationships in the organisations they run, and help people find meaning in their work.

6.8.6. Building an existential definition of leadership stuckness

An existential definition of stuckness has been provided above (section 6.7). It notes that both the stuck person and the context play a role in creating stuckness and that the process involves three losses – the loss of self and self-reflection capacity, the loss of relationship, and the loss of meaning.

6.9. The generalisability of this research

6.9.1. Generalisability to non-leadership populations

While this research has focused on leadership stuckness, my sense is that much of this work can be generalised to a broader population. This is because the research has included non-work examples of stuckness from leaders' lives and thus contains data that is non-specific to leaders. Many factors that are unrelated to work and are experienced by the general population, for example trauma and addiction, have also been integrated into this study.

On a more subjective note, I sense that many if not all forms of stuckness may have the same aetiology and process. I base this view on my experience of the application of this research in my own life with regard to relationship and life choice dilemmas. This would need to be developed in future research.

6.9.2. Generalisability to contexts other than in South Africa

I have worked in Europe, the UK, the USA, and Asia and believe that this research could be generalised to other countries, especially those with a neoliberal capitalist orientation. However, the extremely high level of workplace bullying in South Africa, not experienced everywhere else in the world, would provide a critique for this view.

It would be useful to explore my assumptions in further research on individuals, organisations and maybe even systems.

6.10. Limitations of this research

This was a wide-ranging study that integrated several elements within it. The list of elements needing inclusion may be insufficient or some of the elements may have needed deeper exploration, for example death, addiction, and trauma.

This was not a phenomenological study, but it may have been useful to have obtained more phenomenological information from participants, especially in relation to where in the process they began to feel pain.

Although I have noted the logic of the sample population being 90% white, I do think that this research may have benefited from a more varied sample group. However, this may also have resulted in the inclusion of very dominant race dynamics, which would in likelihood have overshadowed and limited access to more subtle undercurrents and reduced the generalisability of this study to other countries.

6.11. Areas of future research

There are many areas for future research, including undertaking the same research with a different sample population, for example a more diverse or racially/gender different population or people from another country. It would be interesting to run this study from a longitudinal perspective exploring stuckness events over a person's lifetime.

A further area of research would be to complete the study from the perspective of the organisation and possibly even the stuck leader as well. This could fully confirm how the relationship forms and changes over time.

Two themes that may be under-developed in this research that look promising as a cause of stuckness are death and trauma. These could be explored more fully.

The exploration of stuck organisations and systems would be of interest to organisational development practitioners as well as describing through research an existential approach to organisational development and race relations.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Introduction

This research has created new ways of understanding stuckness and several recommendations have emerged for working with this phenomenon. The recommendations are existential in nature and are aimed at supporting a psychotherapeutic approach to working with stuckness. However, these same recommendations could also be useful for existential coaching, even though this modality varies in terms of outcomes, orientation, types of issues presented and past or present focus. Both modalities are based on the same existential philosophical framework. Furthermore, existential coaching tends to be more therapeutic in nature than other forms of transactional coaching.[16] Transactional coaching, where the focus is on performance and enhancing the utility of the leader, is not useful for reasons given throughout this work.

At the end of this section, I have included some comments that relate to organisational development and constructing an organisation and culture where stuckness is minimised.

7.2. Why an existential approach for stuckness?

Existential modalities are uniquely positioned to work with stuckness. Van Deurzen (2012) notes that "Existential therapy enables people to reclaim authorship of their life, so stimulating a renewal of being" (p. 17). Existential therapy already works with the three losses.

Authors such as Heidegger (1927/2008), Sartre (1943/2003), De Beauvoir (1949/2015), Fanon (1952/1986), Biko (1978/2004), and Spinelli (2005) help us to understand that our identity is emergent and that to essentialise this is to risk some form of stuckness. Buber, Jaspers and Levinas understand the importance of relationships in keeping us emergent and connecting to the world so that we may transcend ourselves and avoid stuckness. Frankl, Camus, Sartre, May, and Vos help us to understand the nature of meaning and how we can create it and use it as a source of courage and direction.

7.3. Recommendations for a therapeutic strategy for stuckness

Below are five groups of recommendations for working with stuckness that have emerged from this research (literature review, findings, and analysis). They include the therapeutic relationship, ways in which stuckness can be understood, therapeutic goals in working with stuckness, using the process of stuckness to build appropriate interventions, and broader ideas for stuckness-related therapy.

[16] Comment from Sasha Smith, presentation on existential coaching, September 2020 for Aephoria Partners.

7.3.1. Locating responsibility for stuckness

As with any psychotherapy session, it is important for the psychotherapist to understand what they bring into a therapy session. What are the beliefs and assumptions about leaders, leaders' getting stuck, corporates, salaries, shares, wealth, and corporate politics, and how could these interfere in the relational dynamics during the session?

A critical area to explore is: what are the therapist's and the client's beliefs about stuckness? Notably are these in line with Sartre's earlier notion of total responsibility which is in line with the neoliberal idea of the individual being responsible, or do people recognise the impact of the context on the stuck individual? My sense is that therapists must consider the impact of the context as well as the intrapsychic dynamics. In the world of stuckness the solution lies in a reasonable balance between the two. 'Reasonable' is difficult to define, but where only one type of insight occurs (they are solely responsible or I am solely responsible), the stuckness will persist. Contextualising events is also a useful way of removing/reducing shame and thus all the defences that may be connected with it, including aggression, secrecy, and blaming the context or therapist. This is helpful in reducing stuckness.

7.3.2. The "normal" nature of stuckness

The research suggests that stuckness is inevitable and in most cases non-pathological. As a result, stuckness needs to be expressed by the therapist as normal, useful, and as an invitation to live life more fully and to build one's adaptive capacity.

7.3.3. Therapeutic goals in working with stuckness

A useful goal for stuckness-orientated therapy would be to increase fluidity rather than avoid stuckness. This could include enhancing a client's capacity for noticing stuckness taking place as well as the ways in which the three losses are taking place in the client's life.

7.3.4. Using the process of stuckness to build appropriate interventions

The research suggests that the three losses of stuckness occur in an order – first, the loss of self and the capacity to self-reflect, second, the loss of relationship, and third, the loss of meaning. This is useful for understanding where a client may be in the process of stuckness and thus the most appropriate foci for therapy. This is however not a binary recommendation and does not mean that if the client is at the first stage one only works with exploring and developing their inner worlds and capacity for self-reflection. It would be useful to explore the other losses as well, but perhaps focus on one.

Below are some ideas for working with each stage of stuckness. Useful questions that can be utilised when working at each stage are included in Appendix I.

7.3.4.1. Working with the first stage of stuckness: Loss of self and capacity for self-reflection

It is unlikely that the client will identify stuckness in the first stage of the stuckness process because this stage is often positive and not painful. However, as therapists notice clients entering new employment relationships it may be useful to explore how these are affecting their versions of themselves and their capacity to self-reflect. It would be interesting to understand what parts of themselves they bring to work or not.

7.3.4.2. Working with the second stage of stuckness: loss of relationship

The second loss is one of relationship and thus the therapy could focus on how the person does relationship. A central area to explore is the nature of their relationships, the location of the relationships in the leaders' lives and the value these relationships bring to the leaders. A useful strategy would be to support engaged relationships in the clients life, by actively providing an engaged relationship.

7.3.4.3. Working with the third stage of stuckness: loss of meaning

There is a wealth of existential literature that can support clients to find and develop meaning. Frankl (1946/2006) and Vos (2020) would be two authors who could add value to this conversation. Both authors explore how meaning works, why we need it, and what happens when we do not have it. Conversely, it may be useful to explore absurdity and meaninglessness, for example in the work of Camus (1995/2012). Building the leadership competence of exploring and understanding meaning creation would also be useful for leader clients.

7.4. Preventing stuckness in organisations

While this is not an organisational development research project, it is useful to note briefly some of the recommendations from the participants and the literature review. They mostly relate to building humane, meaningful, and human workplaces.

7.4.1. Building humane, meaningful, and human workplaces

7.4.1.1. Working with an existential definition of leadership

It may be useful to encourage the use of a relationship and meaning orientated version of leadership such as that offered by Jean Lupman-Blum, which is that "the ongoing excavation of the leadership concept is part of a deeper search for the meaning of life, a search for how each of us mere mortals fits into the larger picture" (Hannaway, 2019, p. 15). This could help leaders orientate themselves towards creating organisations that support ontologies, relationships, and meaning creation.

7.4.1.2. Considering an existential approach to leadership development

There appears to be very little research on an existential approach to organisational development other than what can be retrieved through the existential coaching and leadership literature (Ashman and Lawler, 2008; Ulrich and Ulrich, 2010; Gardiner, 2011; Lawler and Ashman, 2012; Morov and Morova, 2015; Tomkins and Simpson, 2015; Hannaway, 2018, 2019; Van Deurzen-Smith, 2020). This literature tends to focus on leaders' roles in humanising the workplace, developing more authentic and engaged relationships, and creating meaning at work.

Heil (2011) recommends treating organisations as worlds, in which people 'world', which means as emergent creations, much like art works that respond to all stakeholders in the relationship.

Vos (2020) provides some suggestions around building meaning-orientated organisations, employees, leadership, and human resources practices. Of leadership practices he notes that meaning-orientated leaders do not view staff as means, as functional tools enabling organisations to meet their objectives, but as ends, and the real meaning behind organisations.

There is a call towards humanising business schools (Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2007), coaching (Lodwick, 2015), and workplaces. Perhaps this knowledge could be useful towards building an existential approach to organisational development.

7.4.1.3. Supporting bosses to support stuck staff

One of the recommendations from participants was to build skills that would enable other leaders to support stuck staff. A key area of work would be to normalise the experience and reduce shame.

7.4.1.4. Working existentially with inclusion and diversity

This recommendation relates to diversity and inclusion in organisations. Participants recommended that workplaces be places where one could be oneself and where difference was accepted and valued.

Nine out of ten of the research participants were white, and in the light of the South African context, one would have imagined that they felt like insiders within the system, and that it would be black people who experienced being outsiders in the South African business context (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1999). Curiously, this was not always so: many brought with them the outsider status still alive from their childhoods. At a process level, at the beginning of the process the participants were real outsiders, in the middle of the process their outsider status changed as their performance utility became manifest and their identity was less under the spotlight, and at the end of the process they were psychological outsiders in preparation for real outsider status. It is therefore appropriate to conclude that outsider status, one of the critical factors in encouraging participants to adopt a false persona, is not

just race based but runs much deeper; and, it is possible that many if not most people in organisations may feel like outsiders to some extent.

While this following recommendation stems from a more anecdotal perspective, it is worthwhile to consider that this outsider experience may be more extreme for those who are not typical of the privileged, masculine, white business culture in South Africa, for example women, black, indian, and coloured people, those from minority religions, those with different sexual orientations or non-neurotypical structures, etc.

2020 has been a year of incidents that have drawn our attention to the critical work needing to be done to ensure that diversity is valued at a societal, organisational, and personal level. If we do not find a way to resolve, neutralise or live with the outsider status carried by so many (possibly even al of usl) in the world, we will continue to experience societal, organisational, and personal stuckness.

I have been unable to locate an academic resource on an existential approach to this. However, I have been working towards developing an approach in my own work using the work described in this research relating to the objectification of people (Heidegger, Fanon, Biko, Gordon, Hook, Mbembe and others) and perhaps this is a pointer in the right direction. Existential philosophy, psychotherapy, and coaching need to engage with this topic more deeply.

8. CONCLUSION

I have provided an existential account of leadership stuckness that focuses on the three losses of stuckness; the loss of self and capacity to self-reflect, the loss of relationships, and the loss of meaning. A significant proportion of this research has been devoted to understanding the participant and the context, noting how they are perfectly primed for a merged relationship of stuckness. I have provided a detailed account of the process of stuckness, showing how objectification, superficial relationships, and absurdity support leaders to get stuck and that attachment patterns, personality characteristics, strategies of coping, and the role of others help them stay stuck. Recommendations have emerged from this research for supporting leadership fluidity, in particular using existential psychotherapy and coaching methodologies. Furthermore, I have suggested that this research may be generalisable to a broader population including individuals, organisations, and systems. Finally, I have documented the limitations of this research and the areas for future exploration.

8.1. A personal note

This research has pulled me from a state of being bewitched, amputated or dead and awakened me to a fuller view of my life, my self-authorship and the joy and pain that can be found therein. It has allowed me to start moving through my own points of stuckness towards a more fluid existence.

Completing this doctorate has been a profound and personal journey for me and I am deeply grateful that I had the opportunity to do something so incredibly transformational for myself. When I see doctorates that lack this inner personal grounding, I profoundly appreciate the way the NSPC and my supervisors work. Thank you.

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10. APPENDIXES

10.1. Appendix A: Six literature review processes

Below is a table providing additional detail on the six literature review processes employed in this study.

Literature review process	Orientation of literature review	New areas of development
One: initial review	• Listing of versions of stuckness according to different modalities, fields and orientations • Extensive and sometimes wooden and unintegrated descriptions of stuckness, superficial existential reading, working largely with the ideas of stuckness as opposite to freedom and responsibility and stuckness as not being a state of negative abnormality	
Two: Pap Viva feedback integrated	• Integration of more definitions of stuckness and freedom • Wooden outline of methodology • Beginning to understand the value of and normalcy in getting stuck	• Deepening the existential orientation of the research working mainly with Kierkegaard, Sartre, Fanon, Biko • Still struggling to find a working definition of leadership stuckness
Three: Pilot study completed	• View of individual identity more fully developed • Growing understanding of methodology needed for this kind of research	• Strong focus on identity formation and the process of stuckness as a process of identity formation • Still struggling to find a working definition of leadership stuckness
Four: All data harvested and analysed ad reflexivity integrated	• The data and my own reflexivity explorations led to a full focus on stuckness as a relationship • Greater integration and development of themes of stuckness • Greater focus on the context • Greater focus on benefits and normalcy of stuckness	• New and more appropriate working definition of stuckness • Focused more fully on the relationship and contextual aspects of stuckness • Reviewing definitions of stuckness and locating an appropriate working definition • Reading Heidegger more deeply • Attachment pattern research
Five: Review before submission	• Final review for first submission to supervisors	• Final review of literature to ensure that no new and relevant publications had become available
Six: Final review	• Reorganisation around the specific questions this research seeks to answer	• Reorganisation around the specific questions this research seeks to answer

10.2. Appendix B: Types of meaning

Extrapolated from Vos (2020)

Materialist types of meaning	The value of having material goods or visible success • Material conditions Finances, housing, possessions, practical activities, physical survival • General and social success General success, social status, power • Educational success • Professional success in career and profession
Hedonistic types of meaning	The value of the self • Hedonistic–experiential activities Hedonism, fun, leisure, and joyful activities, enjoying beauty (music, art, eating, drinking, etc.), peak experiences, pain avoidance • Enjoyment in nature and with animals • Enjoyment of the body Being healthy, healthy lifestyle, sports, sex
Self-orientated types of meaning	The value of the self • Resilience (coping successfully with difficult life situations) Flexibility, perseverance, and hardiness, acceptance of challenges, effective coping skills, positive and hopeful perspective • Self-efficacy Effective actions in daily life (setting specific activities or goals, planning, organising, discipline, evaluating and adjusting daily life, activities, or goals), being in control • Self-acceptance Self-insight, self-acceptance, self-worth
Social types of meaning	Underlying value: the value of being connected with others, belonging to a specific community and improving the well-being of others. and children in particular • Feeling socially connected Sociability, friends, family, intimate relationships/partner • Belonging to a specific community Family, community, history, and society • Following social expectations Doing what is socially expected, following social virtues, conformism, tradition • Altruism • Giving birth and taking care of children the sake of that larger value.
Larger types of meaning	Purposes Specific higher goals, purposes, aims or dreams in life Authenticity Following the perceived true self Personal growth Self-development, self-transcendence, self-realisation, fulfilling one's potential, authenticity, wisdom Temporality Sense of coherence, future oriented, reflection on the past, legacy, after-life, position in life span, little time or resources left Justice and ethics Following ethical standards, being treated in a just way, contributing to a just world Spirituality and religion Spirituality and religion, beliefs, worship and religious practices, insight into cosmic meaning, spiritual union, peace, harmony and balance, Platonic Ideal or Highest Good
Existential-philosophical types of meaning	Not one specific value – more abstract • Being alive: Being born, feeling alive, being until death • Uniqueness: The unique individuality of one's own experiences, own life, own world. and own self • Connectedness with the world and others Being in the world, being in context, being in relationships • Individual freedom: Freedom of decision, freedom to decide born as a gift or miracle that one did not ask for but that one regards as highly precious and special, and to which one responds with gratitude • Responsibility: Individual responsibility for oneself to live a meaningful life according to one's highest values

10.3. Appendix C: Visual reflexivity work

Below are some drawings of my stuckness completed over the past 4 years.

10.4. Appendix D: Excerpts from written reflexivity work

Below are excerpts from diary entries and other reflexivity writings completed during the 4 years of this research.

10.4.1. Writing this document under COVID and lockdown

One would imagine that lockdown would support the writing of this thesis, but no it seems to exacerbate my frustration at being locked up with this enormous piece of work to complete. COVID has amplified every sense or tiny iota of stuckness in me. My life has been reduced to more housework, more childcare and home schooling, health regimes like waking up early to use the government allocated exercise times, making sure we have food and toilet paper for now and in case of a shortage, not using up my limited stocks of alcohol or fishing about in my networks for bootlegged alcohol (alcohol sales banned in SA for five months under lockdown). And then panicking about my business, money, my child's future, my e-husbands string of new girlfriends and whether they will infect my child and much, much more. And then this enormous piece of work to complete in this context of anxiety and frustration.

COVID lockdown feels like the worst of stuckness, it makes everything painful; in particular relationships. You can't see people or the people you can see are the only ones you can see and they become annoying, as does life in general.

I can't flow in the world as I used to. The previous constant change in my context has allowed me to avoid things that I now have to deal with.

My experience of being stuck at home during COVID forced me to examine the high levels of travel I was doing for work, my relationship with my child and with my partner and my need to re-formulate my relationship with my family of origin. But before I could notice this I had to go through the pain of feeling stuck in my life due to COVID, including the way in which quarantine and isolation amplifies areas of stuckness. In these ways stuckness, even amplified stuckness due to COVID was useful to me in that it has catalysed the re-formation of many parts of my life.

10.4.2. ADHD and Grounded Theory

I am thoroughly imbued with ADHD, I can't sit still or work in one place for more than 20 minutes. I don't take Ritalin although I think it sounds very nice, I just have not gotten around to getting it.(I have tried but get distracted on the way – heheha). When I am finished this doctorate I am going to do chicken therapy – you have to learn how to sit still long enough for a chicken to sit on your lap. Hahahaha I have always loved chickens and there off I go again on a tangent, entertaining myself.

GT means that one hops about between the literature review, reflexivity, findings and analysis. I like doing this because I don't get bored working in just one section of the document at a time. I like to follow themes throughout the document, hopping about and not working in a linear way. Sometimes I get distracted while hopping about and don't finish weaving themes in correctly. I hope I have caught all these instances in my work.

I think this writing and thinking behaviour worries my doctoral colleague and my supervisor, both of whom work in a linear fashion. I think it's hard for them to see a document with holes. I am not sure if this worries me.

GT seems to be an excuse for hopping about and I am grateful for that. I am just secretly hoping that this document is not too fragmented and makes sense for someone with a more common

neurological profile. I have tried over and over to compensate for this, by weaving in signposts all over the document. I hope I have not overdone this.

10.4.3. Understanding that stuckness is a sign of something going right

Although I superficially understood that there must be some value in stuckness, I could not deeply understand this in terms of my own life. I could see that stuckness could be a necessary holding pattern informed by practical concerns like earning a living or being able to care of children as a single mother. It was only when I started reflecting on my business and how things had got stuck there that I realised stuckness could be a kind-of incubation and then re-set with the purpose of creating a more engaging and inspiring life.

10.4.4. What I learned from hating my first round of coding

My first round of coding was done in between interviews and in a disciplined and dull way. At the same time I was overwhelmed by my job, relationship troubles and being a mother. I was failing everywhere but I just kept on keeping on with the coding, even though I became more and more resentful of the work, hours and even the personalities involved in the research. There seemed to be a lot of people who talked themselves up, did not take responsibility for their mistakes, blamed others, had easy going and supportive lives, had holidays, had lots of money and generally had everything I wanted but could not have. In particular this meant that they allowed themselves a good view of themselves, time off, support and some freedom with regards to money. And me, I just had to stoically carry on, alone with my dull data, grumpy boyfriend (sorry if you are reading this), unhelpful child, and limited income. Poor me, where is the wine? And it was all my fault because I had chosen this life. Thank you Sartre and Biko.

It was when I started to see the role of the context more fully in the data that I started to think about how I was being too hard on myself, only focussing on where I was not good enough and forcing myself to keep on going on and on and on. I was using very old coping skills of self-blame, autonomy and control as a way to survive. Times were tough, it was COVID, recession, political troubles, power-shedding, we have to pivot our entire business to stay alive and we were struggling to find new clients. It was not all my fault, and maybe it was not all my participants fault either. The more context I gave my participants, the more context I gave myself and the less self-blame, flagellation and castigation I involved myself in.

This meant that the data started to live for me and in some weird way became a source of redemption for me and my participants. We were no longer the bad eggs and this new status made my life much easier.

10.4.5. Understanding that getting out of stuckness can be a kind of redemption and that redemption requires others

There were many times when I behaved badly while stuck. Getting angry, blaming others and adopting various passive aggressive routines were just some of the ways in which I responded to the frustration of feeling stuck. This behaviour created a lot of shame in me which in turn made my behaviour worse. I knew I was stuck and behaving badly but just could not get over the shame of myself to be able to pull myself out and restructure the situation. I tried and tried and tried, making myself a blame target in my organisation just as I had as a child. I just could not offer myself redemption and forgiveness.

Others tried to help me but I often interpreted this as a way of blaming me and this escalated the problem. I watched many movies to try to understand how people who had committed atrocities carried on living with themselves and I finally realised that I could not do it alone. I needed others to forgive me and help me get back to myself. I was blessed in having work colleagues and

a partner that enabled me to be vulnerable and hesitantly and slowly I began to take in their care for me and their forgiveness of my behaviour and withdrawal. Of course this was not so clean but broadly they, mainly him, enabled me to come back into relationship with me and work more positively with my shame. I realised that I needed others to become unstuck and I need others to redeem me from my own shame.

10.4.6. A paradoxical relationship with corporates

I have always struggled with positivism and a scientific approach to business. It seemed completely inappropriate to try to make business like science when it was something that people do and when it works well, it is like art.

I have always railed against fitting into corporates and adjusting who one is to what one was required to me.

I detest some of the objectifying and neutralising language used in corporates and the pat trendy phrases that are thrown into the sticky spaces of human relationships.

And I need to work in this world and corporates seem to pay so well and I have so many friends there and and and

10.4.7. Fighting the Queens English and learning about writing-for-me-and-others

I have ADHD and a quick brain that flies about, making connections and reading metanarratives. I read everything from makeup tips to Heidegger and I can often find real connections between these worlds. I use metaphors to build ideas because I can see commonalities and metanarratives everywhere. Sometimes I get insights that no one saw coming, that change the game completely. Sometimes I don't. Sometimes I feel like I am Carrie from Homeland with her crazy head and need to save the world.

I have a very idiosyncratic way of expressing myself. I taught a course on philosophy and psychology, and one of the participants called me the female Zizek. I was not sure whether to be offended or not. I was not sure if it was because of the ticks I have, the way I communicated or the content I was teaching. I am hoping it's the content.

I have a very odd relationship with language and terminology. On the one hand, I adore words and make an effort to use as much of my vocabulary as I can and be precise in how I talk and write. My therapist said my use of a broad vocabulary was a form of boasting and maybe it is, or maybe it is a form of joy in the use of words.

I hate jargon and pat phrases because they often get used inaccurately, often used as a way to project a certain view of oneself (professional, up to date, successful), are bland and lack life. I honestly feel murderous when people say they want to <u>reach out</u> to x,y,z. I hate the language of the OD community most, because it blands things out, positions the speaker as virtuous and is dummed down and flavoured by New Age bullshit where everyone is loving, and no-one is real. I try to avoid these words and terms, but I sometimes do use them, probably in the same way as the people I despise.

I also have a thing about the Queens English. As a South African I get quite riled up when people say that there is only one way to write English and it is the Queens English. I want to stand with my fist in the air and shout Jou moer Margaret, Jy maak my befok, ek sallie (Translation: Your mother Margaret (said in an obscene and abusive way) you make me very cross, I refuse to follow your guidelines). Course this is very childish and sadly because I am a bit English and have an English passport I have been coming over and fighting the English in England for a very long time and now I am doing an English degree. (Yes the irony is not lost on me).

I have a similar response to academic language, sorry examiner. I decided that I would play the game this time but now I find when I am writing I have huge resistance to doing so. As I write I find I want to ignore conventions and write an intimate and private doctorate that avoids positivism and values the nature of humans (ontology). I want to put my joy and tears into every page because this doctorate means so much to me.

I have had feedback that I am charismatic and engaging and also that some people can't understand me or follow the flight of ideas. I refer to too many authors and jump all over. This behaviour gets worse when I am having fun, enjoying words and ideas. When this happens, this feels like I am a dog running on the beach chasing seagulls, I have an inexplicable joy in my ability to run.

My experience is that not everyone can understand me, and that this is a function of me and not the content I am teaching although this can be also be complex and tricky at times. The people that struggle with me in particular are those that think linearly, believe in the existence of one certain right way of doing things, believe that emotional modulation is the key to being understood and need all the detail to make the connections in order to hop about with me. Actually when I am in full flow, which is really not that often, very few people can understand me, even I struggle.

I have been teaching adults at many levels for 28 years. During this time I have made a huge effort to be understood. I talk slowly, change my accent, try to keep it linear and not abstract and try to put in details where I think people want them. I even work hard to segue from one idea to another. This is very hard work for me that can often be boring and annoying. It can also be exciting if I think about the work as making ideas accessible for people.

I suspect this business of not allowing any communication or writing convention define how I express myself, is just more aspect of the same distrust of authority and you are not the boss-of-me-ness that I have come to accept as part of my usual behavioural and affective repertoire.

So now that I have laid out the landscape, I can articulate the paradox that I am facing and that is writing-for-me and writing-for-others. (I have added the hyphens because this is after all, a Heideggerian-ish-ish doctorate). This is strangely an incredibly painful thing for me to face and I had a very difficult supervision session around this.

My supervisor asked and inferred questions like; do you want to be understood, do you want to examiners to pass you, do you want to write a good doctorate, what do you want to do with your research, what about the people who are receiving your research. And I took this even further to, are you going to insult your examiner by not using language conventions they are familiar with, are you ok with this if you do?

My supervisor challenged me again with …. Have you considered that writing is a relationship and your research on stuckness is about a relationship and now you are denying this relationship in the way you write? You say authenticity is what gets you out of stuckness, but I am wondering if this works in this instance, that more authenticity is the cure for problems caused by authenticity. This really hurt and I cried because it was true, I did not know how to write-for-myself-and-others, I did not even know how to be in the world for myself and others.

10.5. Appendix E: Sampling decisions

Participant	Information I was looking for in the next interview based on existing data and emerging narrative	Critical and new information obtained from that interview
Nettie	Pilot study, broad process of stuckness with high degree of phenomenological exploration.	Pilot study, broad process of stuckness with high degree of phenomenological exploration. Nine years of stuckness. Sexism aspects of stuckness. Dismissed for fraud.
Paolo	More understanding of the context in which the stuckness occurred and an example of someone who left of their own volition. What are the benefits of stuckness?	Broader context in which stuckness occurs including organisation, country, deeper understanding of culture's role in stuckness. Short term stuckness and person left of own accord but had no job to go to. Benefits can allow one to build energy to leave a bad system
Archie	An example of getting stuck in one's own business, or in one's life for example retirement after being CEO, deeper understanding of childhood events that could have contributed to stuckness	Setting up own business, childhood experiences that may have contributed to experience, older more mature perspective, contextual elements of stuckness. Experience of retirement as a loss of traction in the world.
Sandra	Early departure from stuck situations and high degree of personal mobility, impact of addiction on stuckness	Early departure from stuck situations and high degree of personal mobility, impact of addiction on stuckness. Some aspects of stuckness as boredom.
Juliet	Interaction between personal and professional stuckness, high levels of awareness around repeating stuckness. Stuckness as a function of avoiding feeling. Deeper understanding of the process of stuckness.	Interaction between personal and professional stuckness, high levels of awareness around repeating stuckness. Stuckness as a function of avoiding feeling.
Astrid	How long can events go on for, what predisposes a person to not move, how much self will someone give up	Stoic, diligent person continuing to try and meet organisational requirements despite poor results. Two years of intense stuckness. Impact of stuckness of the person and others.
Stephen	A participant that stayed and was able to resolve the situation	Only participant that was able to solve the problem and stay in organisation. Stuckness related to not feeling enough.
James	Majority individual in a majority culture – do they still feel an outsider? Childhood experiences	Good relationship with mom, able to be grateful, knowingly making trade-offs, moving on quickly, not feeling like an outsider
Richard	What about known trade-offs – for the money	Yes, he stayed in the job for an extra 3 years for the money – it snuck up on him, he thought it was ok, but it was not
Willem	Broader depression, experience of the void, race and identity. Death	Experience from another race group. Broader depression, experience of the void, race and identity. His death likely suicide.

10.6. Appendix F: Data tables on the participants

All data was coded like this as secondary process after NVIVO. This is an example of one of the data tables, the others are available on request and relate to the context, process, experience, value and definition of stuckness.

Background

Coming from a poorer background	7: P1,2,3,4,6,7,10	P3, 326	*we were lower middle class*
Being an outsider as a child Not known: P3,4,8,9	6: P1,2,6,7,10,4	P2, 631 P10, 1192, 1154	*Prior to this, when I grew up, you know, walking to school, and I would get beaten up by Afrikaans people.* *fuck yeah I was always an outsider I was always called an outsider* *because I feel I have been made an outsider, but I also have made myself an outsider*
Growing up in rural areas or small town	7: P2,3,4,6,7,9 10	P2, P10, P6, P7, P9	*Description of growing up on a farm* *Description of growing up in a small town*

Racial identity

Disconnected from racial identity	2: P10, 7	P10, 173-174, 187, 206-210 P7, 736	*And to be honest with you actually really very much ran away from the coloured identity in xx cape where I grew up… and almost created a persona that was completely the complete opposite of that person.* *when you're a kid and you're watching TV and stuff, whatever you always saw that you know it would be white people driving these fancy cars and living in these bowl or whatever and that was that ideal life.* *And so I don't like. I don't feel deeply part of a white South African crowd that I don't want to be associated with idiots in it,*

Parental dynamics

Father information Nice guys - Corporate slave (M), Musician (M) Critical - Headmaster (M) Unknown : P1, 2, 6,	5: P9,3,4,10,7 P7, 5	P3,334, P10 P7, 221	*He really, truly was a slave to his company which he worked for 42 years*
Mother information Stay at home	9: P1,2,3,4,5, 6,7,8,9 4: P3,4,5,6	 P4 P3, 275	*my mother was extremely critical, very domineering.* *My mother was Attila the hun* *my grandmother was also a bit of a battle axe* *Mother was working in another town* *Sent to live with another family member*

Critical, demanding and perfectionistic Growing up without mother Mother with anxiety Helpful and useful mother – close to mother (all M) Mother having illegitimate affairs	2: P6,10 P6, 10 5 4: P9,8,7,10	P10, 863 P10 P6 P5, 394 P7, 8, 9 P10	*My mother wouldn't go more than like, a kilometre way from the house* *Narratives of receiving advice and support from mother* *she ended up 1224 having a string of illegitimate affairs with married men, that became the 1225 talk of the town, and that thing has become the thing for me about like 1226 gossip. I hate gossip, my mother became the source of gossip*
Growing up away from both parents	4: P2,9,6,10	P10 P9, 318 P6	*So as a result, my mother was living in Cape Town I was living with my grandparents, I grew up alone.* *I went to boarding school from the age of eight,* Narrative of went to live with harsh aunt so could attend high school
Growing up quickly Don't know: 1, 8	7: P2,3,5,6,7, 9,10	P2, 3, 6, 5 P4,	Narratives of boarding school, living in tough neighbourhoods, mother depressed and needed looking after *Absolutely. I stood on my own two feet from a very young age.*
Self-esteem built through service to parents and family	2: P2,5	P5, 807-812	*Yeah. Because it's terribly unrewarding. not satisfying everyone else's needs. Yeah. Because you are having no value. Yeah. And that's how you esteemed was built around. Being in service.*
Autonomy, looking after self, rescuing self Don't know: P1, P9	7:P2,3,4,5,6,7,10	P4, 12	*I had a habit of rescuing myself*
Brought up in an abusive relationship	1: P4	P4,56	*I was brought up in an abusive relationship - it was what was normal for me. I did not know how to be a different person, and to a point in my career I let that happen there as well. I just knew how to be that.*

Personality

Good child	6: P3,6,7,8,9,10	P3, 279	*No, no, no. I was a complete conformist* *Narratives of the good child*
Having rigid moral belief systems that are conservative	1: P7	P7, 653-654	*I can remember some embarrassing things I did because I believed it was right from a Christianity perspective.*
Not ok to say what is right for me	1: P7	P7, 592-593	*we are not allowed to say this is right for me*
Enjoying hard work Hard workers	6: P2,3,5,6,7,8	P8, 110-111 P6	*And I also enjoy being committed to something like I really enjoy the intensity of work.* *Narratives of working hard*

Not being emotional	6: P2,4,5,6,7,9	P7, 329, 101-106	*I'm not emotional – I consider that a massive boundary 7: I did have emotion, by the way, the other thing apart from responsibility to others, I place a really high bar on internal metrics of control, and responsibility and acting in the right way. So I hold myself to the extremely high bar, and that also (interferes significantly I: says this and repeated by 7)) So emotions for me. You should notice I'm not an expressive person when it comes to emotion.*
Sheltered from hurt as a child	1: P10	P10, 988-989, 993-994	*Exactly, that's the thing like she chose to shelter me from hurt so much … it was the grey boredom, dull.*
Self-doubt	1: P10	P10, 600-604	*So I don't know what that story is - there is a deep insecurity - there is a deep issue of self-doubt and there's also a deep issue of fear of failure as well, but sometimes I even think that is also fear of success even manifesting itself was a fear of fear of failure to what if I do, you know, succeed.*
Sense of being bad or not good enough	7: P1,2,3,4,5,6, 10	P10, 1414-1415	*so that sense of being so profoundly bad you could kill*
Imposter syndrome	1: P10	P10, 772-773	*I question myself. No, God and also imposter fucking hell that seriously*
Easy access to anger	7:P1,2,3,4,5,6, 10		*Narratives of losing temper*
Little access to anger	3: P7,8,9	P7, 451, 466	*anger is the one that I give myself least in terms of my life values. I think it is hurtful and inappropriate to lash out in that way*
Having a strong personality	7:P1,2,3,4,5,6,10	P3, 742	*I have a very strong personality.*
Having higher standards than others	4: P1,2,6,7	P7, 537-538	*he said, you know what, basically he says you have an inner judge that judges your actions much harder than anybody else.*
Not feeling that can speak their truth	2: P6,7	P7, 592-593	*the world can't work without judgement. And my big issue of this time is judgement, we are not allowed to say this is right for me*
Needing meaningful work and a purpose	7:P9,1,5,2,4,8,10	P9, 430-432 P1, 121-122	*Because I need a goal, I think I need, I need a purpose, which is clear.* *I want to go to work to do something meaningful that makes a difference not to tick it off*
Expressing the need to be authentic Not clear: P7	9:P1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,10	P1, 400-401	*people always say that the most amazing thing about me is what you see is what you get and I'm the person that's not fake and that's prepared to say it. I cannot do it - I cannot do this corporate shit anymore.*
Being a straight talker	6:P1,2,3,4,5,10	P4, 376	*I had a lot of enemies' people didn't like being spoken to directly*

Addictions

Addiction -Alcohol, drugs, shopping, food	3: P4,5,10	P10, 129	*My addictive behaviour my addictions. Mine is alcohol food drugs*

Relationship to corporate

Not very ambitious wrt corporate role	6:P7,4,3,8,9,10	P8, 314 P10, 624	*I would hate to be the CEO* *friend of mine called me the reluctant messiah, like I'm not interested in being the one who, you know, who, you know, the top person.*
Ambitious wrt corporate role	4: P1,2,5,6	P6	*Whole narrative is that of wanting to be COO*
Having an erratic relationship with corporates	1: P6	P6, 355-358	*have this erratic emotional relationship with them because one day you're fantastic and the next day you're just nothing.*
People who need to prove themselves		P6, 354-357	*People try and prove themselves in order to get some feedback that they're just not going to get and so it just keeps repeating itself. People try harder and harder in order to prove themselves*
My desire to please hinders my career	1: P8	P8, 819-821	*And I guess that's also where my desire to please can hinder your career because I haven't been hardegat enough*
A whole generation trying to be ok through working hard	1: P6	P6, 380-381	*It's a whole generation of people that is just always working hard and trying hard to be Okay.*
Repeating patterns of relationship from childhood in jobs	1: P10	P10, 861-868	*And there's it isn't there's a couple of the things is that my grandmother was also a bit of a battle axe, when I would come home from school, and I wouldn't know what mood she would be - there was a persecution complex complex as well thing that I've got, and it's the same thing with the angry bosses, with bosses, and this is another thing that I struggled with at the DM, my CEO can be famous like that, you know, you don't know one day what he is going to be in the next day*
Not being visible in jobs	1: P8	P8, 821-823	*- that's another part of the reason that people that don't see me is because I'm not visible. I could have made myself much more visible. I could have done different things.*
Having a history of success	10:P1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	P3, 974 P6, 84-85	*I was extremely successful if I might say, in every single job* *I picked the top three business schools in the world, went out and graduated top of the class I almost killed myself that year.* *I've always been quite successful*

Inner readiness for a change

Ready for a shift – Inner changes creating the need for outer changes	2: P5,10	P5, 85-96 P5, 105-108	*But I'd been ready for a shift and a move fora long time. And I had to actually just again, like when I was in my early 20s, just be okay with the compromise. And at some level in the while, with L death and then having a hysterectomy - me physically, not strong. I'm at this crossroads with physically I'm acknowledging I've changed emotionally. I'm not the same person I was at any level.* *I think for years and years and years, I got in my car and drove to the same office and basically largely did the same shit all the time, and that worked for me but now*

10.7. Appendix G: The pilot interview

The first interview was with a volunteer referred to me by a work colleague. This senior leader had just been fired from a job and was very unhappy with how things had turned out for her. She talked with little prompting as she had much to express and I did not need all the questions that I had prepared for the meeting. The first session was 90 minutes and analysis on NVIVO produced 82 codes which I reduced to 30 through a painstaking line-by-line coding process which in itself revealed the importance of such detailed work (Charmaz, 2006).

The pilot interview suggested the following findings

- There is a process or spectrum of stuckness, with many shades of stuckness in between stuckness and unstuckness
- Stuckness is intensely related to the stuckness of one or more relationships
- The context is critical in the stuckness process, inner machinations on their own, may not always be a sufficient explanation for stuckness
- Stuckness is a complex interplay of intersecting inner and outer forms of stuckness
- Identity is at the core of stuckness
- Stuckness can be understood as a kind of death of existing identity, moving out of stuckness could be understood as a process of reinvigorating and expanding one's identity
- The experience is characterised by anger, self-judgement, shame, somatic symptoms, existential guilt and regret
- It is hard to find value in stuckness when you are stuck, and perhaps this is easier achieved after stuckness has begun releasing
- Stuckness can precipitate a more authentic and inner aligned way of being
- The notion of an emergent identity that changes constantly is critical to understanding the process of stuckness and becoming unstuck.

All of these findings were confirmed by later research and integrated within the broader data and analysis.

Reflexivity work on my pilot interview noted that I was too overly focused on the negative aspects of stuckness and that my background as a corporate coach and human development model maker has orientated me to processes rather than understanding the experience of participants. This is in line with the non-phenomenological orientation of this project

10.8. Appendix H: Participant documentation

The Department of Health and
Social Sciences
Middlesex University
Hendon
London NW4 4BT

5 Informed consent

Title: I Write What I Like… or Not: Leadership Emancipation from the Inside Out: A Grounded Theory Study of Leadership Stuckness and Release

Researcher: Julia Kukard

Supervisor: Dr Patricia Bonnici

- I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.
- I have been given contact details for the researcher in the debriefing sheet.
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.
- I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and I provide my consent that this may occur.

_____ _____

Print name Sign Name

Date: _____

To the participant: Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Health and Education Ethics committee of Middlesex University, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits: _____

The Department of Health and
Social Sciences
Middlesex University
Hendon
London NW4 4BT

Date: February 2018

Title: ***I Write What I Like… or Not: Leadership Emancipation from the Inside Out: A Grounded Theory Study of Leadership Stuckness and Release***

Invitation paragraph

Thank you for showing interest in taking part in this research. This participant information sheet outlines the research focus, your role and other important elements. Please read it carefully and let either my supervisor (Dr Patricia Bonnici) or me know if you have any questions.

What is the purpose of the research?

The research aims to understand how leaders get stuck and what this feels like for them. I would like to explore if and how leaders find value in stuckness and how this stuckness could be released. Finally I want to develop a methodology for releasing stuckness that could be used in a therapeutic context for leaders and others.

The definition of stuckness that I will be using for this research is as follows

- "1. being unable to go forward toward a future state of being;
- 2. being unable to go backward, to return to a prior state of being;
- 3. having the desire to move one way or another;
- 4. wanting to will something to happen but recognizing, if only dimly, that one's will is inconsequential;
- 5. hence, repeating the same gestures or remaining paralyzed while becoming half or fully aware of this repetition or this state of paralysis."(Taggart, 2012).

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen for this research because you are a senior leader and have shown interest in being a voluntary participant in this process.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is voluntary and you do not have to take part in this research.

What will happen to me if I take part?

I will interview you for approximately 50 minutes during which time you can also ask me any questions you may have about the research.

The interview will be recorded and then transcribed by myself. During the transcription process I will remove any identifying details. I will then send the transcript to you to read through and send me written

consent by email that I can use that transcript in my research. You can also require changes to the text where you believe there are identifying details that have not been removed.

What are the possible disadvantages to taking part?

It is possible that the questions may bring up difficult emotions for the interviewee. I will spend some time talking through this experience in the interview and should you feel you required additional support I will refer you to relevant agencies who are not connected to myself.

What are the possible advantages of taking part?

While there is no direct benefit to taking part in this study you may find the session valuable as a way to reflect on this aspect of your life and role.

Consent

Please sign the attached informed consent form if you agree to be interviewed for this research.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am paying my own tuition fees for the New School of Psychotherapy at Middlesex University. The research is not sponsored or paid for by anyone else.

Middlesex University and the NSPC are co-responsible for this research and will retain a copy of this research for ten years as a standard.

What will happen to the data?

I will record the interview on two digital recorders, in case one fails, and will transfer the files to an encrypted USB stick for storage, deleting the files from both recorders. All of the information that you provide me will be identified only with a project code and stored either on the encrypted USB stick, or in a locked filing cabinet. I will keep the key that links your details with the project code in a locked filing cabinet.

The information will be kept at least until 6 months after I graduate and will be treated as confidential. If my research personal and the research will be stored by Middlesex without this information for 10 years as required. No identifiable data will be is published, I will make sure that neither your name or other identifying details are used.

Data will be stored. according to the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

My supervisor may from time to time receive copies of the research in order to verify my work. She will store this on a password-protected computer and destroy the documents once the project is complete, that is once I have received my doctorate.

Who has reviewed the study?

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The NSPC Ethics Committee have reviewed this proposal.

Concluding section

Thank you for your attention, I appreciate your help in this.

Researcher: Julia Kukard

Supervisor:

10.9. Appendix I: Useful questions for working in a stage specific way

10.9.1. Questions for the first stage of stuckness: Loss of self and capacity for self-reflection

Four worlds	**Self-reflection, responsibility and a transcending ontology**
PHYSICAL DIMENSIONS (Umwelt)	How have I changed my home or work environment in the recent past? What is my physical state now and how has it changed? How does my physical experience impact on my experience of being in the world?
SOCIAL DIMENSIONS (Mitwelt)	What attachment patterns do I bring from my childhood? How have I replicated my familial patterns over time? How has the way in which I have relationships changed over time? Can I hold my own inner world as the truth, even as others disagree with this? Can I doubt part of myself, without doubting all of myself? What about me helps or hinders my self-knowledge and self-authorship? What parts of myself would I like to get rid of? What parts of me are validated by the outside world?
PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS (Eigenwelt)	What range and fluidity of feelings do I have? What is my relationship to myself? How do I harm myself? How has my version of myself changed over time? How have my values changed over time? How do I keep myself relevant psychologically without losing myself? What am I learning about myself? How do I work with self-criticism and shame?
SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS (Überwelt)	How has my religious or spiritual experience changed over time? How do I think about purpose in life? Is God immanent or transcendent for me? How do I understand grace, shame and forgiveness?

10.9.2. Questions for the second stage of stuckness: Loss of relationship

Four worlds	Humanising, transcending relationships
PHYSICAL DIMENSIONS (Umwelt)	How does my environment support relationships? Is my home constructed for others or just myself? How much physical intimacy and disclosure am I comfortable with?
SOCIAL DIMENSIONS (Mitwelt)	How do I feel about others? How do I respond to the group? Can I stand alone? How do I compete with others? How do I balance being-for-others with being-for-myself? What is the history of my intimate relationships? How do I deal with shame? What is my relationship to failure? Who really hears me? Who do I really hear? Can I hold boundaries and look after myself in the face of others?
PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS (Eigenwelt)	How open am I? What do I bring to relationships with others? How do I express difference in relationships?
SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS (Überwelt)	How do I think and feel about God and or a spiritual presence in relationship? How do I serve others without infantilising them?

10.9.3. Questions for the third stage of stuckness: Loss of meaning

Four worlds	Transcending meaning
PHYSICAL DIMENSIONS (Umwelt)	What meaning does my environment have for me? What are meaningful environments for me and why? What environments reflect my inner world?
SOCIAL DIMENSIONS (Mitwelt)	What is the meaning of others to me? Do I have meaningful community engagement? When do I feel touched by a relationship?
PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS (Eigenwelt)	What is the meaning of learning and personal development to me? What is absurd in your life? How do you deal with it?
SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS (Überwelt)	Where are my sources of meaning and purpose? Is meaning given to me or do I need to create it? What is the role of god and/or my spiritual beliefs in living a meaningful life?