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Navigating psychological crises in leadership transitions

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Navigating Psychological Crises in Leadership Transitions

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Abstract: This paper delves into the psychological crisis that leaders and managers in private higher education institutions (HEIs) encounter when transitioning into new job roles. The study employs Bridges' Transition Model to examine the internal obstacles and adaptive measures that emerge during the transitional phase, with a specific emphasis on the psychological dimensions of the transitions. The study utilised a qualitative research methodology and grounded theory approach that involved conducting in-depth interviews and analysing relevant documents to investigate the experiences of leaders and managers in the context of organisational transitions. The results of the study offer significant contributions to the field of organisational management, particularly in the area of leadership succession planning. The findings shed light on effective strategies for managing leadership transitions, promoting smoother transitions, and providing adequate support to individuals in leadership positions during periods of organisational change.

Keywords: psychological crises; leadership transitions; private higher education institutions; bridges' transition model; job role transitions.

Introduction

The study provides an overview of the difficulties encountered by leaders and managers when transitioning to new job roles within private higher education institutions (HEIs). In the current competitive environment, private higher education institutions (HEIs) face numerous challenges that require effective leadership and management (DeRue et al., 2011). One of the key challenges encountered by leaders and managers within these organisations concerns the proficient management of job role transitions. According to Charan et al. (2011), the act of transitioning is a complex process that requires individuals to possess adaptability, resilience, and a deep understanding of the intricate dynamics of the organisational context. The significance of comprehending the psychological crises that arise from leadership succession and the challenges faced during job role transitions is highlighted by the expansion and progress of private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and this need is becoming more pressing.

This study utilises Bridges' Transition Model (Bridges, 2003) as a framework to gain a deeper comprehension of the psychological crisis experienced by leaders during the process of transitioning job roles. The Bridges' Transition Model is a conceptual framework that encompasses three distinct phases, namely the Ending phase, the Neutral Zone phase, and the New Beginning phase. The aforementioned model serves to enable the discernment of diverse emotional and psychological reactions that leaders and managers might encounter during their transition to novel positions. In the context of this study, the Ending phase involves the acknowledgment of the conclusion of a leader's previous role and the potential anxiety, uncertainty, and loss associated with it. The Neutral Zone represents the period of uncertainty and disorientation that leaders may face as they try to adapt to new roles and responsibilities, which may result in feelings of isolation, lack of trust, and anxiety. Lastly, the New Beginning phase is characterized by

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leaders embracing their new roles, developing new skills, and establishing new relationships.

The objective of this study is to obtain a more comprehensive comprehension of the psychological difficulties encountered by leaders and managers in private higher education institutions during job role transitions by integrating Bridges' Transition Model into the analysis. This will, in turn, contribute to the development of more effective strategies and support systems that can facilitate smoother and healthier transitions for leaders in these institutions.

The purpose of this investigation is to examine the psychological quandary that emerges from the transfer of leadership authority and the difficulties encountered by leaders and managers during the process of transitioning job roles within privately-owned higher education institutions. The present study aims to offer a comprehensive comprehension of the emotional and psychological consequences of such transitions on the concerned individuals and to recognise plausible approaches for minimising potential hazards and fostering smoother transitions. The objective of this study is to enhance the existing literature on leadership succession and provide guidance for leaders and managers in private higher education institutions by analysing the intricate relationship between individual, organisational, and contextual factors. This research aims to facilitate the creation of practical interventions and support mechanisms.

Significant body of literature available on the issues associated with leadership transitions in corporate environments and public educational institutions. However, the specific and complex dynamics of private higher education institutions (HEIs) have received little attention in scholarly research. The difficulties of role transitions have been acknowledged by Charan et al. (2011). However, there is a lack of attention given to the unique subtleties, problems, and psychological consequences experienced by leaders in private higher education institutions. Moreover, a significant portion of the existing research primarily on the immediate and observable consequences of leadership transitions, such as enhanced role effectiveness and increased organisational productivity. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight the noticeable absence of research around the emotional and psychological obstacles encountered by leaders amongst these transformative processes. A gap exists in knowledge on the cognitive processes and behavioural adjustments undertaken by leaders when they assume new positions, particularly in the context of private higher education institutions. This gap is particularly pronounced when considering the complex emotional issues that these leaders encounter within the highly competitive and high-stakes atmosphere of such institutions.

The objective of this study is to fill the existing research gap by using the Bridges' Transition Model (Bridges, 2003) to get a comprehensive understanding of the profound psychological effects associated with leadership changes in the context of private higher education institutions. Furthermore, while the Bridges' Transition Model has been used in many settings, its applicability and significance in understanding the complexities of leadership transitions in private higher education institutions represent a unique research endeavour.

Literature Review

Psychological theories underpinning leadership succession and job role transitions

Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory

Bowlby's (1988) theory of attachment offers valuable insights into the emotional connections that individuals establish with others, particularly in the context of their early childhood encounters. According to the theoretical framework, the aforementioned bonds or attachments may have enduring implications for an individual's psychological welfare

and capacity to establish relationships during their adult years. Attachment theory can provide insight into the emotional responses of leaders and managers during job role transitions within the framework of leadership succession. According to Hill (2003), the experience of losing familiar work roles, relationships, and routines can elicit emotions of anxiety, insecurity, and grief that may impede an individual's capacity to effectively adjust to new roles and responsibilities. In line with this, Mikulincer and Shaver (2016) affirm that understanding attachment styles can indeed be instrumental for effective leadership, especially during transitions, suggesting that leaders' attachment styles can significantly impact their reactions to change and their ability to successfully assume new roles.

Festinger's (1957) concept of cognitive dissonance

According to Festinger's (1957) Cognitive Dissonance Theory, individuals undergo psychological distress when they confront incongruities between their beliefs and actions, or when they maintain conflicting beliefs. The state of discomfort experienced by an individual can potentially trigger a response aimed at reducing cognitive dissonance. This response may involve modifying one's beliefs, attitudes, or behaviours. Leadership succession can give rise to cognitive dissonance, wherein leaders and managers experience conflicting roles, responsibilities, values, or expectations that challenge their prior identities. The incongruity between one's new roles and pre-existing self-concept can potentially lead to a psychological dilemma (De Meuse et al., 2010).

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress-coping theory

The theory of stress-coping, which was formulated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), provides a theoretical framework for comprehending the psychological and emotional reactions to stressors and the coping mechanisms that individuals utilise to manage stress. As per this theoretical framework, individuals engage in an appraisal process wherein they evaluate stressors as either posing a threat or presenting a challenge. The coping strategies that they employ are contingent upon their appraisal of the situation. Within the realm of leadership succession, the process of transitioning to new job roles can be viewed as a notable source of stress, prompting a range of emotional responses and coping strategies. According to Day (2000), an individual's capacity to manage the transition is contingent upon their cognitive evaluation of the circumstance and the resources at their disposal. Quick and Wright (2011) emphasize that the individual's perceived ability to cope with stress can significantly impact their overall stress response. This perspective may shed light on how leaders respond to and manage the stress associated with role transitions.

Factors contributing to the psychological crisis during leadership succession

The individual's comprehension of emerging challenges is restricted

A restricted comprehension of the novel job responsibilities linked with leadership succession is a contributing factor to the psychological turmoil experienced during this process. According to Gagné and Deci (2005), inadequate understanding of the anticipated duties, accountabilities, and possible hindrances associated with a novel role can intensify emotions of apprehension, ambiguity, and strain. Insufficient readiness for these difficulties could impede an individual's capacity to adjust and execute proficiently in their fresh position, thereby exacerbating the psychological predicament. Additionally, Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2015) argues that clarity and understanding of the role requirements are critical during leadership transitions. An individual's lack of understanding can not only add to the stress but also negatively impact their performance in the new role, which underscores the need for effective transition planning and role clarification.

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The lack of structured educational and instructional initiatives

Insufficient provision of structured instruction and mentorship initiatives for leaders and managers who are transitioning into new job roles can intensify the psychological distress. Insufficient assistance and direction may impede the acquisition of essential proficiencies, aptitudes, and introspection essential for triumph in novel positions (Spreitzer, 1995). Insufficient training and coaching can also lead to a feeling of seclusion, as individuals may perceive themselves as being insufficiently prepared to handle the intricacies and difficulties of their recent roles (Goleman et al., 2013).

The concept of restricted autonomy

The curtailment of autonomy in the context of leadership succession may lead to a psychological crisis as it restricts the capacity of individuals to exert influence and engage in decision-making in their newly assumed positions. According to Ryan and Deci's (2000) research, autonomy plays a crucial role in both psychological well-being and motivation. The experience of limitations on autonomy during job role transitions may result in a sense of disempowerment and disengagement among leaders and managers. This, in turn, may lead to heightened levels of stress, dissatisfaction, and a perception of crisis. Furthermore, limited autonomy may hinder the cultivation of self-efficacy and resilience, both of which are crucial for effectively adjusting to novel roles and obligations (Herzberg, 1968; Luthans et al., 2008).

Leadership transition theoretical frameworks

Nicholson's transition cycle model

Nicholson's Transition Cycle Model (1984) focuses on the adaptive responses to changes in job roles. It comprises four stages: preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization. The preparation stage involves anticipating and planning for the upcoming transition, while the encounter stage refers to the initial experience of the new role. The adjustment stage is characterized by learning and adapting to the new role, and finally, the stabilization stage marks the completion of the transition process, with the individual becoming fully integrated into the new role. In contrast to Bridges' Transition Model, which emphasizes psychological processes, Nicholson's model highlights the behavioural adjustments that individuals make during transitions. Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) expanded the understanding of transitional stages, emphasizing the importance of identity work and social connections during role transitions. They argued that transitions are not just about behavioural adjustments, but also about reshaping one's professional identity to match the requirements of the new role.

Schlossberg's transition theory

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981) takes a broader approach to understanding transitions by examining the individual and contextual factors that shape one's experience during a transition. Schlossberg identifies four major sets of factors that influence an individual's ability to cope with transitions: the individual's situation, self, support, and strategies. The situation refers to the specific circumstances surrounding the transition, the self encompasses the individual's personal characteristics, support pertains to the availability of social support networks, and strategies involve the individual's coping mechanisms. Schlossberg's Transition Theory Complements Bridges' model by emphasizing the role of contextual factors in shaping one's experience during a transition. Anderson et al. (2012) further emphasized the role of these factors in transitions, particularly the role of coping strategies and support networks. They underscored that transitions are multifaceted experiences, influenced not only by the individual's inner processes but also by their interpersonal relationships and environment, underlining the importance of a comprehensive, individualized approach to managing transitions.

Bridges' transition model

Bridges' Transition Model (2003) is a widely recognized and influential framework that offers a comprehensive understanding of the psychological processes individuals undergo during transitions. The model, developed by William Bridges, consists of three distinct phases: ending, neutral zone, and new beginning. Each phase represents a different stage of the transition process and is characterized by unique emotional and psychological experiences. By focusing on the internal dynamics of transitions, Bridges' model provides invaluable insights into the emotional responses, coping mechanisms, and adaptive strategies that individuals employ while navigating change. The model has been extensively applied in various contexts, such as organizational change, career transitions, and personal life events, proving its versatility and relevance across diverse scenarios. In the context of this study, Bridges' Transition Model serves as a solid foundation for exploring and analysing the psychological crises that leaders and managers in private HEIs may face during job role transitions, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges and strategies for effectively managing these transitions. Kegan and Lahey (2016) who argue that the success of navigating transitions is not only about managing the stages but also about fostering a continuous process of learning and development. They suggest that individuals' capacity to manage transitions is enhanced when they are able to transform these experiences into opportunities for personal growth and self-understanding. This viewpoint can provide a profound lens through which to examine the psychological complexities of leadership transitions in private HEIs.

Adopted theoretical framework for this study

The analysis in this study is primarily based on Bridges' Transition Model (Bridges, 2003) due to its focus on the psychological processes that individuals undergo during transitions. This model is particularly relevant for examining the psychological crises that leaders and managers in private HEIs may experience during job role transitions, as it addresses the internal challenges and coping strategies that can arise throughout the process. While Nicholson's Transition Cycle Model (Nicholson, 1984) and Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1981) offer valuable insights into the adaptive responses and contextual factors that shape one's experience during a transition, the emphasis on psychological processes in Bridges' model provides a more focused approach to understanding the specific challenges faced by leaders and managers in private HEIs. By concentrating on the psychological aspects of transitions, the analysis can delve deeper into the internal experiences of the individuals undergoing the leadership transitions. Moreover, the three-phase structure of Bridges' Transition Model (Bridges, 2003) lends itself well to the qualitative research methodology employed in this study, as it facilitates the organization and analysis of interview and observational data. The model's clear delineation of the stages of transition – ending, neutral zone, and new beginning – provides a framework that allows for the identification of potential challenges and coping strategies at each stage. Recent studies have further emphasised the relevance and importance of these models, based on the above-mentioned integrated framework. Oreg et al. (2018) emphasised the efficacy of Bridges' Transition Model in comprehensively capturing the intricate emotional and psychological experiences that accompany leadership transitions. The authors highlighted the significance of this particular model, especially when employed in conjunction with Schlossberg's Transition Theory, as it provides a comprehensive structure for comprehending the complex nature of these transitions. Moreover, Ashford (2019) has emphasized the value of Nicholson's Transition Cycle Model in elucidating the process and stages of adjustment during leadership transitions, arguing that this model, together with Bridges' Transition Model, provides a robust and detailed picture of the complexities involved in such transitions.

While Nicholson's Transition Cycle Model (Nicholson, 1984) and Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1981) contribute to a comprehensive understanding of leadership transitions, the analysis in this study is primarily based on Bridges' Transition Model because of its focus on the psychological processes and its suitability for the qualitative

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research methodology. The integration of these models in the literature review, however, ensures that the overall understanding of leadership transitions remains well-rounded and thorough.

Understanding psychological crises during leadership succession using Bridges' transition model

Ending phase

The Ending phase of Bridges' model (Bridges, 2003; Nicholson, 1984; Schlossberg, 1981) can provide insight into the emotional effects of departing from a prior position and the apprehension that accompanies the transition to a new one. Bowlby's (1988) Attachment Theory emphasises the possibility of experiencing anxiety, insecurity, and grief during the Ending phase, as individuals undergo the loss of familiar work roles, relationships, and routines. Furthermore, the Cognitive Dissonance Theory proposed by Festinger in 1957 highlights the potential psychological discomfort that can arise from inconsistencies between an individual's pre-existing self-concept and their newly acquired roles. Taylor and Walton (2020) have further explored the emotional and cognitive challenges during transitional phases. They highlight the potential for cognitive dissonance and identity disruption, further emphasizing the complexity of emotions and psychological adjustments necessary during the Ending phase of role transitions.

Neutral zone

According to Bridges' (2003) theory, the Neutral Zone is distinguished by a state of ambiguity, perplexity, and a perception of being in a transitional phase between prior and current roles. The Stress-Coping Theory developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) can be applied to comprehend the psychological and emotional responses to stressors in the current phase, as well as the coping strategies employed by individuals to regulate stress. The Neutral Zone is a phase that may entail an assessment procedure, whereby individuals assess stressors associated with leadership succession and formulate coping mechanisms based on their evaluation. Carver and Scheier (2017) provide an expanded perspective on stress-coping strategies. They emphasize how self-regulatory processes and goal adjustment can play a key role in managing the uncertainty and stress inherent in this transitional phase, offering a nuanced understanding of the coping mechanisms utilized during leadership succession.

New beginning

According to Bridges' model, during the initial phase of New Beginning, individuals commence the process of accepting their new roles, creating novel identities, and forging fresh relationships (Bridges, 2003). According to existing literature, there are various factors that contribute to the psychological crisis experienced during this phase. These factors include limited understanding of emerging challenges (Gagné & Deci, 2005), inadequate educational and instructional programmes (Goleman et al., 2013; Spreitzer, 1995), and limited autonomy (Herzberg, 1968; Luthans et al., 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Several factors can exacerbate emotions of unease, uncertainty, stress, isolation, powerlessness, and discontentment, which can impede an individual's ability to adapt and perform effectively in their new role.

This literature review offers a comprehensive understanding of the psychological crises that leaders and managers encounter during job role transitions, by incorporating Bridges' Transition Model with the aforementioned theories. The model functions as a theoretical framework to facilitate the examination of the present psychological crisis in this study, enabling to recognise prospective obstacles and adaptive mechanisms. The present study will employ Bridges' Transition Model to analyse the reactions and encounters of leaders and managers in the course of these transitions. The insights derived from this model are utilised for data collection and analysis.

Broadening the perspective: a multi-faceted view of leadership transitions

Building on the initial insights into the psychological underpinnings of leadership transitions in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), it is essential to further explore the dynamics of these transitions. While the emotional and cognitive processes are undoubtedly pivotal, leadership roles in academic settings are influenced by a myriad of factors. Some of these are proactive decisions taken by individuals, while others are structured interventions by institutions to facilitate smoother role transitions. It is crucial to holistically understand these nuances to paint a comprehensive picture of leadership transitions in HEIs.

Proactivity in leadership transitions

The psychological theories that have been examined, generally centre on the difficulties and emotional outcomes associated with leadership changes. However, it is important to acknowledge the proactive aspect inherent in these transitions. The leadership position is an active endeavour, since it involves a deliberate decision made by persons who are generally cognizant of the forthcoming difficulties they will face. According to Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy, people often have a belief in their capacity to effectively carry out the necessary activities to handle potential scenarios. Hence, those with aspirations for leadership often possess a perception of being adequately prepared, to a certain degree, to confront the imminent obstacles and possess confidence in their capacity to acquire knowledge and adjust accordingly (Bandura, 1997).

The role of training and preparation

The current educational environment has recognised the complex difficulties that come with leadership transition, particularly in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Numerous universities and academic institutions have implemented proactive strategies, prioritising the development of leadership training programmes specifically designed to address these distinctive changes (Gallos & Bolman, 2021). These programmes consist of a comprehensive curriculum that includes courses such as effective decision-making (Northouse, 2018), team management (Day, 2007), conflict resolution (Komives & Wagner, 2016), and the essential aspect of emotional intelligence (Riggio & Harvey, 2011). The main objective of these programmes is to improve the transitional anxiety and tension experienced by individuals, by providing leaders with the necessary skills and confidence needed for their new jobs (Kim, 2018; Megheirkouni & Mejheirkouni, 2020).

A holistic perspective on leadership transition

Leadership transitions, though complex, can manifest in a variety of ways across different individuals. Notable examples indicate that some leaders transition with relative ease, fortified by factors such as, past experiences, inherent resilience, adaptability, and robust support networks (Masten, 2001; Luthans et al., 2006). Such individuals often enter these roles with a lucid understanding of upcoming challenges, and this awareness, paired with educational resources, can act as a safeguard (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018; Tims et al., 2015). However, these examples should not overshadow the significant portion of leaders who grapple with these transitions, facing cognitive dissonance and struggling to align their roles with their self-concept (Hogg, 2001; Kira et al., 2012; van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Zsolnai, 2016). This apparent contradiction of experiences that underscores the necessity of research in this domain. Understanding these complexities can inform interventions and institutional policies, ensuring support for those facing challenges during leadership transitions.

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Methodology

The grounded theory approach

This study employed a grounded theory methodology to explore the psychological challenges and crises encountered by leaders and managers during job role transitions in private higher education institutions (HEIs) (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The grounded theory methodology is a well-recognized inductive research approach that generates theories and concepts based on empirical data (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The utilisation of qualitative data collection techniques, including semi-structured interviews with participants and observations of strategic reports, action plans, and meeting minutes, enabled the researchers to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives and experiences of leaders and managers in private HEIs (Birks & Mills, 2015; Creswell, 2014). The use of a multi-method approach ensured that both individual experiences and organizational contexts were taken into account, providing a thorough comprehension of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

This investigation focused on the emerging crisis and psychological dilemmas linked to leadership succession and job role transitions from the perspective of those directly involved (Birks & Mills, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 2017). The study aimed to enhance understanding of the psychological crisis associated with leadership succession and job role transitions and to contribute to the development of more efficient and robust organizations in the private higher education sector (Birks & Mills, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 2017). This study utilised a grounded theory methodology and qualitative data collection techniques to examine the psychological challenges and crises experienced by leaders and managers during job role transitions in private HEIs. The study's methodology enabled the author to generate insights that were data-driven and context-specific (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). By focusing on the perspective of those directly involved and utilizing a multi-method approach, this study provided a thorough comprehension of the phenomenon being studied (Birks & Mills, 2015; Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

Qualitative data collection methods

The present study utilises a three-layer strategy which firstly involves a comparable methodology to that of DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree's (2006) research, employing comprehensive, semi-structured interviews with leaders and managers who have experienced job role changes. The conducted interviews are expected to provide a comprehensive comprehension of the participants' experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies concerning the transition process. Secondly, this study utilised observations and document analysis, as recommended by Bowen (2009), to furnish comprehension of the organisational situation and variables that contribute to the difficulties encountered during job role transition. The analysis of strategic reports, action plans, and meeting minutes is conducted to acquire significant insights into the operational dynamics of the organisation. Thirdly, the methodology employed in this study will adhere to the framework proposed by Krueger and Casey (2014), which involves the utilisation of focus groups as a means of gathering data from a heterogeneous sample of individuals, encompassing leaders, managers, and employees who have encountered or observed leadership transitions. The proposed focus groups aim to foster participatory dialogues and facilitate the collection of diverse viewpoints regarding the challenges associated with leadership transitions in private institutions of higher education.

Employing these qualitative data collection techniques, this study aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the challenges faced by leaders and managers during job role transitions, and the psychological crises that may arise as a result. This approach will contribute to a more complete understanding of the issue, offering valuable

insights for organizations seeking to effectively manage leadership succession and promote healthier transitions.

Participants and data sources

The participants of the study were intentionally chosen from among leaders and managers in UK private higher education institution who had undergone job role transitions. The utilisation of purposive sampling strategy facilitated the acquisition of varied and knowledge-laden viewpoints concerning the difficulties and adaptive measures linked to leadership succession, as stated by Palinkas et al. (2015). The study employed a range of data sources, meeting minutes, reports and action plans containing information of strategic meetings, discussed issues, internal school management communication and directing board of trustees meeting minutes. These sources were analysed in a thorough and meticulous manner to gain a comprehensive, nuanced, and contextualised understanding of the organisational factors that impacted the transition process and the psychological crisis that was encountered by the participants (Table 1 and Figure 1).

Table 1. Summary of primary and secondary data

Data	Role/Position	Description of role and involvement in transition	No.
Primary	Director of Academics	Responsible for the overall performance of academic department. Highlighted the need of strategic approach for transition of roles as it may assist the organisation for other associated issues.	1
	Director of Admission	Responsible for the overall performance of Admissions department. In the transition phases, critical challenges were related to "low motivation" due to "isolated feeling" and it led to "lack of team bonding".	1
	Academic Manager	Responsible for the standard operating procedures of academic department. This participant had two transitions in her career and had multiple challenges at all three	1
	Programme Manager	Responsible for smooth learning programme delivery by the teaching team. Both have faced, "Team bonding challenges" and "psychological related issues".	2
	Admin Manager	Responsible for managing the workforce and retaining talent. This participant faced challenges of "hierarchical issues" and "anxiety" during the transition period.	1
	Lead Academic Officer	Responsible to bridge the gap between tutor and student and enhancing student learning. Both faced challenges of "pressure handling", "capabilities" and "work-life balance".	2
	Total Interviews	All the participants were interviewed one time for this study.	8
Secondary Data	Further data collection of the essential information portrayed above, more than 30 records including enormous arrangements of meeting minutes, reports and action plans containing information of strategic meetings, discussed issues, internal school management communication and directing board of trustees meeting minutes.		30

Source: own elaboration

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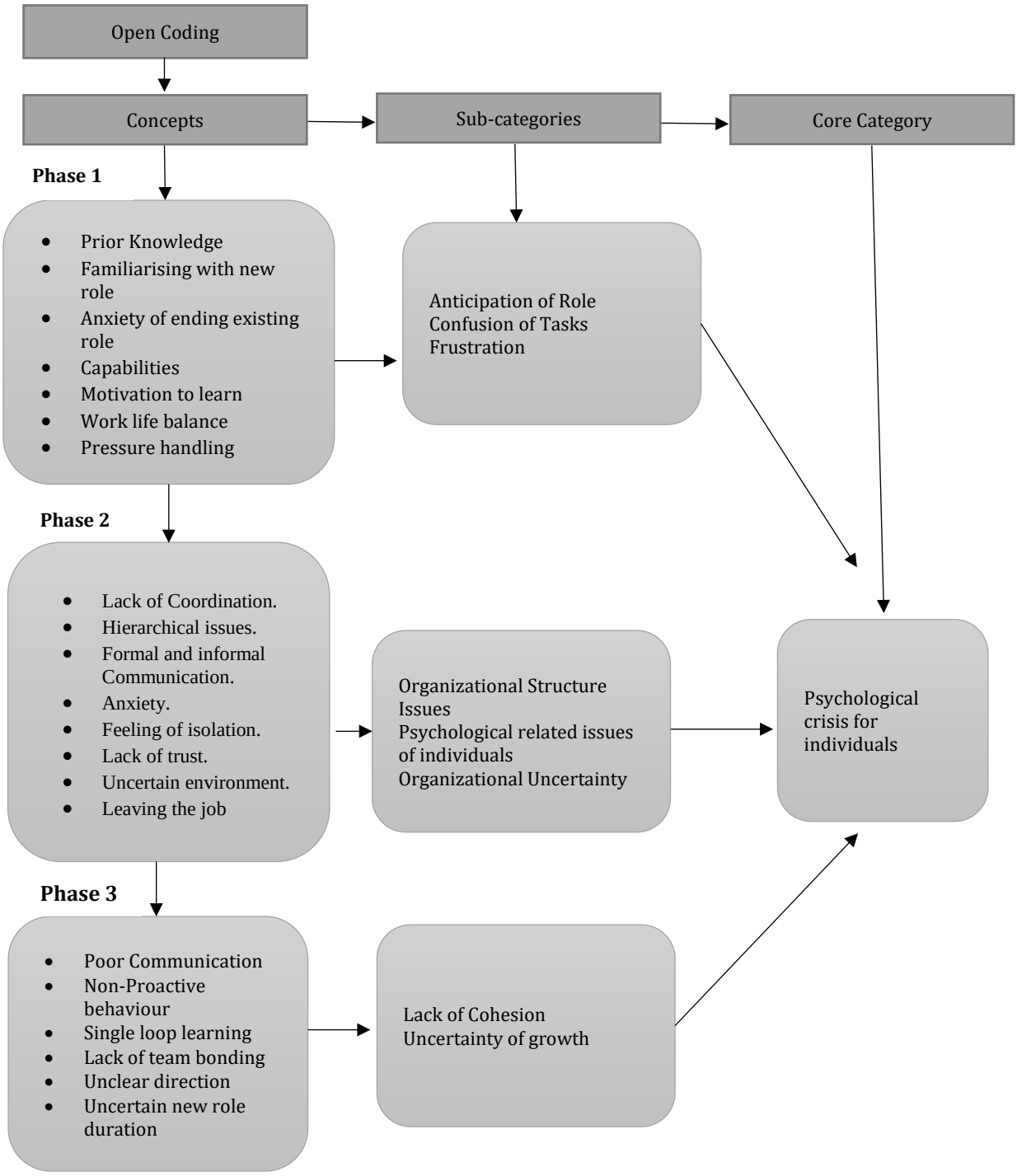

Figure 1. Open coding and core category
Source: own elaboration

Coding and constant comparison of data

The study's coding process was initiated through open coding and selective coding techniques, which facilitated the generation of concepts for the development of sub-categories and the construction of the core category. The utilisation of the open coding process facilitated the study in comprehensively coding the data in all conceivable manners, as posited by Glaser (1978). The process of coding events into multiple tentative categories was found to be beneficial. As a result, various codes and tentative categories were produced, including hierarchical interference, anxiety, lack of trust, and high employee turnover. The subsequent phase of coding entailed the examination of

provisional groupings pertaining to the fundamental category, which was formulated based on the concept-indicators framework, thereby facilitating the translation of conceptual coding into empirical indicators (Glaser, 1978). The present investigation involved a systematic process of comparing the emerging data with the existing theoretical framework, leading to the identification of a significant theoretical lacuna pertaining to the difficulties associated with leadership transitions to novel positions. The aforementioned gap is intrinsically linked to the empirical data under investigation and, as a result, has been identified as the central category of focus in this scholarly inquiry. In the open coding phase, the indicators were associated with the identified concepts of the provisional category. The findings and analysis chapter presents a curated list of indicators pertaining to each category of challenges that arise during leadership transitions to new roles.

During the ultimate phase of coding, the present study employed theoretical coding, a technique that involves the conceptualization of the relationship between substantive concepts and codes and their integration into a theory (Glaser, 1978). Upon analysis of the data, it was discovered that there existed both positive and negative correlations. Positive relationships were fostered by prioritising long-term growth objectives and providing employees with role-specific training opportunities as a component of ongoing professional development. The presence of negative relations resulted in a diversion of attention from individuals who were experiencing difficulties during the process of transitioning to new roles. Glaser (1978) suggests that exploring the codes of other disciplines may yield novel and advanced theoretical concepts. Hence, in order to acquire a more profound understanding, the researcher contemplated exploring theoretical concepts pertaining to leadership and change management. The researcher's motivation was sparked by the literature on the rising need for leaders to assume diverse positions over the course of their professional trajectories (Hutzschenreuter et al., 2012; McArthur, 2010). The theoretical concepts presented in the readings exhibited a strong correlation with the observed issues within the context of the study. The researcher postulated the difficulties encountered by leaders and managers in their transition to novel positions.

Papers must have between 6,000 and 9,000 words in length, including abstract, figures, references and appendices. Before submitting your paper, please ensure that it has been carefully read for typographical and grammatical errors. If English is not your first language, please have your paper proofread by an English-speaking person. Papers will be returned if the standard of English (United States) is not considered good enough for publication. The proposal as .doc or .docx file should be uploaded on the journal platform. Papers must not be sent in PDF format and should not be zipped.

Findings and discussion

Leadership transition to new job role

In this section, this study provides a brief summary and in-depth case analysis of the grounded core category "Transition Challenges for Individuals," taking into consideration the integration of Bridges' Transition Model and the relevant theoretical perspectives discussed earlier.

This study examined the strategic efforts for transitioning leaders and managers to new roles in a private Higher Education Institution (HEI) by incorporating the insights provided by Bridges' Transition Model and the associated theories. The aim was to implement a structured practice for successful transitions of individuals to new roles, thereby increasing the competitiveness of the private HEI in the dynamic market.

The private HEI is facing fierce competition in the private higher education industry, with hundreds of competitors around the UK. The top management of the private HEI decided to address the formulated problem by focusing on the emerging theory of this study and

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putting in place a strategic approach to transitioning practices. The case organization had discussions about this problem in the past but no effective strategy was actioned. During the formulation of the research problem, the researcher found the issues related to individual transitions to new roles and how this practice is affecting the organization.

Theorizing individual transition to a new role using Bridges' Transition Model

By integrating Bridges' Transition Model with the relevant theoretical perspectives, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of the psychological crises that leaders and managers in private HEIs may experience during job role transitions. The model provides a framework for identifying potential challenges and coping strategies, ultimately assisting organizations in effectively managing leadership succession and promoting healthier transitions.

The case data for this study covers several aspects of managing and delivering effective transitions of individuals to new roles. The transition areas of the case are defined and conceptualized based on the identified indicators and the list of codes. The defined and conceptualized themes about the experience of an individual before, during, and after the transition process are structured around the three phases of Bridges' Transition Model (Ending Phase, Neutral Zone, and New Beginning). These phases provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by leaders and managers during their job role transitions and inform potential strategies for addressing these challenges within the organizational context. By using the insights gained from Bridges' Transition Model and the associated theoretical perspectives, this study informs the development of a more effective transition process in private HEIs, ultimately benefiting both the individuals undergoing transitions and the organization as a whole (Table 2 and Figure 2).

Table 2. Overview of emerged themes and open codes

Phases	Open Codes	Frequency	Concept	Supporting Quotes
Ending 1	Prior Knowledge	6	Anticipation of Role	"I have no understanding of the new job expectations and I feel pressurized of new challenges" and "I am not sure how much time I will require to settle into my role"
	Familiarising with new role	4		
	Anxiety of ending existing role	8		
	Capabilities	5	Confusion of Tasks	"I questioned myself am I capable for the new role due to the lack of motivation and challenges of the new role"
	Motivation to learn	8		
	Work life balance	8	Frustration	"I experienced frustration in my personal life as well due the thoughts of getting moved to a new job role"
	Pressure handling	6		
Neutral Zone 2	Lack of Coordination	5	Organizational Structure Issues	"I experienced during my transition that other department leaders are interfering and communicating the information informally"
	Hierarchical issues	6		
	Formal/informal Communication	7		
	Anxiety related to new role	8	Psychological related issues of individuals	"My anxiety about my task have kept me in the situation of feeling of isolation" and "I lacked trust in my team on their capabilities as I was new to them but and I felt they team felt the same way but never mentioned"
	Feeling of isolation	6		
	Lack of trust	5		
	Uncertain environment.	6	Organizational Uncertainty	"At points I had thoughts about leaving job because the

	Leaving the job	6		challenges were making the work environment uncertain for me to effectively run the department.
New Beginning 3	Poor Communication	7	Lack of Cohesion	"I faced the challenges in communicating the tasks to team due to my non-proactive behaviour, this was because I was constantly asked to do the tasks coming from the top and this was the reason, I had less bonding with my team for several months"
	Non-Proactive behaviour	6		
	Single loop learning	8		
	Lack of team bonding	6		
	Unclear direction	7	Uncertainty of growth	"I was unsure for several months about my role, because I was transited to a new role but I had limited information about the role and I leant about the role by self-learning" and "I was not giving a clear timeframe for the duration of new role"
	Uncertain new role duration	8		

Source: own elaboration

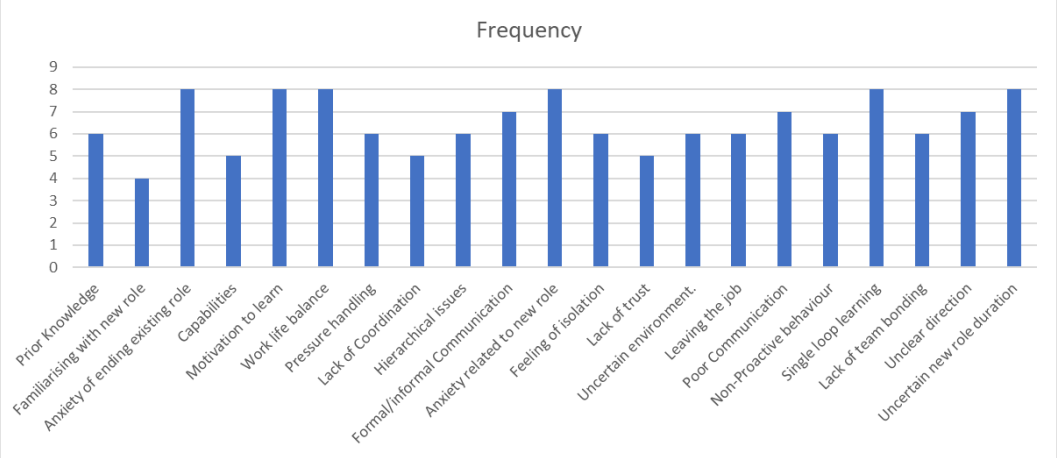

Figure 2. Indication of codes mentioned by participants
(Created by authors)

Analysis of Transition Phase 1

During the analysis of the data for Phase 1, three private HEI institute leaders who were involved in the transition stated, "if I had a chance to develop a comprehensive understanding of the new role, I would have led effectively." Other leaders responded to the interview question, stating, "I have felt the anxiety related to leaving my team, my office, team relations, and comfort zone," and "I have gone through the anxiety of questioning myself, am I good enough to fit in the new role?" The majority of the participants experienced a lack of motivation in the new role due to anxiety about the new role tasks. These challenges led to frustration, impacting work-life balance. Six out of the eight participants mentioned that handling pressure was an issue for them in the first stage of transition. These experiences formed the basis for the open coding.

Analysis of Transition Phase 2

Phase 2 emerged as a critical stage for leaders and managers involved in the transition process within private HEI institutes. Most participants stated, "I have felt isolated in the new position, and my new team did not have the feeling of trust about me, like my previous

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team had, and these challenges led to anxiety." Other factors that contributed to psychological impact during the transition period included hierarchical interdependence, lack of coordination, and complex tasks due to formal and informal communication. These factors became the codes for the concepts of the emerging theory.

Analysis of Transition Phase 3

During the analysis of Phase 3 challenges, private HEI institute leaders and managers highlighted the impact of Phase 2 on their final phase of transition, which occurred during the 5th to 6th month of their service in the new role. At this point, they were able to identify problems and challenges. Participants expressed the need for team bonding and effective communication. The presence of a single loop learning process within the private HEI was identified as a barrier to team bonding and negatively impacted proactiveness. The lack of clear direction and informal communication resulted in uncertainty, leading some leaders and managers to leave their positions. The business model based on partnerships with other educational institutes was also identified as a reason for uncertainty. The primary data were further validated by observing secondary data, including reports, meeting minutes, and action plans.

Primary Data Comparison with Secondary Data

All primary data collected through interviews were validated by cross-referencing with secondary data sources, including meeting minutes, action plans, and strategic reports. For the purpose of data validation, 30 documents were observed to analyse the critical challenges for the transition process of the case organization. Generated codes from the primary data were validated with secondary data observations, which helped generate the concepts of the formulated problem statement.

Purposive method for reducing possible psychological crises of leadership transitions

Drawing upon the data derived from our research findings, it becomes paramount to address the multifaceted emotional and psychological challenges inherent in each stage of leadership transition. As a response, the following strategies are proposed to attenuate the potential psychological distress during these pivotal moments of organizational change.

Supportive transition programs

The establishment of supportive transition Programs by organizations is recommended. Such programs should move beyond merely addressing the procedural nuances of a new role. Instead, they ought to prioritize and cater to the psychological well-being of individuals in transition. This holistic approach would entail elements of mentoring, coaching, and possibly therapeutic counselling services, all tailored to meet the distinct needs of transitioning leaders.

Transition workshops

The significance of transition workshops becomes evident, particularly when addressing the ambiguities associated with the Neutral Zone. Tailored workshops that delve into the intricacies of this transition phase can offer invaluable insights. Through these workshops, individuals can acquire coping strategies, derive solace from peer camaraderie, and gain access to tools specifically designed to mitigate the emotional oscillations prevalent during this period.

Continuous feedback mechanism

The importance of a Continuous feedback mechanism is also underscored, especially as one navigates the New Beginning phase. Periodic feedback, both formal and informal, can

serve as an affirmation of an individual's progression within their new role. Such feedback loops not only highlight potential areas of enhancement but also fortify an individual's self-assurance, bolstering their belief in their capabilities and the decisions they make in their new capacity.

Resource availability

The accessibility of resources becomes a critical concern. Resource Availability should be ensured at every juncture, encompassing a range from training modules to dedicated team assistance and pertinent literature. Such resources, when made readily available, can significantly aid leaders in comprehending and adapting to their new roles with greater efficacy.

Inclusive environment

Fostering an inclusive environment within the organization is essential. This entails cultivating a culture that is not only cognizant of but is also empathetic towards the myriad challenges posed by transitions. Such an environment would be characterized by supportive team members, superiors equipped with a profound understanding of transitional complexities, and an overarching atmosphere that advocates open communication, wherein individuals feel empowered to articulate their concerns without apprehension.

Practical implications, limitations and further research directions

The present research holds significant practical implications for private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and individuals who are undergoing job role transitions in leadership and management positions. Through comprehension of the psychological mechanisms and obstacles encountered during these periods of change, corporations can design more efficacious assistance structures and educational initiatives to promote seamless transitions for their staff. The results emphasise the significance of effective communication, precisely defined responsibilities and anticipations, and tactics for handling anxiety and other psychological consequences in the course of transitions. The insights garnered from this can be employed by organisations to establish a more favourable atmosphere for the development of leadership skills and succession planning. This, in turn, can result in improved organisational performance and a more salubrious work culture (Kets de Vries, 2001; Bridges, 2003).

This study offers significant contributions to the understanding of the psychological obstacles encountered by leaders and managers in private higher education institutions when transitioning job roles. However, there exist prospects for additional research endeavours in this domain. Broadening the scope of the investigation to encompass diverse industries, sectors, or organisational categories may yield a more all-encompassing comprehension of the leadership transition phenomenon in a variety of settings. Further investigation into the influence of organisational culture and structure on the experiences of individuals during transitions may augment comprehension of the determinants that impact effective or ineffective leadership transitions. Conducting longitudinal research on leaders and managers over an extended duration could yield significant findings regarding the enduring impacts of job role transitions on their professional trajectories and personal well-being. Subsequent research endeavours could explore the efficacy of particular interventions or support mechanisms tailored to aid leaders and managers in their transitional phases, thereby furnishing empirically-grounded suggestions for organisations endeavouring to enhance their leadership development tactics.

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The present study, despite providing valuable insights into the leadership transitions within private HEIs, is not without its limitations. These limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the findings and extrapolating the conclusions.

Firstly, given that the research specifically focuses on private HEIs within the United Kingdom, the applicability of the results to other industries, sectors, or geographical locations might be limited. To address this limitation, further investigations could be conducted in different contexts to explore the extent to which the findings can be generalized.

Secondly, the study relies predominantly on qualitative data derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis. While this approach yields detailed and nuanced insights, it may be subject to researcher bias and interpretation. The absence of quantitative data limits the ability to establish causal relationships and further validate the findings. Future research could incorporate mixed-methods designs, combining both qualitative and quantitative data, to strengthen the robustness of the findings.

Thirdly, the study's participants were limited to a relatively small number of leaders and managers from private HEIs. This may affect the representativeness and diversity of the sample, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the use of convenience sampling might introduce selection bias. Further research could employ larger sample sizes and probability sampling techniques to enhance the external validity of the findings.

Fourthly, as with any research project, time constraints may have impacted the depth and scope of the study. The research process, including data collection and analysis, was conducted within a limited timeframe, which might have restricted the extent to which certain aspects could be explored. Longitudinal studies could be conducted in the future to monitor the evolution of leadership transitions and associated challenges over time.
Lastly, the reliance on self-reported data from interviews may introduce social desirability bias, as participants may be inclined to present themselves or their experiences in a more favourable light. Future research could consider using alternative data collection methods, such as anonymous surveys or third-party assessments, to mitigate this potential bias.

Ethical consideration

The study placed significant emphasis on ethical considerations to safeguard the research process's integrity and participants' rights and well-being. Prior to conducting interviews or any form of data collection, informed consent was acquired from all participants. The participants were duly apprised of the research's purpose, objectives, and potential outcomes, and were explicitly reminded of their voluntary participation and right to withdraw, as per Bryman and Bell (2015). In order to safeguard the privacy of the participants, the research process was conducted with strict adherence to anonymity and confidentiality measures. The collected data underwent a process wherein personal information and identifiers were eliminated, and participants were assigned pseudonyms or codes, as per the methodology outlined by Saunders et al. (2016). The handling and storage of data were executed in a secure manner, with electronic data being safeguarded by password protection and physical documents being stored in locked cabinets that were only accessible to the research team. The ethical aspect of avoiding harm was deemed significant, and the research was structured in a manner that aimed to mitigate any probable harm to the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview questions and observations were thoughtfully designed to avoid causing any emotional distress or discomfort to the participants. The researchers were attentive to the emotional state of the participants and adapted their approach accordingly in the event of any indications of distress. The study was conducted in a responsible manner and with due regard for the well-being of all participants by following the ethical considerations.

Conclusion

The present research offers an extensive comprehension of the psychological predicaments that leaders and managers in private higher education institutions (HEIs) may encounter while transitioning between job roles. The research integrates Bridges' Transition Model with pertinent theoretical frameworks, including Attachment Theory, Stress-Coping Theory, and Cognitive Dissonance Theory, to provide valuable insights into the difficulties encountered during transitions and the potential coping mechanisms that can be utilised. The results of this study indicate that there are discrete stages in the process of transitioning, each of which presents unique difficulties and necessitates particular strategies for managing them. The findings underscore the significance of proficient communication, cohesive team dynamics, and a thorough comprehension of the novel responsibilities in achieving a prosperous transition. Furthermore, the research emphasises the necessity for institutions to acknowledge the psychological ramifications of such changes on individuals and offer sufficient assistance to facilitate more favourable adaptations. Nevertheless, the study has certain constraints. The research primarily centres on private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) located in the United Kingdom. It is important to note that this may restrict the applicability of the results to other settings.

Furthermore, the study is based on qualitative data, which could be susceptible to interpretation and potential biases. Potential avenues for further research could involve expanding the scope of the inquiry to encompass additional industries or nations and utilising a blended methodology that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative data to corroborate the outcomes more comprehensively. Conclusively, comprehending the psychological crisis encountered by leaders and managers amidst job role transitions is imperative for organisations endeavouring to proficiently handle leadership succession and foster smoother transitions. Through the amalgamation of theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, the present study provides significant insights for scholars and practitioners who are keen on exploring leadership transitions. The results of this study have the potential to guide the creation of specific interventions and organisational tactics that can effectively assist individuals during crucial periods. This, in turn, can lead to overall benefits for the organisation.

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