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Understanding the Barriers to Successful Strategy Execution at OmanBank

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Glossary of Terms, Abbreviations, and Acronyms

CMB	Change Management Barriers (to strategy execution).
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council (The six Gulf States: Bahrain, KSA, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and UAE).
OCB	OmanBank Contextual Barriers (to strategy execution).
OLB	Organisational Leadership Barriers (to strategy execution).
OMB	Operational Management Barriers.
OmanBank	Pseudonym for a commercial bank domiciled in Oman. Is the case study of the current research.
OWL	Omanisation, Wasta, and Labour law.
PMB	Process Management Barriers (to strategy execution).
RAB	Resource Availability Barriers (to strategy execution).
SE	Strategy Execution. Synonymous to strategy implementation.
SEFR	Strategy Execution Failure Rate.
SFB	Strategy Formulation Barriers (to strategy execution)..
SSII	Semi-Structured In-depth Interview.

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Abstract

Research has shown that effective strategy execution is fundamental for organisational success and represents a competitive advantage. Nonetheless, most studies indicate that around 90% of organisations in the developed nations, mainly in the West, fail in strategy execution, thereby failing to attain the success and competitive advantage to which they aspire and that the underdeveloped and developing nations are under-researched. More worryingly, despite increased calls for more attention, research on strategy execution remains fragmented and lacks an overarching cohesive framework.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the barriers to strategy execution at OmanBank, a bank domiciled in the Sultanate of Oman, aiming to offer a fresh perspective on the subject from the context of a developing nation and thus fill a gap in the literature.

To achieve the said aim, the study deployed an interpretive methodology using semi-structured in-depth interviews to gather the views and insights of eight senior managers of OmanBank about the barriers to strategy execution at the bank, and the data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Interestingly, in a major departure from the barriers commonly cited across the literature, the key findings revealed by this study are three major and contextually-novel SE barriers at OmanBank. These are Omanisation (the nationalisation policy of Oman), 'Wasta' (nepotism/favouritism), and Omani Labour Law. This new barrier-trio, working collaboratively by reinforcing each other, has formed a chain of strategy execution blockages and framed and shaped the rest of the strategy execution barriers that inductively emerged from the data to hinder the strategic success of the bank.

The originality of these findings is that they did not feature elsewhere in the consulted literature as barriers to successful strategy execution; thus they have definitively answered the research question. The key implication for academicians and practitioners is that context is vital: future researchers may uncover other context-specific strategy execution barriers or relationships among barriers in non-Western, less-developed countries that are significantly under-researched while practitioners need to adjust their managerial and leadership practices based on the context.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

This research explores the barriers to successful strategy execution (SE) at OmanBank, domiciled in Oman, a country located in the Arabian Peninsula of the Arab Middle East. The topic arose out of the field from recurrent observations by the researcher, a long-serving management practitioner in several large organisations operating in the region, the last of which was OmanBank. Those organisations have persistently invested sizable sums of money in building strategic plans, aiming to monetise such strategies to achieve what strategising promises: sustained competitive advantage leading to financial success (Feldman, 2020; Mahdi, Nassar, and Almsafirc, 2021). However, invariably, such strategies suffered failures in strategy execution (SE), and, thus, the investments seldom paid off, and the aspirations towards success were far from reach.

Bringing his intrigued practitioner's curiosity to the literature, the researcher found four critical areas of evidence that made him determined to pursue the problem further.

First was that the strategic management process – a scholarly field comprising strategic analysis, strategy formulation, strategy execution (SE), and strategy evaluation and control (Köseoglu, Yazici, and Okumus, 2018) – has one overarching goal: to achieve long-term competitive advantage and sustained business success (Caplan and Norton, 2008; Norton, 2009; Ansari, 2010; Wasilewski, 2020; Mahdi, Nassar and Almsafirc, 2021). This is precisely what the researcher's former employer-organisations had been trying to achieve in vain.

Second, of these four stages of the strategic management process, SE is considered in the literature as the most crucial for the attainment of long-term competitive advantage (Radomska and Kozyra, 2020; Tawse and Tabesh, 2021; Vigfússon, Jóhannsdóttir, and Ólafsson, 2021).

Third, and most importantly, there is evidence in the literature that many organisations worldwide fail in SE (Cote, 2020; Radomska and Kozyra, 2020; Zorek, 2020; Olsen, 2021). Most scholars agree that 50–90% of (predominantly Western-zone) organisations fail to execute strategy successfully (Cote, 2020; Radomska and Kozyra, 2020; Olsen, 2021; Stadler et al., 2022). OmanBank is no exception to this general rule.

Finally, despite its demonstrated criticality for organisational success, the topic of SE is significantly under-researched, and what has been written on the subject is fragmented (Vigfússon, Jóhannsdóttir, and Ólafsson, 2021), incohesive (Tawse and Tabesh, 2021), and lacking in a unifying conceptual model (Maas, 2008) to build upon.

Together, these four findings from the literature motivated the researcher to move forward with the research, reasonably confident that the effort would be worthwhile and that it would be likely to add to both academia and practice.

1.2 Research Context

OmanBank is in Oman, a country forming part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE), which the United Nations classifies as a developing country (DPAD, 2014). In this respect, the literature shows that developing countries are significantly under-researched concerning SE (Alves, Martins, and Trez, 2017; Trapero, 2019), constituting only about 10% of the total research on the subject (O'Toole, 2000; Saetren, 2005; Maas, 2008), with the remaining 90% focused on the advanced economies from a predominantly Western cultural perspective (Maas, 2008; Trapero, 2019). This finding makes the present research contextually relevant, and more so since the major data findings of this study indicate that the contextual factors, which are external to OmanBank, with the most significant adverse impact on SE success – 'Omanisation', 'Wasta', and 'Omani Labour Law' – have not been sufficiently researched concerning SE (Chapter 2), thus revealing a research gap. Alves, Martins, and Trez (2017: 299) have precisely described this in their postulation that "the existence of research gaps, regarding the understanding of factors external to the organisation that influence the strategy implementation process in those countries, highlights the need for research efforts".

OmanBank was chosen as a case study for this research for two primary reasons. Firstly, the consequences of failed strategies are hurting the bank's future success in terms of the loss of good/high-performing staff, customer attrition, declining profitability, and loss of its top-ranking in the Omani banking sector. Secondly, the researcher's familiarity with the organisation as a previous senior team member, he was confident would be advantageous to his objective of uncovering the real reasons for SE failure at the bank. This proved to be true,

because the researcher was indeed privileged with a distinctive 'insider advantage' in terms of access to decision-makers and interviewees, echoing Walsham's (2006: 322) postulation: "interpretive researchers need to gain and maintain good access to appropriate organisations for their fieldwork". The relationships the researcher had maintained with both management and staff over the years did mirror the characteristics of an 'involved researcher' (Walsham, 2006), a 'member researcher' (Adler and Adler, 1987), and an 'opportunistic researcher' (Riemer, 1977; in Baker and Edwards, 2012: 10), all describing the researcher's position as 'one of them'. It is hoped that this professional relationship reflected positively on the quality of the data collected and, thus, achieved trustworthiness, which is the most crucial feature of any qualitative research.

1.3 Research Aim, Objectives, and Focus

Based on the background and context just described, the primary aim of this research has been to understand the barriers to successful SE at OmanBank, with two main objectives. The first objective is to help the bank attain the competitive advantage and financial success to which it aspires and to help it regain its top-ranking position within the Omani banking sector by enlightening the board and management about the strategic blockages they may not be aware of. The bank's leadership may consider extracting an action plan based on the SE barriers highlighted in this study to improve SE success.

The second objective is to contribute to the bodies of academia and professional practice by offering a new perspective and fresh insight into the barriers to successful SE from an under-researched, developing country.

1.4 Research Philosophy, Methodology, and Methods

In its quest to answer the above-cited research question, this research has been philosophically scaffolded by an idealist ontological position, following the assumption that social reality is subjective (Collins and Hussey, 2003) and that social properties are not phenomena (reality as such) but rather interpretations of that reality (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Moreover, to acquire knowledge about the SE barriers at OmanBank, the researcher has chosen to apply an integrated epistemology whereby knowledge concerning the barriers to successful SE is gained both inductively 'bottom-up' and deductively 'top-down' (Ormston et al., 2013).

To honour the aforementioned philosophy, the interpretive methodology was employed, complemented by the semi-structured in-depth interview (SSII) method, which allowed the gathering of interviewees' explanations and lived experiences of barriers to SE. The choice of methodology and method is justified in Chapter 3.

Furthermore, the interpretive methodology and the SSII method were further complemented with Reflexive Thematic Analysis as a congruent qualitative data analysis method used in analysing the eight semi-structured interviews, and its deployment is justified in Chapter 3.

1.5 Interview Cohort and Setting

Eight of the 12 randomly selected senior managers from OmanBank agreed to participate in the interviews (67%). Initially, the interviews were scheduled to be face-to-face in Oman in August 2020. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 lockdown prevented this, and the Zoom meeting application was used instead. The eight interviews took place between August 2020 and February 2021 in English and were audio/video recorded. The choice of senior managers for this study builds on and complements the prior empirical research accomplished by the researcher through the DBA's Document-3 (focused on middle managers) and Document-4 (focused on junior managers), using the same bank as the research arena, which had left a set of questions and issues unresolved. Therefore, the aim of choosing senior managers was to paint a holistic view of the barriers to successful SE at OmanBank from the perspective of the three significant managerial layers.

1.6 Relevant Key Terms Arising from the Empirical Data

Of the six main SE barrier themes that emerged from the data analysis, the 'OmanBank Contextual Barriers' (OCB) theme, with its three subthemes of 'Omanisation', 'Wasta', and 'Omani Labour Law', represented the major findings of this study in answer to the research question. These prevailed as novel and severe SE barriers that the interviewees viewed as having the most devastating impact on the bank's strategic success. The supplementary literature review that took place in retrospect, prompted by the unexpected emergence of these three subthemes, did not indicate that they have been researched in the context of SE so far. Therefore, as these three key terms may not be familiar to all readers, they are worthy of setting down here separately in this Introduction.

The first term is 'Omanisation', an Oman-specific term referring to the nationalisation policy of the country, i.e., the Work Localisation (WL) policy by the Omani government (Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer, 2019; Aravind and Nayar, 2020). Omanisation aimed to substitute the expatriate workforce with Omanis in all sectors of the economy to achieve socio-economic and political objectives (Al-Nahdi, 2016). Being the first WL programme in the GCC, Omanisation was mirrored across all six GCC states (Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer, 2019), all of which share similar demographics and labour market issues – mainly rapid population growth, extensive reliance on an expatriate workforce, and high unemployment among citizens (Waxin, Kumra, and Zhao, 2020). In the largely Western-focused literature on SE (Mass, 2016), the search for SE barriers did not unveil 'nationalisation' as a barrier.

The second term, 'Wasta', is an Arabic term meaning nepotism in English. Wasta was another major SE barrier that emerged from the OmanBank data. While the literature agreed with the data that Wasta is rife in Oman (Al-Nahdi, 2016), an equivalent in terms of the specific impact of Wasta on SE success did not show up in the literature consulted.

Omani Labour Law is the law that regulates the workforce in Oman. It represents the third vital subtheme to emerge under OmanBank's contextual barriers. Omani Labour Law was seen by participants as obstructive to the bank's strategy by prohibiting the removal of underperforming Omanis except in extreme cases. This empirical finding did not have an equivalent in the predominantly Western-biased SE-related literature (O'Toole, 2000; Saetren, 2005; Mass, 2016; Alves, Martins, and Trez, 2017); there was no indication in the literature that Western labour laws were discussed as a barrier to SE success.

1.7 Organisation of the Thesis

This section outlines the structure of the thesis to provide the reader with a roadmap for the remainder of the research.

Guided by the research question: 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?', Chapter 2 first identifies, extracts, critically assesses, and presents the latest research on SE in the literature in terms of definitions, importance, research, success, and barriers. Chapter 2 also acknowledges that a further literature review was carried out into

'Omanisation' and 'Wasta' based on the findings from the interview data. Finally, the literature review process culminated in this study's 'SE Conceptual Framework', which emerged inductively to conceptualise the relationship among the different barriers to SE (see Figure 2.3).

Chapter 3 begins by presenting the research design that sets the stage for the subsequent sections. This is followed by an outline of the research philosophy that has underpinned it. The research approach is then delineated, describing how it has guided the research process, and this is followed by an account of the research method deployed to carry out the research, and both are then justified. The chapter proceeds to offer a visual perspective of the interview process in the field, followed by introducing qualitative data analysis and presenting and justifying the DA method, which aims to furnish a conceptual scaffolding for the next chapter on data analysis. Finally, chapter 3 closes by arguing the case for the research's validity, reliability, and ethical conduct and how the researcher managed these aspects.

Chapter 4 is wholly dedicated to data analysis. Its vital mission is to capture, understand, synthesise, categorise, analyse, interpret, and present the key findings from the narratives of OmanBank's senior interviewees in service of the research question. To achieve its stated objective, the chapter takes two leaps:

The first leap aims to set the stage for the empirical work by offering a visual description of the data analysis process, which provides the reader with a simulated experience of joining the researcher in the field. The second leap dives into the actual data analysis, first by introducing and describing the main themes and subthemes of the data and then by presenting and discussing the key findings under each theme.

Of the six major themes that emerged from the data as barriers to successful SE at OmanBank, three major and novel contextual barriers: Omanisation, Wasta, and Omani Labour Law (abbreviated as OWL), provide a new perspective and an original insight into the topic. Therefore, as Chapter 5 stresses, given their novelty and contextual peculiarity, OWL represents this study's original contribution to the bodies of academia and professional practice.

Chapter 5 wraps up the inquiry of this thesis. It begins by reintroducing the research problem and the research question that was posed to investigate it. Next, it provides a brief outline of the research approach and method that were employed to examine the problem, followed by a summary of the key findings concerning the research question. It then describes how the findings have answered the research question and the value and contribution thereof. Finally, the chapter concludes by highlighting the limitations of the research and proposes how future research might pursue other avenues to enrich and build upon this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review on strategy execution (SE) sets out to pursue the research question: 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?'.

The aims of this review, therefore, are to identify, extract, critically assess, and present the latest thinking about SE in general, and to identify instances where barriers to SE have been presented, discussed, and analysed. Evidence drawn from the literature has then been synthesised with empirical evidence from the in-depth semi-structured interviews held with senior managers at OmanBank – the subject of this case study.

To achieve the said aims, Chapter 2 is structured in four phases:

Phase 1 seeks to gain a broad perspective of the barriers to SE by looking generally at the subject of SE in the literature. Doing so, it attempts to answer four vital questions:

    (1)   How is strategy execution defined?

    (2)   Does strategy execution matter for organisational success?

    (3)   How comprehensive is strategy execution research?

    (4)   How successful are organisations at SE?

Phase 2 proceeds by taking an inductive investigative approach, extracting and grouping the most relevant and commonly cited barriers to SE in the literature into 'barrier themes'.

Phase 3 focuses on two novel main themes related to OmanBank – the case study of this research – taking 'Omanisation' (nationalisation) and 'Wasta' (nepotism/favouritism) as the two most prominent and contextually-novel 'barrier themes' to SE to emerge from the primary research at OmanBank.

Part 4 concludes the literature review, providing a conceptual framework that illustrates and describes the main, most commonly-cited 'barrier domains' deemed central to the failure of SE, and highlighting the overlapping nature of them.

2.2 General Aspects of Strategy Execution

2.2.1 The Strategic Management Process (SMP) in Brief

The SMP comprises four key stages: strategic analysis, strategy formulation, strategy execution (SE), and strategy evaluation and control (Köseoglu, Yazici, and Okumus, 2018; Vasu, 2018). The SMP is a responsibility of organisational leadership (OL) (OpenStax, 2019; Pereira, Durão, and Santos, 2019; Wasilewski, 2020), which aims to achieve competitive advantage and long-term business success (Porter, 1985; Caplan and Norton, 2008; Norton, 2009; Ansari, 2010; Calhoum, 2013; OpenStax, 2019; Wasilewski, 2020; Mahdi, Nassar, and Almsafirc, 2021). Engaging in the SMP is particularly imperative in today's uncertain business environment (Feldman, 2020; Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade, 2021). This is pushing organisations (including OmanBank) to adopt flexible, innovative strategies (Obeidat et al., 2017; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020).

However, of the four stages of the SMP, SE is considered the most crucial (Feldman, 2020; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020; Radomska and Kozyra, 2020; Tawse and Tabesh, 2021; Vigfússon, Jóhannsdóttir, and Ólafsson, 2021), nonetheless, many organisations around the world fail to achieve it (Cote, 2020; Radomska and Kozyra, 2020; Zorek, 2020; Olsen, 2021), OmanBank is no exception to this general rule. This brings to the fore the criticality of successful SE (Radomska and Kozyra, 2020; Zorek, 2020) for organisational success, indeed even for its survival. This is a precise description of what OmanBank has been trying to achieve, and thus what this study has tried to demonstrate to OmanBank; how competitive advantage and sustained long-term financial success can be achieved by understanding, and then overcoming, the barriers that currently impede SE at the bank.

2.2.2 Definition of Strategy Execution

Various scholars have used the words 'execution' and 'implementation' interchangeably in the literature as synonyms, regardless of their philosophical orientations (Sashittal and Wilemon, 1996; Yang et al., 2008; Collis, 2019). For example, MacLennan and Markides (2021: 20) concluded that:

"We use the terms 'strategy execution' and 'strategy implementation' interchangeably, taking the view that nothing in the existing literature supports drawing a meaningful distinction between them."

Accordingly, while the current research uses the term 'execution' for consistency, 'execution' is also used in the sense of 'implementation' wherever it is mentioned.

The literature indicates that "there is no consensus on appropriate definitions" for SE (Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade, 2021: 1955). The term, thus, has been defined variously (Tawse and Tabesh, 2021) depending on the conceptual dispositions of the authors (MacLennan and Markides, 2021), which fall into four theoretical categories: two theorising strategy formulation and two theorising SE.

Regarding theorising strategy formulation, scholars in the first category follow a 'descriptive' strategic paradigm which assumes that strategies may 'emerge' over time and need not necessarily be prescribed in advance (Rose and Cray, 2013; Stalk and Stewart, 2019). The definition put forward by Sull, Holmes, and Sull (2015: 6) – "seizing opportunities that support the strategy while coordinating with other parts of the organisation on an ongoing basis" – represents a good example where expressions such as 'seizing opportunities' and 'ongoing basis' are indicative of an emergent strategy. The second category of scholars follows a 'prescriptive' strategic paradigm, otherwise known as the 'intended' strategy, which assumes that strategies are first prescribed and then executed (Rose and Cray, 2013). Pennings's (1996: 2133) definition of SE as "the quest to convert intended strategy into a realised strategy" offers a perfect example.

In terms of theorising SE, the first category of scholars takes a 'structural control view' (Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020), focusing predominantly on conceptualising SE in terms of planning optimal structures, systems, controls, and incentives to support it (ibid.; Coulson-Thomas, 2021a). A notable definition of SE underpinned by the 'structural control view' is the definition provided by Giles (1991: 75): "the execution of tactics so that the company moves in the desired strategic direction". The 'structural control view' paradigm, however, has been criticised for overlooking "the behavioural and social dynamics associated with adaptive organisational behaviour" (Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020: 3). This

criticism has led to a more recent theoretical stream of research on SE known as the 'adaptive turn' to SE', led by Noble (1999). 'Adaptive turn' to SE' shifted the emphasis of research towards sense-making and enacting strategies in practice (Andersen and Nielsen, 2009; Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020; Doeleman, van Dun and ilderom, 2021). Under the 'adaptive turn' to SE' conception comes Noble's (1999: 119) definition of SE as "the communication, interpretation, adoption, and enactment of strategic plans" where the focus moves from hard data to feelings and intuition (Coulson-Thomas, 2021a).

Inspired by the above findings, the current research adopts the following overarching definition of SE proposed by the researcher. This amalgamates the four theoretical dispositions that have just been outlined:

> *'[T]he decisions taken, the processes designed, the communications made, the interpretations sought, and the resources deployed by OmanBank's OL to operationalise the strategy, intended or emergent, and translate it into the desired tangible results, leading to competitive advantage and, thus, long-term sustained financial success.'*

2.2.3 Does Strategy Execution Matter for Organisational Success?

Having established the definition of SE, i.e., what it is, this section investigates what value SE brings to organisational success, i.e., what it does, and more specifically looks at how important SE is for OmanBank, thus necessitating this research to understand the barriers thereof.

Exploration of the extant literature indicated that authors on this subject (from all theoretical orientations) generally agreed that SE is central to organisational success, regardless of size, sector, or location (Mbaka and Mugambi, 2014; Olivier and Schwella, 2018; Radomska and Kozyra, 2020; Tawse and Tabesh, 2021; Vigfússon, Jóhannsdóttir, and Ólafsson, 2021). In this respect, the authors fall into three categories:

The first category emphasises the importance of SE for organisational success in general, without specific reference to internal or external factors. EPL (2020: 19), for instance, states that "the best strategy in the world would be doomed to failure if the execution stage is not up to scratch", ultimately leading to failure in achieving the planned goals (Olsen, 2021). Olivier

and Schwella (2018) argue in support of this, asserting that even well-articulated strategies are worthless if not successfully executed, while Chase (2019: 1) is adamant that "strategic plans are not worth the paper they are written on if organisations are not prepared to execute effectively".

The second category stresses the importance of SE for organisational success during change. According to Chase (2019: 1), "if the strategy is all about placing the right bets in an ever-changing world, then strategy execution is about driving rapid and effective change to capture those bets' value". Brazukas (2018: 1) seconds Chase's view by arguing that, since the goal of strategising is to eventually 'change' the current way of doing things, SE is, in effect "change management in disguise".

The third category of authors sees the value of SE for organisational success in offering competitive advantage and sustained long-term success. These authors maintain that organisations which manage to execute strategies successfully have a better chance of achieving competitive advantage than those that do not (Bej and Das, 2019; Gartner Inc., 2019; Feldman, 2020 Wasilewski, 2020; Tawse and Tabesh, 2021; Vigfússon, Jóhannsdóttir, and Ólafsson, 2021). Thompson, Scott, and Martin (2017: 509), for example, claim that "an effectively implemented strategy, intended or emergent, in itself is a source of competitive advantage". Similarly, Pereira, Durão, and Santos (2019) argue that in a globalised, complex and dynamic environment, SE is critical for attaining competitive advantage over others, while Olivier and Schwella (2018: 7) claim boldly that "strategy execution is the only competitive advantage".

The above literature finding affirming the vitality of SE to organisational success offers two essential insights concerning the research question that guides this study. Firstly, it is highly relevant to the current study because it aims at understanding the barriers to successful SE at OmanBank in order to help the bank attain the aspired competitive advantage and sustained success by reflecting on the findings of this study and taking corrective action. Furthermore, this consensus on the power of SE to bring about organisational success affirms that this research's focus on SE is a worthwhile effort for both industry and academia, especially since it is a topic that is incongruously under-researched, as demonstrated in the next section.

2.2.4 How Comprehensive is the Strategy Execution Research?

The review of the extant literature on SE research was organised around the two critical perspectives of coverage and cohesiveness.

Coverage of SE Research

Various scholars agree that strategy formulation is well-theorised, having been researched for decades (Velliquette and Garretson, 2002; Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020; Vigfússon, Jóhannsdóttir, and Ólafsson, 2021; Amoo, Lodorfos, and Mahtab, 2022), but SE has received much less coverage (Bej and Das, 2019; EPL, 2019; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020; Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020; Eresia-Eke and Soriakumar, 2021; Amoo, Lodorfos, and Mahtab, 2022). Srivastava and Sushil (2018: 10), for example, argued that "to date, greater emphasis has been paid to the creation of strategies. Execution has, by comparison, tended to slip under the radar somewhat." This view is supported by Vigfússon, Jóhannsdóttir, and Ólafsson (2021), who, after reviewing the empirical research on SE from 1980 to 2020, concluded that SE research is still in its early days with only a handful of empirical studies accomplished. Similar arguments have persisted over the last three decades (Olivier and Schwella, 2018; Vasu, 2018), largely taking the view that the SMP has focused on strategy formulation to the detriment of SE (Claudu, Faviu, and Madalina, 2008; Olivier and Schwella, 2018; Srivastava and Sushil, 2018; Vasu, 2018; Eresia-Eke and Soriakumar, 2021). Sull, Holmes, and Sull (2015: 1) conclude, therefore, that "we know a lot less about translating a strategy into results. Books and articles on strategy outnumber those on execution by order of magnitude", and other scholars join them in calling for more research on SE to fill the research gap, not least Vigfússon, Jóhannsdóttir, and Ólafsson (2021).

Another contextual observation regarding the gap in the literature on SE research, which is relevant to the research question seeking to understand SE barriers at OmanBank, is that "the differences among industries, countries, and cultures regarding implementation have not yet been explored at any depth" (Vigfússon, Jóhannsdóttir, and Ólafsson, 2021: 12). In agreement with this stance, Alves, Martins, and Trez, (2017: 298) who studied SE in BRICS countries, concluded that these developing countries present a challenge to academia due to their contextual differences to developed countries, stating that "context has an influence on the

implementation of organisational strategies". These views corroborate with numerous instances in the literature (O'Toole, 2000; Saetren, 2005; Maas, 2008; Alves, Martins, and Trez, 2017; Trapero, 2019), which find that developing countries – Oman included (DPAD, 2014) – are significantly under-researched concerning SE. The overlooking of developing countries in SE research is seen by Maas (2008) to have direct implications for research in SE and for the organisations operating in these geographies, prompting Xu and Meyer (2013) (in Alves, Martins, and Trez, 2017: 289) to describe the emerging economies as the 'laboratory' to investigate the interaction between business strategies and local contexts.

The major and novel contextual SE barrier findings – namely, 'Omanisation', 'Wasta', and 'Omani Labour Law' (OWL) – to emerge from the OmanBank data attest to these findings, as shall be elaborated in Chapter 4.

Cohesiveness of SE Research

The literature on SE has been characterised generally as lacking cohesion: fragmented and eclectic (Maas, 2008; Vigfússon, Jóhannsdóttir, and Ólafsson, 2021); underdeveloped and immature (Köseoglu, Yazici, and Okumus, 2018); or just too specifically irrelevant; and that what little has been written may be overly focused on tactics, without context, or take a single case on which the author then generalises (Sull, Holmes, and Sull, 2015). Scholars have argued that, despite the countless calls for increased attention to SE, "research on the subject remains a disparate constellation of recommendations, case studies, and empirical work that provides insight but lacks a cohesive framework" (Tawse and Tabesh, 2021: 22).

As noted, the lack of a robust, cohesive body of literature on SE (Olivier and Schwella, 2018; Bej and Das, 2019; Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020) has been evident for decades (Cândido and Santos, 2019; Vernizzi, Zanoni, and Zuccolotto, 2019). This is believed to have been caused by several failings, not least a commonly agreed, tried and tested, all-embracing SE framework (Maas, 2008) upon which to build (Greer, Lusch, and Hitt, 2017; de Oliveira, Carneiro, and Esteves, 2019; Tawse and Tabesh, 2021). The arguments as set out above have meant that the conceptual understanding of the SE process has remained underdeveloped (Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen, 2016; Tawse and Tabesh, 2021) and that a holistic, integrated view of SE remains largely absent from the literature (Maas, 2008).

The analogy of Tawse and Tabesh (2021: 29) appropriately describes the fragmentation of SE research to date:

> *"Like the proverb of the blind men and the elephant, strategy implementation research has been limited to the investigation of individual parts of the overall animal that researchers are trying to understand. The result is a field characterised by broad scope but shallow depth that provides little clarity."*

The above discussion furnishes two central acumens relevant to this study's research question. Firstly, it is fair to conclude that SE, although central to organisational success, suffers, paradoxically, from serious under-research. A dearth of rigorous research has also led to a fragmented and incohesive corpus of literature on the subject, which means there is no overarching, integrated framework for authors to build upon. The above acumen, in turn, infers that novel research contributions on the topic are needed. Secondly, the literature on SE seems largely to have overlooked developing countries. For the current research, therefore, this significant gap in the literature justifies the choice of SE as a topic for research and the choice of OmanBank as a case study based in a developing country.

2.2.5 How Successful are Organisations Worldwide in Strategy Execution?

Having defined SE and established its research gap despite demonstrated criticality for organisational success, this section looks at the global SE success rate in order to gauge the magnitude of the problem.

The literature indicates that SE is widely acknowledged as a substantial challenge for organisations (Vernizzi, Zanoni, and Zuccolotto, 2019; Doeleman, van Dun, and Wilderom, 2021; Eresia-Eke and Soriakumar, 2021; MacLennan and Markides, 2021). For example, in their survey of over 400 global CEOs across the USA, Europe, and Asia, Sull, Holmes, and Sull (2015: 2) found that 'execution excellence' topped a list of 80 key challenges CEOs face. This finding agrees with the American Management Association survey of CEOs (Barrows, 2019), which revealed that CEOs rated SE as their first and second most challenging issue.

Accordingly, there is strong evidence in the literature of organisations' failure in SE at a global scale (Raps, 2005; Cândido and Santos, 2015; Köseoglu, Yazici, and Okumus, 2018; Barrows,

2019; Kraaijenbrink, 2019; Cote, 2020; Radomska and Kozyra, 2020; Zorek, 2020; Doeleman, van Dun, and Wilderom, 2021; Olsen, 2021). At a conservative estimate, the SE failure rate (SEFR) reported in recent studies (Pereira, Durão, and Santos, 2019; Cote, 2020; Zorek, 2020; Olsen, 2021) exceeds 50%, meaning that for every two SE attempts one is a failure. Cater and Pucko (2009), Hourani (2017), Radomska and Kozyra (2020), and Stadler et al. (2022) agree that the SEFR varies from anywhere between 50 and 90%, whereas Cote (2020), Zorek (2020), and Olsen (2021) agree that 90% of businesses fail in SE. Surprisingly, the alarmingly high SEFR rates quoted by numerous studies do not represent a recent phenomenon. Instead, it is a challenge "that has stayed constant from the 1970s to the present" (Canic, 2020: 1).

The above shreds of evidence are seen as astonishing, considering that globally firms spend over 30 billion dollars on strategising, while CEOs spend over 20% of their time focusing on strategy (Stadler et al., 2022). This could aptly describe the case of OmanBank. For example, reflecting on personal experience as a former OmanBank executive, the researcher witnessed sizable investment in developing strategies by external consultants; in one instance, a consulting firm received two million US dollars over six months to formulate a strategy for the bank's corporate banking division alone.

The essential contextual question, however, is to which geographic region does this quoted high SEFR apply? The literature indicates that, generally, the high SEFR describes a Western context (North America and Europe), which accounts collectively for about 90% of SE research (O'Toole, 2000; Saetren, 2005; Maas, 2008). In other words, the reported SEFR describes advanced economies with robust infrastructures, advanced technologies, and overall stability within predictable political and economic environments – yet the best scenario in these contexts is still 50% SEFR.

Two meaningful inferences can be drawn from the above discussion on SEFR concerning the research question – 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?' – that guides this study.

First, in both developing and underdeveloped economies, which includes Oman (DPAD, 2014), organisations generally operate in unstable environments (Bej and Das, 2019) in constant flux, where political instability is commonplace, infrastructure is far from being state-

of-the-art, and labour, while abundant and inexpensive, is mostly unskilled (Guillén and García-Canal, 2012; Trapero, 2019). Given this fact, and in the light of SE being under-researched (Maas, 2008; Alves, Martins, and Trez, 2017), it would be reasonable to deduce that the SEFR in emerging economies (including Oman, where OmanBank is domiciled) is higher than in their developed counterparts. The assumption is ratified by Gribble (2018: 1), whose research into health issues in developing countries indicates that "in most ministries of health, strategies sit on shelves and gather dust because people do not know how to translate them into action and results".

Second, the high SEFR, described in the predominantly Western literature, never indicated nepotism, nationalisation policies, or labour laws as barriers to SE. This further infers that, apart from dealing with the other conventional SE complexities (Bej and Das, 2019; Doeleman, van Dun, and Wilderom, 2021) and barriers, OmanBank must deal with the added contextual complexities of its novel barrier-trio, known as OWL (Omanisation, Wasta, Labour Law), if it is to achieve SE success.

2.3 Barriers to Successful Strategy Execution

Having defined SE, established its crucial role in attaining organisational success, emphasised the gap in the research, and discussed the alarmingly high SEFR, this section aims at the heart of the research question by looking at the barriers to SE success. The objective is to unearth from the literature the main and most commonly-cited SE barriers to (a) inform the intended interview guide, which will lead the in-depth interviews with OmanBank's senior management team, and (b) compare these barriers with the barriers that emerged from the OmanBank interview data.

According to Cândido and Santos (2019: 49), SE barriers are "the internal and external events that act to modify or impede the execution of the initial strategic intention". The terms barriers, obstacles, and impediments have been used synonymously in the literature, and a similar approach will be carried through here.

A review of the extant literature was carried out inductively on barriers to successful SE. Synthesis of the findings unveiled that while some researchers highlight individual barriers to SE, the majority follow the tradition of grouping the barriers into related domains depending

on their theoretical inclinations (Obeidat et al., 2017; Cândido and Santos, 2019). Furthermore, the grouping of barriers takes two distinct directions: either straightforward categorisation or grouping within a graphics-based framework to describe a web of causal or temporal relationships among barriers (Obeidat et al., 2017). Okumus (2003) and Pettigrew (2014), for example, used the same grouping (strategic content, strategic context, operational factors, and outcome), whereas Kazmi (2008) and Obeidat et al. (2017) grouped the barriers into actions such as activating strategy, managing change, and achieving effectiveness.

This study follows the grouping conventions used in the literature, whereby the SE barriers have been extracted and grouped under five main banners:

(1) OmanBank Contextual Barriers (OCB)
(2) The Organisational Leadership Factor (OLF)
(3) Strategy Formulation Barriers (SFB)
(4) Operational Management Barriers (OMB), and
(5) Change Management Barriers (CMB)

This grouping of SE barriers has the following characteristics:

(a) Relevant to the research question of this study, which seeks to understand the barriers to successful SE barriers at OmanBank.
(b) Vitally, begins with OmanBank's Contextual Barriers (OCB), mainly Omanisation (nationalisation policy) and Wasta (nepotism/favouritism), whose emergence, as the novel major finding of this study, has mandated a focused literature review on the two topics.
(c) Encapsulates the most commonly-cited barriers to SE (Cândido and Santos, 2019) across the literature [from (2) to (5)].
(d) Not all barriers work in isolation. Some barriers interconnect, interact, and are interdependent (Ranjbar, Shirazi, and Blooki, 2014). A barrier may "lead to and reinforce other barriers, eventually forming long chains of blockages" (Cândido and Santos, 2019: 39).
(e) Importantly, the 'organisational leadership' factor emerged as the overarching domino-effect factor having an effect on all the other barrier domains, either positively or negatively (EPL, 2020; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020; Obembe, Al Mansour, and

Kolade, 2021). The reason for this is that effective SE depends on effective organisational leadership (Bossidy and Charan, 2012; Paten, 2015; Gandolfi and Stone, 2016) and necessitates "CEOs [to] develop an approach that integrates all those elements" (Collis, 2021: 1), thus evidencing the interconnectivity and interdependences of barriers as mentioned under (d) above.

The barriers are listed in order of their relevance and importance for this research, and their presentation and discussion follow in the same order. As such, OCB merits discussion at the top of the five barrier domains to SE, followed by organisational leadership and then the rest of the barriers.

2.3.1 OmanBank Contextual Barriers (OCB)

At the apex of the findings of this research from the OmanBank data is the OCB theme, comprising 'Omanisation' (nationalisation), 'Wasta' (nepotism/favouritism), and Omani Labour Law (abbreviated OWL) which captured the most important findings of this study, and thus deserved to be discussed at the outset. The striking emergence of OWL mandated a retrospective-focused literature review due to the following four main considerations:

(a) being the most prominent and contextually-novel SE barriers at OmanBank with no similarities whatsoever in the literature.

(b) their endorsement by all the eight participants as a severe domain of SE barriers, commanding the highest number of total interview-mentions among all the six main themes at both the main theme level and the individual subthemes level (see Table 4.1).

(c) having led to the redefinition and re-categorisation of the SE barriers into 'contextual barriers' and 'conventional barriers' (see 4.3.1) and, thus, the modification of this study's 'conceptual framework' (see Figure 2.1).

(d) representing this study's original contribution to the corpus of research on strategy execution, Omanisation, and Wasta, hopefully adding value to both theoretical knowledge and professional practice.

However, since Omani Labour Law is a government-legislated law with no identified dedicated literature, this section covers only Omanisation and Wasta.

In the literature, which is overwhelmingly Western-focused (Mass, 2016), the review process in the search for barriers to successful SE did not unveil the issues of 'nationalisation' and

'nepotism' as barriers to strategic success. Omanisation and Wasta as severe barriers to SE, therefore, represent novel findings at OmanBank, going a long way towards answering the research question in its aim to understand the barriers to successful SE at the bank. This novelty and severity prompted a retrospectively focused literature review on the two topics that the interview participants described as having nationwide prevalence.

(A) The Omanisation (Nationalisation) Policy

The six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations (Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE) present similar characteristics in terms of demographics: namely, rapid population growth, extensive reliance on an expatriate workforce, and high unemployment among citizens (Waxin, Kumra, and Zhao, 2020).

Particularly in Oman, unemployment has become a pressing social policy issue that had been building up long before, but wider public attention was first drawn to it during the 'Omani Spring' demonstrations of 2011 (Ennis, 2020: 760). This spectre concerns all GCC States that have embarked on similar work-localisation programmes (Al-Nahdi, 2016). It was this socio-economic and political atmosphere that gave birth to 'Omanisation' in 1988 as the work-localisation policy introduced by the Omani government (Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer, 2019; Aravind and Nayar, 2020). Omanisation, therefore, aimed to substitute the expatriate workforce with Omanis in all sectors of the economy to achieve the said objectives, not least to retain the sizable outflow of overseas remittances by the expatriate workforce (Al-Nahdi, 2016). Being the first work-localisation programme in the GCC, Omanisation was mirrored across the GCC states (Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer, 2019).

However, in terms of research attention in the literature, while multiple authors have examined the impact of work-localisation programmes in the GCC, no robust body of literature on Omanisation can be said to exist in either the conceptual or empirical research (Waxin, Kumra, and Zhao (2020). Theoretically, according to Al-Nahdi (2016: 101), for example, there is a limited body of conceptual knowledge of Omanisation, which, having carried out a more recent literature review, is a view this researcher can only agree with.

The labour market is a contested space for the Omani government, as it is mired between the opposing pressures of liberating the private sector and deregulating the labour market to ensure

easy access to skilled, cheap, foreign labour on the one hand, and protecting Omani labour interests on the other (Ennis, 2020).

Omanisation was introduced to the Omani banking sector (of which OmanBank is part) by the Central Bank of Oman in June 1992 (Al-Lamki, 2005). The ruling stipulated that all banks should achieve an overall Omanisation target of 90% by December 1995 (Al-Lamki, 2005). The same was to be done granularly by job level: 70% in top- and mid-management roles, 95% at the clerical level, and 100% at the non-clerical level (Al-Lamki, 2005). OmanBank was among the first few banks to achieve the legislated target (91% in 2013), but not until 21 years after the deadline set by the Central Bank of Oman (Al-Nahdi, 2016), providing a clear indication that the policy was dysfunctional in terms of being unrealistic and unachievable.

Since its inception, several measures have been taken by the respective Omani governments to implement Omanisation (Ennis, 2020), including human capital development and other more direct labour market interventions such as a sponsorship system, limited work permission schemes, quota systems (Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer, 2019), temporary visa caps and bans, and increasing visa costs (Ennis, 2020).

Despite operating for about three decades, the evidence suggests that Omanisation and the GCC work-localisation programmes that mirrored it have failed considerably in achieving their primary objectives due to similar human, social, and organisational factors (Al-Nahdi, 2016; Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer, 2019). For example, a recent study conducted in 2020, i.e., 33 years after the launch of Omanisation, indicated that "Omani citizens hold only 12.5 per cent of jobs in the private sector" (Ennis, 2020: 759), while in neighbouring UAE the situation is much worse – where citizens represent only 3.64% of the private workforce (Waxin, Kumra, and Zhao, 2020).

Researchers have attributed such a massive failure of work-localisation programmes generally and Omanisation in particular to three main causes (Common, 2011; Sidani and Thornberry, 2013; Ismail and Al Shanfari, 2014; Al-Nahdi, 2016; Lanvin and Evans, 2018; Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer, 2019):

Firstly, the Omani government has consistently used punitive logic over the years in its Omanisation policies, dictating quantitative quotas, bans, and imposing fines (Glaister, Al

Amri, and Spicer, 2019). For example, the Supreme Court of Oman ruled that if an expatriate employee is replaced by an Omani employee, this is deemed fair dismissal, and the employment protections afforded the latter make subsequent dismissal difficult (International Trade Administration, 2021). Another example of the government's punitive stance was seen in its swift response following the jobseekers' demonstration in late 2017 – creating 25,000 jobs within six months "in a way that seemed to mirror the announcement of 50,000 new jobs to quell protests in the 'Omani Spring'" (Ennis, 2020: 762). Accordingly, many companies received long lists of jobseekers from the national registry to hire within a specific time frame. Of these, 161 companies received fines for failing to hire a single Omani citizen within the stipulated deadline (Ennis, 2020).

This disciplinarian approach, according to Al-Nahdi (2016), Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer (2019), and Ennis (2020), did not achieve the required results mainly because employers saw it as illogical and, hence, significantly resisted it. Indeed, employers lobbied hard against the punitive measures, calling them cumbersome, injurious to revenue, and phantom employment, and named them the 'Omanisation tax' (Ennis, 2020).

Secondly, Omanisation has failed due to the country's poor human capital management system (Al-Nahdi, 2016), be that in education (Ismail and Al Shanfari, 2014) or talent management (Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer, 2019) failing to meet current market–skill needs. For example, the research into weaknesses in the education system presented by Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer (2019: 727) quotes one executive as saying: "Usually if we recruit somebody from the higher college of technology, we will spend another three years of training. [The] curriculum does not meet the requirement of our petroleum and gas industry." It has also been argued that, despite a more recent focus on workforce development (Al-Jahwari and Budhwar, 2016), Oman's ranking in talent management (coming 84 in a list of 119 countries) is down mainly to its diminished pool of global talent (Lanvin and Evans, 2018).

Thirdly, the prevalence of the 'hidden' barrier of 'Wasta' in the selection and promotion systems (Common, 2011; Sidani and Thornberry, 2013) further exacerbates the weak education system and counterproductive, punitive government measures.

Considering the obstacles described above, scholars suggested three key measures to improve Omanisation (Al-Nahdi, 2016): (i) building robust education and Human Resources

Management (HRM) systems, (ii) changing the approach from a punitive quantitative approach (Wilkins, 2001; Harry, 2007; Mashood, Verhoeven, and Chansarkar, 2009; Al-Nahdi, 2016) based on setting quotas and firing foreigners to a more logical, qualitative and motivation-based one, and (iii) establishing structured processes – implying, though not directly, a cultural shift away from 'Wasta'-oriented practices to a more coherent approach (Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer, 2019).

The above-mentioned obstacles to Omanisation furnish four meaningful inferences concerning the research question that guides this research, aiming to understand the barriers to successful SE at OmanBank.

First, the respective Omani governments have consistently used the 'hard' approach vis-à-vis the 'soft' approach with employers, which is likely to have harmed Omanisation in two significant ways: (i) discouraging foreign investors and resulting in foreign capital outflow, thus defeating the 'retention of overseas remittances' as one of the main goals of Omanisation. This impact is seen in expressions like 'Omanisation tax' and, most importantly, (ii) creating resentment and resistance among employers and thus discouraging them from training Omanis to achieve effective Omanisation. The lack of training would have resulted in unqualified Omanis taking undeserved positions, more seriously crucial leadership positions, thus, producing a cascading chain of interconnected SE barriers emanating from wrong decisions, namely: failure of communication, lack of engagement, lack of motivation, and ultimately failure of SE.

Second, the respective Omani governments have failed for decades to upgrade the quality of education and talent management. Thus the 'mandated' percentage of Omanisation speaks of quantity rather than quality, which produces the same impact on SE as discussed in the previous inference.

Third, whatever chances Omanisation has of being successful, no matter how minor, are seriously jeopardised by Wasta, which as a 'hidden barrier' to SE, reinforces Omanisation and they both work collaboratively to undermine the success of SE.

Finally, the above literature findings are validated by the findings of this research which concluded that "Omanisation is a good strategy, bad implementation" (Participant-8), and thus

turned into a major SE barrier at OmanBank through its grave impact on organisational leadership, which in turn has impacted every other SE barrier.

(B) 'Wasta' (Nepotism/Favouritism)

Oman is an Arabic-speaking country, and Wasta means nepotism or favouritism in Arabic. Wasta is a crucial topic for this study because of its prevalence in the OmanBank data as a major barrier to SE. Accordingly, as was the case with Omanisation, Wasta mandated a retrospective-focused literature review.

Nepotism takes many forms, and discussing all forms goes beyond the bounds of the current study, where the focus is on identifying the barriers to SE at OmanBank. This being the case, the review of 'Wasta' has been confined to 'undeserved appointment of relatives, friends and tribal mates in key positions and its impact on strategic success'.

Wasta is regarded as a form of social networking (Ali and Weir, 2020) indigenous to the Arab World (Bachkirov, 2019), leading to the provision of unmerited advantages (Mohamed and Mohamad, 2011) and based on tribal and family affiliation (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993; Al-Hamadi, Budhwar, and Shipton, 2007; Ali, 2016). While Wasta may be seen as a universal phenomenon (Chittock, 2015), known as Guanxi in China and Blat in Russia (Hutchings and Weir, 2006a; Ali, 2016), for example, different countries have polarised attitudes towards it, and it prevails in various potencies, dependent on many factors including cultural perception and national legal and law enforcement systems (Chittock, 2015). Wasta's prevalence is predominantly visible in the Arab Middle East (Ali and Weir, 2020), particularly in Oman (Al-Nahdi, 2016). In these countries, Wasta is viewed as a source of major cultural influence on every strategic business, economic, and social decision (Iles, Almhodie, and Baruch, 2012; Velez-Calle, Robledo-Ardila, and Rodriquez-Rios, 2015; Ali, 2016; Al-Nahdi, 2016; Lee Park and Paiva, 2018; Bachkirov, 2019; Ali and Weir, 2020).

In terms of research attention, whilst there has been increasing interest in the topic, research on Wasta remains scarce, fragmented, and criticised for its limited theoretical rigour (Ali, 2016; Ali and Weir, 2020). Conceptually, available research has viewed Wasta through different lenses, such as the institutional, social capital, and social network theories (Ali and Weir, 2020) and the Theory of cognitive dissonance (Al-Nahdi, 2016). As an example of the latter, the

prevalence of Wasta could be interpreted using Leon Festinger's *Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (published 1957), which conceives that people are likely to behave in ways contrary to their beliefs if the reward for doing so is significant (Harmon-Jones and Mills, 1999). For instance, in Islam, Muslims are instructed that "the best that you can hire is one who is competent and trustworthy" (Quran: 28: 26); nonetheless, getting an undeserved Wasta job in a high-unemployment labour market like Oman's (15% in 2015) (Al-Nahdi, 2016: 17), may be considered a significant reward. Accordingly, 'Wasta' is thought to play an important role in decisions about hiring and promotion in many Arab countries (Mohamed and Mohamad, 2011) and is seen to directly promote one's career (Dobie, Grant, and Knudstrup, 2001).

According to the Theory of cognitive dissonance, the more people rely on Wasta, the stronger and more self-reinforcing it becomes (Ali and Weir, 2020), and the more dissonance is reduced (Harmon-Jones and Mills, 1999); hence Wasta becomes 'business-as-usual' and normalised (Al-Nahdi, 2016; Bachkirov, 2019). Then, beyond normalisation, 'Wasta' gets embedded in the national culture (Hutchings and Weir, 2006b; Ledeneva, 2006; Horak, 2014; Velez-Calle, Robledo-Ardila, and Rodriquez-Rios, 2015; Horak and Taube, 2016), and beyond cultural embeddedness, Wasta may gain legitimacy (Mohamed and Mohamad, 2011; Ali, 2016). Why legitimacy? Because in Oman and the Arab-Middle East generally, there is ubiquitous anticipation that an individual with access to authority will provide Wasta to those closest to them – relatives, tribe, and friends – whenever possible (Loewe, Blume, and Speer, 2008; Ali and Weir, 2020) as a token of loyalty (Alwerthan, Swanson, and Rogge, 2017). More worryingly, in societies with a strong sense of tribalism like Oman, individuals who do not provide Wasta are seen to bring shame to themselves and those closest to them (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993). Mohamed and Mohamad (2011) quote several Arab proverbs that actively encourage Wasta, four of which are listed in Table 2.1 below, as evidence of the cultural embeddedness of Wasta.

Table 2.1: Examples of Arab Proverbs Promoting 'Wasta'

	Proverb	Meaning
1	Seek who you know to fulfil your needs (p. 32)	Do not waste time, go straight to your connections.
2	If you have a turban you will have a safe trip (p. 106)	The turban symbolises seniority. If you know such a person, your demands will be met.
3	No one can escalate except those who have ladders (p. 107)	Rising to higher levels requires important connections.
4	Lucky is the person who the governor is his uncle (p. 505)	If you are related to important people, you are fortunate.

Source: Adapted by the researcher from Mohamed and Mohamad (2011)

Within the context of Oman, the findings from the OmanBank data, as confirmed in the literature, revealed that Wasta has a strong presence in the national culture and has an impact on all economic and social aspects (Al-Hamadi, Budhwar, and Shipton, 2007; Katou et al., 2010; Sidani and Thornberry, 2013; Al-Nahdi, 2016). Al-Nahdi (2016: 234), for instance, contends that "Wasta is rife throughout Omani society and that despite their negative belief towards 'Wasta' and nepotism, Omanis are very keen to use it to gain employment opportunities." Al-Hamadi, Budhwar, and Shipton (2007) maintain that tribe and family are the second most influential factors of HRM in Oman after Islam, despite Islam forbidding tribal prejudices (Sidani and Thornberry, 2013). Katou et al. (2010) surveyed six Omani organisations and agree that Oman's national culture (beliefs, values, norms, social elites, and religion) plays the most important role in shaping HRM in Oman. Within the larger HRM arena, Al-Nahdi (2016: 54) has specifically stressed the impact of 'Wasta' and Omanisation on the system of 'selection and promotion' (which the focus of this study echoes), arguing: that "several factors play a crucial role in shaping the HRM systems in Oman, namely Omanisation and the prevalence of Wasta in selection and promotion systems". The contention is, therefore, that despite the popular cognisance of the unhealthy practice of Wasta, people strive to use it to secure jobs (ibid.), making the degree of cognitive dissonance at play highly prevalent in the manner in which employment is accomplished in Oman (ibid.).

A final important finding is that, from an Omani-Omani perspective, Wasta is believed to defeat Omanisation because it disqualifies well-qualified Omanis to benefit unqualified Omanis (Al-Nahdi, 2016). This finding is relevant to the research question, because it reflects

the interdependences among the two OmanBank-only barriers to SE and, thus, the 'compounded' adverse impact on the strategic success of the bank, as elaborated in 4.4.1 of Chapter 4.

To summarise, the synthesis of the literature review on Wasta reveals Wasta's strong presence in the national culture of Oman and its significant influence on the nation's strategic, economic, and social decisions. This finding infers that Wasta has a significant impact on the formulation and implementation of strategies (Lee Park and Paiva, 2018), placing inappropriate people in strategic decision-making positions (Katou et al., 2010; Al-Nahdi, 2016), which in turn, leads to a lack of organisational productivity (Loewe, Blume, and Speer, 2008; Ali and Weir, 2020), which ultimately fails SE. This finding corroborates with the major finding of this study (see 4.4.1): that 'Wasta' is a serious barrier to SE success through unmerited hiring of relatives and 'tribal mates' in leadership positions, and leadership is proved to be the overacting factor that controls and impinges the greatest impact on all the elements influencing SE (Lowy, 2015; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020).

A final concluding insight from the literature review on OmanBank's Contextual Barriers (OCB) theme is that the literature findings are hardly surprising, bearing in mind the major empirical finding from this research, which is that both Omanisation and Wasta represent the two major contextually-novel obstacles to the strategic success of OmanBank. Through the eyes of the interviewees, this is seen in Participant-2's comment that: "Wasta has the same impact as [ahh] Omanisation because it leads to placing the wrong person sometimes in key posts"; and Participant-6's statement that: "I believe Omanisation is a form of Wasta for Omanis by the government […] because it is forcing businesses to give senior positions to Omanis before they are even ready." The severe impact of Omanisation and Wasta (along with the Omani Labour Law, as we shall see later) happens through reframing leadership as the dominant influencing factor on SE (Bossidy and Charan, 2012; Paten, 2015; Gandolfi and Stone, 2016), thus creating a novel contextual leadership model at the bank, which, in turn, shapes the rest of every other barrier to SE. This conclusion transitions the discussion on barriers to organisational leadership as the subject matter of the next section.

2.3.2 The Organisational Leadership Factor

In this study, 'organisational leadership' refers to the executive team responsible for the overall management of the organisation – in this case, OmanBank – and the body in charge of the strategic management process particularly. In the literature, organisational leadership has been used synonymously with 'strategic leadership' (Mahdi, Nassar, and Almsafirc, 2021; Tao, 2021), 'strategic management' (SM) (Pereira, Durão, and Santos, 2019), 'management' (Cândido and Santos, 2019; Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade, 2021) or 'leadership' (Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020).

Generally, authors stress the extent to which organisational leadership has become indispensable within organisations (O'Reilly et al., 2010; Sorooshiam et al., 2010; Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020; Doeleman, van Dun, and Wilderom, 2021; Tao, 2021), maintaining that "the success or failure of a company is explained by its Strategic Management" (Pereira, Durão, and Santos, 2019: 2).

Regarding SE barriers, scholars across their disciplines have emphasised that organisational leadership has the upper hand when it comes to SE, be that its failure or success (Lynch, 2018; Cândido and Santos, 2019; EPL, 2020; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020; Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade, 2021). For example, Cândido and Santos (2019: 45) have stated: "most of the obstacles to successful strategy implementation are organisational factors that fall under management control". This view is supported by EPL (2020), which points to the numerous barriers identified by scholars to SE: poor leadership, lack of time and resources, poor communication, behaviours and skills, most of which come under the control of organisational leadership. Hiršsons and Ludviga (2020) endorse these arguments by maintaining that organisational leadership is considered the major factor influencing the outcome of SE, since leaders are responsible for transforming organisations.

Conversely, ineffective organisational leadership is cited as the primary barrier to SE (Kaplan and Norton, 2005; Hrebiniak, 2006; EIU, 2013; Lynch, 2018; Beer, 2020) because "the conversion of strategic intentions into plans, actions and outcomes, falls to organisational leaders" (Lowy, 2015: 1) and demands their greatest efforts (Bernardo, Anholon, and Novaski, 2016). Moreover, according to Beer (2020: 2): "top-team ineffectiveness was reported as the reason for failed strategies in almost all the organisations we studied".

However, the question must be: What makes organisational leadership critical to SE? According to the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL, 2017), the strength of organisational leadership comes from influencing others by adopting a defined geo-culturally sensitive set of universal leadership skills and personality traits. One of the key challenges of leadership in practice, however, is that, despite the profusion of research on the topic, there is no universal definition of leadership, nor a competency framework, that precisely defines the gold-standard leadership skills and personality traits (Jian and Fairhurst, 2016; CISL, 2017) that bring about effective SE (Bossidy and Charan, 2012; Paten, 2015; Gandolfi and Stone, 2016). As Doeleman, van Dun, and Wilderom (2021: 55) assert, the "specific behaviours and practices for effective strategy implementation have hardly been empirically explored". This lack of consensus prompted Allio (2018: 50) to conclude:

> *"The leadership phenomenon itself is still a mystery. We cannot observe it directly, but we claim to observe its effects – although we cannot agree on a metric for leader competence. And theories about how to lead effectively."*

The demonstrated lack of a universally agreed leadership definition and competency framework has prompted most relevant studies to focus on CEOs and top leadership (Bass, 1990; Tao, 2021) and show an increased interest in the symbolic role of organisational leadership, particularly how the personality traits of CEOs can impact SE (Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020). Therefore, this has led to leadership and leaders becoming "the trending topics in management literature for the past 20 years or more" (Allio, 2018: 50). Accordingly, Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) sensibly argue that the disagreement among people on what they mean by leadership is the essence of the research.

With this study focusing on a specific context, a final relevant note on 'contextual leadership' – meaning context-impacted leadership – is pertinent to conclude this section. The literature indicates that contextual leadership is fundamental for the success of SE (Coulson-Thomas, 2021b) because forms, requirements, and expectations of leadership vary depending upon the context and may present particular challenges in different environments (ibid). However, surprisingly, despite its established importance, contextual leadership is under-researched, as seen in the postulation of Reiche et al. (2016: 1) that "while the global leadership literature has

grown rapidly over recent years, the context in which global leadership occurs remains ill-defined and under-conceptualised".

Given that this section has forcefully demonstrated how critical organisational leadership is to the success or failure of SE and bearing in mind this conclusion's relevance to the research question, organisational leadership was a central theme of the in-depth interviews with senior practitioners from OmanBank. In OmanBank data, unsurprisingly, organisational leadership stood out at the apex of SE barriers, particularly after being contextually remodelled via OWL (Omanisation, Wasta, and Omani Labour Law), representing OmanBank's contextually-novel barrier triangle (see 4.4.1).

2.3.3 Strategy Formulation Barriers (SFB)

Strategy Formulation has shown in the literature as one of the major domains of barriers to SE. Defined as "the positioning and actions taken by an enterprise, in response to or anticipation of changes in the external environment, intended to achieve competitive advantage" (Wasilewski, 2020: 23), strategy formulation is the first, most crucial step in the strategic management process. According to Kabeyi (2019) and Eresia-Eke and Soriakumar (2021), strategy formulation is the bedrock of successful SE; the two being a fundamental double-act, whereby the one without the other cannot succeed (EPL, 2020), and therefore, must be seen as two sides of the same coin (Pereira, Durão, and Santos, 2019; Eresia-Eke and Soriakumar, 2021).

Furthermore, were the SE perfect but the strategy formulation below par, the outcome would be perfect SE of the wrong strategy, "which is likely to lead to an organisation being more unsuccessful rather than successful" (Wasilewski, 2020: 24). And since the goal of strategising is to improve organisational success and gain competitive advantage (Caplan and Norton, 2008; Norton, 2009; Ansari, 2010; OpenStax, 2019; Pereira, Durão, and Santos, 2019; Wasilewski, 2020), putting a concerted effort into SE before focusing on strategy formulation would defeat the objective of the exercise (Horwath, 2006). Therefore, not only does strategy formulation matter, but it is an essential prerequisite for successful SE (Porter, 2008; Magretta, 2011; Montgomery, 2012; Stadler et al., 2022). So, what could go wrong in strategy formulation that causes a barrier to SE?

Two major strategy formulation-related barriers to SE were prominent in the literature and are worth exploring in service of this study's research question in its quest to understand the barriers to successful SE at OmanBank: (A) unclear strategy, and (B) lack of involvement of lower-level staff in strategy formulation.

(A) Unclear Strategy

Numerous scholars agree that no matter how critical SE is to organisational success, unarguably, it relies on good strategy formulation (Henry, 2018; EPL, 2020; MacLennan and Markides, 2021; Wiles, 2021). Therefore, an SE barrier is created if the assumptions upon which strategy formulation are based are flawed (Cândido and Santos, 2019: 67) because SE is not expected to rescue a strategy that from the outset was ill-formed (Leonardi, 2015). According to Wiles (2021), the 2020 Gartner Execution-Gap Survey found that 83% of strategies can fail due to faulty assumptions. Conversely, scholars, including Hiršsons and Ludviga (2020: 99), indicate that organisations with clear strategies and goals outperformed those with unclear strategies.

MacLennan and Markides (2021: 88) clarify why strategy formulation must not be unambiguous by stating that "generic and ambiguous statements create lack of clarity – something long recognised as a problem in strategy". Wiles endorses this (2021: 1), maintaining that "a lack of clarity leads to unwanted surprises during execution". Hence, a rigorous approach to strategy formulation is essential (EPL, 2020: 20) to achieve successful SE.

The central implication of this discussion about unclear strategies not only supports the research question but also sets the direction that must be taken to ensure effective SE at OmanBank. The Bank's organisational leadership, therefore, must ensure that (a) the strategic assumptions (Cândido and Santos, 2019; Wiles, 2021) underpinning strategy formulation are not flawed, and (b) the conceptual model of strategy formulation (prescriptive vi-a-vis descriptive) (Amoo, Lodorfos, and Mahtab, 2022) clearly defines the process as well as the relationship between formulators and executors (Mintzberg, 1987; Rose and Cray, 2013; Leonardi, 2015; Coulson-Thomas, 2021a; Loch, Kavadias, and Yang, 2021). At OmanBank, one of the primary data findings (see 4.4.4) is that a lack of strategic clarity – relating to unclear, unrealistic, and conflicting strategies – has been a key barrier to SE.

(B) Lack of Involvement of Lower-level staff in Strategy Formulation

According to human capital theory, inclusive employee involvement helps the workforce accumulate work experience, increasing personal and organisational knowledge and skills and building employee commitment to the organisation (Joo and Park, 2010). Al-Nahdi (2016), among others, point out that committed employees are less likely to leave an organisation.

Lack of involvement at lower managerial levels and among other stakeholders in the strategy formulation process, otherwise known as 'the disengagement canyon' (Haudan, 2009), is another severe strategy formulation-related barrier to SE about which scholars strongly agree (Beer, 2020; Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020; Brown, 2021; Coulson-Thomas, 2021a; Loch, Kavadias, and Yang, 2021; Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade, 2021). Cândido and Santos (2019) argue that strategy formulation is sometimes perceived as the responsibility of one individual or a few people, creating weak communication and low levels of involvement. Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade (2021: 1967) add that by restricting strategy formulation to a few key individuals, not only does the majority workforce become disengaged, but it limits the chances of effective transition from formulation to execution and, therefore, "if formulated strategies are to be successfully realised, it should not be an exclusive preserve of senior managers" (ibid.: 1955).

Coulson-Thomas (2021a: 15) makes this limiting of strategy formulation to key personnel their major critique of traditional planning, stating: "too often, it has been done by specialists with limited inputs from those closest to customers and marketplace trends". Loch, Kavadias, and Yang (2021: 28) agree, claiming that bottom-up "novel ideas from the operational levels may even suggest ways to improve the strategy" because, in effect, these employees also become 'strategy makers' (Cândido and Santos, 2019: 67). And being 'strategy makers' will urge them to "put more energy into realising the plans they helped to build" (Doeleman, van Dun, and Wilderom, 2021: 67), a matter that ultimately enhances SE. Accordingly, lack of involvement is seen as not only harmful to strategy (Brown, 2021), but also rather a way to defeat the strategy (Maas, 2008).

Having established the criticality of the involvement of lower-level staff for a compelling strategy formulation and, thus, its importance to successful SE, the question remains: What is the ideal breadth of involvement in the strategy formulation process? Opinions about this are

mixed: while some authors suggest involving all hierarchical levels of the organisation (Cândido and Santos, 2019), others stress the crucial role of middle management (Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020; Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade, 2021). For example, according to Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade (2021: 1958), "middle manager's active contribution to strategy formulation enhances meaning development and communication". Empirically, the survey of Stadler et al. (2022: 5) of 201 organisations across Europe and the USA found that while the majority had opened up less than one-third of their strategies to lower-level staff and even to other stakeholders, non-the-less this has accounted for 50% of these organisations' profitability. Moreover, the survey found a trend among larger organisations (e.g., Ericsson, Telefónica, Adidas, Lufthansa, IBM, and Enel) to open up their strategies to lower-level staff and other stakeholders (ibid).

Relating the preceding discussion to the current study's line of inquiry, two important deductions are worth making.

First, lack of involvement breeds numerous adverse behaviours, including a lack of commitment, motivation, and initiative, and can engender resistance – all of which are seen as barriers to successful SE (Maas, 2008; Lynch, 2018; Cândido and Santos, 2019; Brown, 2021). Furthermore, this foregrounds the intertwinement and compounding nature of SE barriers (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel, 1998); that is, failure of organisational leadership to involve lower-level staff in strategy formulation will likely lead to a lack of motivation, resistance to change, and thus SE failure, as depicted in the conceptual framework of this study (see Figure 2.1).

Second, lack of involvement showed prominently as a harmful outlier in the barriers to SE at OmanBank (see 4.4.4.). As an issue that all the participating senior managers spoke about regretfully, in many ways, the strategy formulation process at OmanBank echoed Beer's (2020: 1) description that "strategy is often developed by the leader along with the chief strategy or marketing executive".

2.3.4 Operational Management Barriers (OMB)

In the context of the strategic management process (SMP), operational management – otherwise known as operational strategy – has been defined as "the strategy concerned with

how to use the organisational resources, processes, people and their skills effectively to attain the corporate and business-level strategic direction" (Kyriazoglou, 2020: 8). It is clear from the definition that Operational Management, in effect, describes the SE process as shown in Figure 2.1. Moreover, OMB falls into the two categories of (A) Process Management Barriers (PMB) and (B) Resources Availability Barriers (RAB), each of which is delineated below.

(A) Process Management Barriers (PMB)

Processes are 'series of actions carried out to achieve a particular result' (*Collins Dictionary*, 2021). Processes may include (amongst other things) the processes of strategy communication, setting goals, determining roles, delegation, and monitoring performance (Hallahan et al., 2007; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020; Miller, 2020; Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020). Efficient process management is key to SE success (Eresia-Eke and Soriakumar, 2021; Petersen et al., 2021; Wiles, 2021). However, since discussing all process barriers goes beyond the bounds of this research, the two processes that stood out most prominently as barriers to SE success in the data findings of OmanBank are explored further here (see 4.4.3). These were (A) strategy communication failure and (B) lack of employee motivation.

Strategy Communication Failure

In the literature, effective communication of strategy to all stakeholders surfaced as the process that had the most profound impact on the success or failure of SE (Rice, 2008; Sial et al., 2013; Kaplowitz, 2018; EPL, 2020; Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020; Loch, Kavadias, and Yang, 2021; Wiles, 2021). That is because SE success requires communication to radiate from/to all organisational constituents and occur at every level of the firm (EPL, 2020) to ensure that all stakeholders remain fully informed (Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020). Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade (2021: 56), for example, stress how it is "widely established in extant communications literature that effective communication plays a significant role in strategy implementation".

Accordingly, strategy communication failure is seen as a major barrier to successful SE (Schaap, 2006; Pereira, Durão, and Santos, 2019), and thus it is cited more frequently in the literature than any other issue hindering successful SE (Obeidat et al., 2017). Pereira, Durão, and Santos (2019: 4), for instance, maintain that "there are several proven barriers to strategic implementation, with communication being more identified by people as the one that causes

the most trouble to this process" because "in the organisational arena, business and communication are two inseparable issues" (ibid.: 1).

Paradoxically, despite its demonstrated criticality for SE, most organisations fail to communicate effectively (Wiles, 2021), thus exacerbating SE failure. According to Gartner's '2020 Execution Gap Survey', 67% of employees said they do not understand their role when launching new strategies (Wiles, 2021).

In summary, the literature review on strategy communication failure was prompted by the OmanBank data's unearthing of it as a visible SE barrier (see 4.4.3) that is vital in answering the research question of this study seeking to understand the barriers to successful SE at OmanBank.

Lack of Employee Motivation

Like strategy communication failure, lack of employee motivation emerged from OmanBank's data analysis as an observable impediment to successful SE at the bank, thus instigating this focused literature review on the topic.

Motivation has been defined as 'the process of rewarding the right actions and behaviour contributing to achieving the organisational strategic targets by organisational leadership' (Pindelski and Mrowka, 2011). Conceptually, motivation can be seen through the lens of Herzberg's Two- factor theory on individual motivation in the workplace (Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman, 2011), which is regarded as one of the most commonly used theories in the management literature (Chelladurai, 2006; Fitzgerald and Schutte, 2010). The theory stresses the importance of employee motivation, stating that two-factor clusters – 'motivator factors' and 'hygiene factors' – decide it. Of these, the former relates to the 'content' of the work, like responsibility, achievement, and recognition, while the latter relates to the 'context' of the work, like working conditions, human capital policies, and pay.

A review of the extant literature revealed that the criticality of employee motivation to the success of SE is far from obvious (Lynch, 2018; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020; Vigfússon, Jóhannsdóttir, and Ólafsson, 2021; Loch, Kavadias, and Yang, 2021). According to Loch,

Kavadias and Yang (2021: 29), one of the keys to successful SE is "giving everyone a voice – which motivates people emotionally to contribute rather than resist". Furthermore, giving everyone a voice creates employee satisfaction which "has a positive impact on strategy realisation" (Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020: 100) because employees will be enthusiastic and willing to perform duties (Albidewi, 2014). Inversely, a lack of employee motivation is seen as a substantial barrier to successful SE due to its profound impact on productivity (Ranjbar, Shirazi, and Blooki, 2014; Mass, 2016; Lynch, 2018; Olivier and Schwella, 2018; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020).

The key inference from the above concerning the research question of this study is that lack of employee motivation, as a significant SE barrier, is the direct responsibility of organisational leadership, which the literature has indicated as the dominant factor that controls all other factors impacting SE, turning them into barriers or boosters. Moreover, lack of employee motivation breeds a whole host of cascading negative attitudinal issues that could be summed up by 'low morale', which leads to a lack of commitment and yields low productivity, eventually severely impairing SE.

(B) Resources Availability Barrier (RAB)

In the context of SE, resource availability refers to the organisation's ability to deploy and manage human, financial, technological, material, natural, and intangible resources to meet a set of strategic objectives (Bird, 2018; Petersen et al., 2021). Faced with finite strategic resources, organisations must optimise resource allocation to succeed in SE (Obeidat et al., 2017; Wasilewski, 2020; Mahdi, Nassar, and Almsafirc, 2021). As Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade (2021: 1955) stress, "strategy implementation involves managing resources to ensure successful delivery of proposed strategies", otherwise resource shortages or failure to optimise capabilities will hinder SE (Petersen et al., 2021; Wiles, 2021). In their research of SE barriers in Middle Eastern pharmaceutical companies, Obeidat et al. (2017) found that resource availability is a vital factor affecting the success of SE. Likewise, Rani (2019: 2007) concluded that "the most significant undertaking in strategy implementation is the provision of assets, which is in the form of monetary or non-monetary resources".

Ironically, despite resource availability being regarded as key to the success of SE, "many organisations fail to allocate resources [...] for the actual implementation of new growth

strategies" (Wiles, 2021: 4), and there is often a lack of alignment between resources and SE requirements (Eresia-Eke and Soriakumar, 2021).

Linking the above literature findings to the research question of this study, the inference to OmanBank is that while resource availability is vital for successful SE and lack or absence of it represents a barrier to SE, most organisations face RAB. However, this is almost contrary to the findings from OmanBank, where RAB emerged as a 'mild' barrier with the lowest score (6%) of overall negative impact on SE compared with other barriers (see 4.4.6), inferring that despite a reasonable availability of resources, OmanBank's OWL-leadership continued to fail in SE through other barriers.

2.3.5 Change Management Barriers

According to the literature, change management is the last of the four central barrier domains pertaining to SE. This section defines change management, emphasises its importance, highlights its intertwinement with SE and other barriers, and then looks more closely at why it matters for this study.

Change management has been defined in many ways by different scholars. However, the following definition by Brown (2021: 16) appears comprehensively to sum it up:

> *"Organisational change is an attempt or series of attempts to modify an organisation's structure, goals, technology or work tasks in response to the changes in the organisation's environment (e.g., the collapse of a product market, changing service demands, shortage of skilled labour), and changes internal to an organisation (e.g., adoption of new procedures, new technology)."*

Taking the lead from the definition above, the source of organisational change can be either internal or external; that is, it can be internally induced or come in response to, or in anticipation of changes in the external environment (Brown, 2021). As to which form it may take, organisational change can be planned or unplanned (Wilson, 1992; Osborne and Brown, 2005). Planned change is "an intentional action, allowing the possibility of a systematic process of scanning the environment and determining how an organisation can change to meet the demand of its internal or external environment" (Brown, 2021: 17). Unplanned change, on the other hand, is likely to be "pushed on the organisation suddenly by powers outside of its control"

(ibid.) or emerge when adjusting to unpredictable external conditions (Osborne and Brown, 2005; Manninen and Huiskonen, 2022).

Effective change management has become imperative for organisational success (Lynch, 2018; Chase, 2019; Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade, 2021), and its importance has increased exponentially (Chase, 2019) considering today's turbulent business environment. This has mandated that virtually every organisation will undergo change management in some shape at some point, be that restructuring, reengineering, acquisition, downsizing, or merger, in order to remain viable and relevant (Kotter, 2007; Mosadeghrad and Ansarian, 2014; Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade, 2021; Brown, 2021). However, the said rapid pace and increasing uncertainty and complexity made change management a challenging endeavour, as seen in Kotter, Akhtar and Gupta's (2021: 1) postulation: "the single biggest challenge we face as teams, organisations, and a society at large is to adapt fast enough to match the increasing uncertainty and complexity around us". Accordingly, many organisations experience great difficulties in change management due to continuing to do what used to be the "right thing" (Cândido and Santos, 2019: 67), the consequences of which can range from minor to large-scale failings (Schwarz, Bouckenooghe, and Vakola, 2021: 163).

In the literature, the relationship between change management and SE reveals an interdependence such that "the organisation's ability to manage change has a positive impact on strategy realisation" (Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020: 100). In fact, the two are regarded as inextricably connected (Miller, 1998), which resonates in Brazukas's (2018: 1) argument that the end-goal of strategic planning is to 'change' the current way of doing things, upholding that "strategy execution is change management disguise". It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) large-scale global survey covering the USA and Europe found that failure of change management was the leading barrier to successful SE (EIU, 2013).

The inseparable overlap between change management and SE is spotlighted by the high failure rate of change management programmes reported at 67–70% (Balogun and Hailey, 2004; Meaney and Pung, 2008; Brown, 2021), which is on par with the average SE Failure Rate (SEFR) of 50–90% (see 2.2.5). Moreover, the intertwinement between the two has led several authors to conclude that failure to manage change is a failure of SE (Miller, 1998; Alamsjah, 2011; Hughes, 2011; Pindelski and Mrowka, 2011).

Regarding how the barriers to change management and, thus, to SE can be overcome, numerous scholars have proposed various measures which are beyond this study's limitations to discuss in detail. Therefore, two examples are offered here. Firstly, many authors have agreed that articulation of a 'structured change management programme' (SCMP) prior to SE is a prerequisite to its success (Redding and Catalanello, 1994; Bazzoli et al., 2004; Kotter, 2007; Cooke, Cabrey, and Haughey, 2014; Huy, 2016). Caldwell et al. (2008) see SCMP as central to aligning the behaviours of employees and combatting resistance to change, a contention that echoes Cooke, Cabrey, and Haughey's (2014: 3) statement:

> *"A good practice at the launch of a strategic initiative is to develop a deliberate and structured change management plan to address both the hearts and minds of employees up and down the organisational hierarchy."*

Secondly, Lynch (2018) argues that while SCMP is a vital prerequisite for successful SE, SE may not be effective if it is not sized up, i.e., disproportionate to the volume of change. To illustrate the point, Lynch (2018) offered a categorisation (see Table 2.2) that maps the size of SE to the tone of change management and equally illuminates the overlapping nature of the two.

Table 2.2: Matching Strategy Execution Intervention to the Tone of Change

Types of change	Corresponding type of strategy execution intervention
Radical change: Where there is an urgent need for fundamental change of strategic direction, such as when an organisation faces bankruptcy.	Comprehensive strategy execution programme: Strategy execution is urgent, sweeping across the organisation, notwithstanding the reactions of anyone who is affected.
High uncertainty: Where timetables, tasks, and even strategic objectives are likely to undergo frequent changes.	Incremental strategy execution programme: A flexible execution programme which happens in small increments over short time periods as part of the overall strategic direction.
Moderate change: In cases where there is neither an urgent need for radical change of direction nor a high degree of uncertainty.	Selective strategy execution programme: Where strategy execution takes a moderate compromising pace.

Source: Adapted from Richard Lynch (2018).

To conclude the aforesaid literature findings on change management, two remarks are pertinent in relation to the research question of this study that seeks to understand the barriers to successful SE at OmanBank. First, the literature findings demonstrated that change management is inextricably intertwined with SE and is an essential prerequisite prior to executing any strategic initiative. Second, the findings clearly demonstrated why this study's empirical investigation of change management is critical to understanding the barriers to successful SE in practice at OmanBank. As such, change management was central to the design of the in-depth interview guide with OmanBank's senior managers, which yielded insightful findings (see 5.4.5).

2.4 Chapter Summary

Guided by the research question: 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?', this chapter has carried out a critical review of the extant literature on the concept and the processes of SE from all relevant angles: definition, theoretical perspectives, importance, research, success rate, and barriers. Notably, the two major relevant empirical findings of this study – 'Omanisation' and 'Wasta' – were reviewed in the literature retrospectively. Several insights can be drawn from the literature review regarding the said research question.

First, the strategic management process is essential for all organisations as a means to attain superior performance and competitive advantage. Understanding this, organisations globally invest money, time, and effort strategising; however, most fail to execute such strategies successfully, making SE a vital area of research and an essential element on which organisations should focus to achieve success.

Second, paradoxically, despite the ample evidence that SE is vital, it is a significantly under-researched area, and whatever has been written is incohesive, fragmented, and has no agreed conceptual model.

Third, the literature review revealed many barriers to SE success. Following the grouping convention in the literature, these were organised logically into four domains: the organisational leadership factor, strategy formulation barriers, operational management barriers , and change management barriers.

Fourth, Omanisation and Wasta represented the major findings and the original contribution from the OmanBank data as barriers to SE through reshaping organisational leadership, thus prompting a retrospective literature review on the two topics that proved to be under-researched, both conceptually and empirically.

Fifth, the 'organisational leadership factor' is not just 'one' of the barriers that impacts the success of SE; rather, it is the all-embracing factor responsible for managing all the other barriers impacting the success of SE, implying that if organisational leadership is right, SE is likely to be successful.

Finally, a vital output of the literature review is the birth of this study's 'conceptual framework', which came into being inductively from conceptualisation of the relationship between the different barriers to SE. The framework is depicted in Figure 2.1 and explained on the following page in the 'Key to the Conceptual Framework'.

Figure 2.1: Understanding the Barriers to Successful SE: A Conceptual Framework
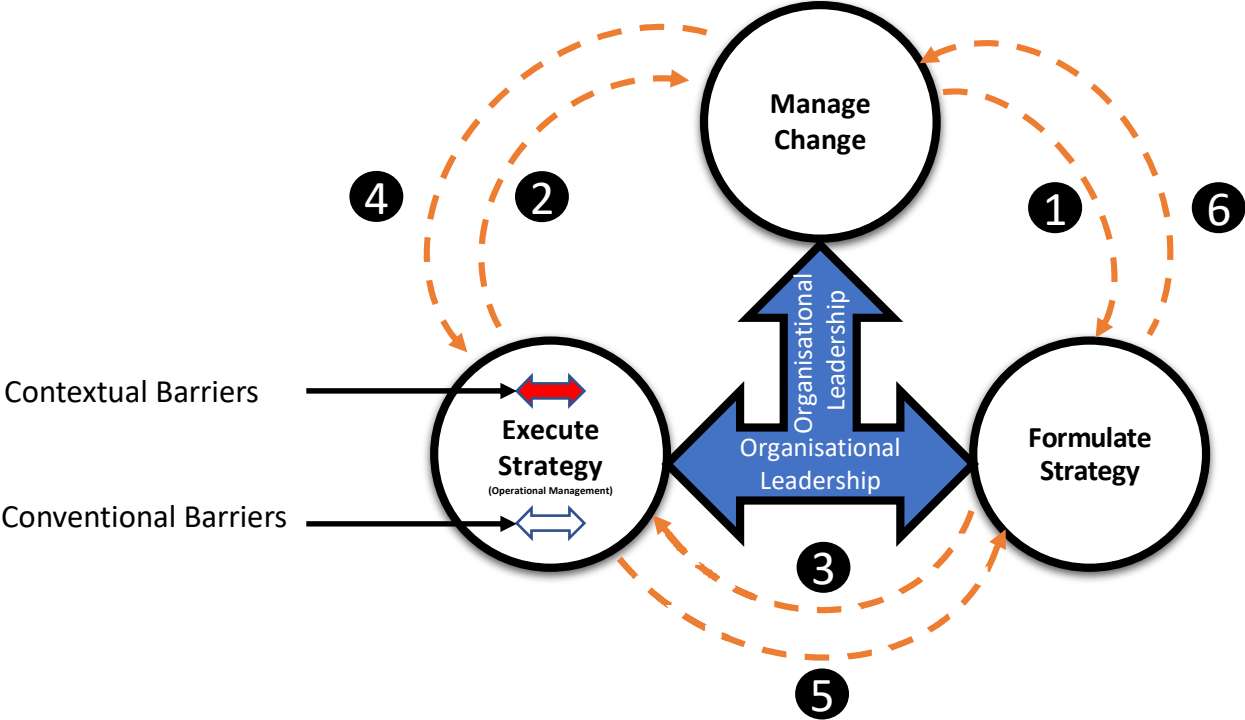
Source: Developed by the researcher

Key to the Conceptual Framework

 ☐ Organisational leadership represents the overarching factor responsible for SE and organisational success, thus taking the central position of a *blue* three-arrow shape pointing at the three core domains of SE barriers: manage change, formulate strategy, and execute strategy (i.e. Operational Management).

 ☐ Organisational leadership has oversight on strategy formulation (pictured as a *yellow* circle), strategy execution (SE) (pictured as a *green* circle), and change management (pictured inside a *grey* circle), in order to attain organisational success and competitive advantage. This involves assuming six key responsibilities (numbered 1–6 inside black circles), which do not necessarily occur in the same order because of the iterative nature of the cycle. Actions 1–6 are represented by three pairs of dotted arrows, each pair is curved and pointing in opposite directions, symbolising a cyclical loop that is recursive through time, in which the phases are enacted and re-enacted, to build and rebuild as required (Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade, 2021).

1. Organisational leadership formulates a clear strategy (Wiles, 2021) following the prescriptive strategic paradigm (Stobierski, 2020) either proactively by initiating/anticipating change or reactively in response to change (Brown, 2021), and in so doing involves different staff levels and other stakeholder, namely customers and suppliers (Coulson-Thomas, 2021). This necessitates the articulation of a 'structured change management program'(Cooke, Cabrey, and Haughey, 2014) .

2. Since SE and change management represent two faces of the same coin (Brazukas's, 2018), prior to SE, organisational leadership rolls out the 'structured change management program' to align the hearts and minds of individuals to the new strategy and manage resistance to change (Cooke, Cabrey, and Haughey, 2014). At the heart of this is employee involvement (Cândido and Santos, 2019), motivation (Loch, Kavadias, and Yang, 2021), and an effective strategy communication process: top-down, bottom-up, and lateral (Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen, 2020).

3. Organisational leadership executes the strategy (Beer, 2020) through an operational management strategy (Kyriazoglou, 2020) that involves creating and effectively managing resources and processes and monitoring and controlling the outcome, to achieve the goals of the formulated strategy (Cândido and Santos, 2019).

4. SE, however, is likely to face challenges and barriers (Pereira, Durão, and Santos, 2019) depending on the organisational leadership's mastery of steps 1,2, and 3. Such barriers could be 'conventional' SE barriers, namely strategy formulation barriers (SFB), change management barriers (CMB), and operational management barriers (OMB) as evidenced in the literature and validated by the primary research at OmanBank (symbolised by a double-sided white colour arrow) or 'contextual' SE barriers such as Omanisation, Wasta, and Oman Labour Law (OWL), as evidenced in the primary data of OmanBank and confirmed by the literature (symbolised by a double-sided red colour arrow). Furthermore, since change is perpetual (Kotter, Akhtar and Gupta, 2021), more change is likely to occur during the SE process, which shall necessitate adjustments to the SE process and challenge the original strategic assumptions (Wiles, 2021).

5. When employees are well-informed about the strategy (Obeidat et al., 2017), fully engaged (Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade, 2021), and motivated (Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020) by organisational leadership, the feedback loop travels bottom-up from the shop-floor, taking the new [change] to the strategists in the form of an 'emergent strategy' (Stobierski, 2020) following the descriptive strategic paradigm (Stalk and Stewart, 2019; Stobierski, 2020).

6. Organisational leadership learns from the practice of SE, reflects on the feedback [change], and instructs the strategists to modify the strategy to manage the ongoing change (Manninen and Huiskonen, 2022) . Accordingly, the strategists will amend the strategy; however, depending on the volume and pace of change (Lynch, 2018) and organisational leadership's mastery in managing change, the strategists may proactively anticipate and source more change (Chase, 2019) and further redefine the strategy and the 'structured change management program'(Cooke, Cabrey, and Haughey, 2014). The redefined 'structured change management program' and strategy go from the strategists to the executors (again via channel 3) and the full cycle (steps 1-to-5) is recursively repeated as more change happens (Schwarz, Bouckenooghe, and Vakola, 2021).

☐ The whole process described above is termed 'strategic adaptation' (Collis, 2021) wherein organisational leadership constantly adapts SE by managing a cyclical process of action learning: strategising, executing, reflecting, adjusting, and actioning, and in the process discharging the best 'contextual' leadership skills and behaviours, including envisioning, strategising, team-building, communicating, engaging, listing, motivating, training, inspiring, and role-modelling (Collins, 2001).

☐ With these components working in tandem, orchestrated by organisational leadership as the core driving force (Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020), SE success may well be inevitable (EPL, 2020). The possibility that SE will fail looms large should any of the components fall short of the mark (Beer, 2020).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology and method that have guided this study in pursuing the research question – 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?'.

The chapter opens by presenting the research design that sets the stage for the subsequent sections. An outline of the research philosophy underpinning the study then follows. The research approach is then delineated, describing how it has guided the research process, followed by an account of the method deployed to carry out the research, and then both are justified. The research setting and process are then discussed, justifying the choice of OmanBank as the case study and the selection of interviewees offering the reader a rendition of the fieldwork. Qualitative data analysis and its method are then presented and justified. Finally, the chapter closes by arguing the case for the research's validity, reliability, and ethical conduct.

3.2 Research Design

The research design is the strategy or general plan for conducting the research project. It articulates all the stages of the research process (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021) to answer the research question (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012). Accordingly, Figure 3.1 (below) depicts the research design framework, representing the master plan for accomplishing this research.

Figure 3.1: Research Design

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                    │        Research Question         │
                    └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                   ⬇
       What are the Barriers to Successful Strategy Execution at OmanBank?
                                   ⬇
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                    │         Literature Review        │
                    └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                   ⬇
Barriers: TLF, SFB, CMB, OMB   ⬅  Strategy Execution  ➡   Definitions, Importance, Research, Success Rate
                                   ⬇
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                    │       Research Methodology        │
                    └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                   ⬇
Philosophy: Ontology and epistemology  ⬅  Interpretive Approach  ➡  Definition, Feature, Suitability, Justification
                                   ⬇
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                    │          Research Method          │
                    └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                   ⬇
Planning, Conducting, Transcribing  ⬅  In-depth Interview  ➡  Definition, Features, Justification, Limitations
                                   ⬇
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                    │       Qualitative Data Analysis   │
                    └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                   ⬇
Generating Themes, Findings, Discussion  ⬅  Thematic Analysis  ➡  Types, Features, justification, Limitations
                                   ⬇
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                    │            Conclusion             │
                    └─────────────────────────────────┘
```

Source: Developed by the researcher

3.3 Research Philosophy

> *"Our epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises represent a framework or set of beliefs that guide our understanding of the world and shape our approach to conducting research." (Tracy, 2013:49).*

This section furnishes the core philosophical scaffolding that underpins this research in terms of its ontology and epistemology.

Ontology – a branch of metaphysics concerning the nature of reality and existence (Berryman, 2019; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021) or the essence of phenomena (Tracy, 2013; Putnam and Banghart, 2017) – explores "whether or not there is a social reality that exists independently of human conceptions and interpretations" (Ormston et al., 2013: 4) and whether there is a shared social reality (Pervin, and Mokhtar, 2022). The two dominant ontological positions that have shaped social science are idealism and realism (Pihlström, 2012; Ormston et al., 2013; SEP, 2021). Idealism proclaims that reality is mind-dependent and recognisable through the human mind (Ormston et al., 2013; DeVries, 2018), while realism asserts that an external social reality exists independent of the human mind (Tracy, 2013; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Realism proclaims that "facts are out there to which our ideas and constructs, measuring tools, and theories must correspond" (Sandberg, 2005: 41).

Epistemology, on the other hand, deals with the logical discourse of knowledge and how knowledge about the world is acquired (Berryman, 2019; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Knowledge acquisition takes three distinct epistemological positions: inductive, deductive, and integrated logic (Schulz, 2012; Terry et al., 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2019; Kiger and Varpio, 2020). An inductive logic assumes that knowledge is a 'bottom-up' process (Kalpokaite and Radivojevic, 2019), whereby the researcher uses what is 'in' the data as the starting point (Terry et al., 2017), leading to 'theory generation' (Kalpokaite and Radivojevic 2019). Deductive logic assumes that knowledge is a 'top-down' process, wherein the researcher brings in a pre-existing theory to the data (Terry et al., 2017; Kiger and Varpio, 2020) for testing (Schulz, 2012; Kalpokaite and Radivojevic, 2019). Finally, an integrated logic combines both the inductive and the deductive approaches (Joffe, 2012; Schulz, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2019; Kiger and Varpio, 2020), whereby the researcher approaches the data with 'two mindsets';

"one goes to the data with certain preconceived categories derived from theories, yet one also remains open to new concepts that emerge" (Joffe, 2012: 211).

Applied to this research, in its quest to understand the barriers to successful SE at OmanBank, this study adopts a philosophy of ontological idealism (DeVries, 2018) and an integrated epistemology (Schulz, 2012), as explained below.

Ontologically, this research follows the assumption that social reality is subjective (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021) and mind-dependent rather than objective (Berryman, 2019). As such, the barriers to SE at OmanBank have not been seen so much as phenomena (reality as such), but rather as interpretations of that reality with interactions between individuals or between individuals and their environment (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Pervin, and Mokhtar, 2022).

Epistemologically, this study takes the view that through interaction with the object/subject of the research (Collins and Hussey, 2003), the researcher will develop knowledge through social constructions such as language (Walsham, 1993) or lived experience (Sandberg, 2005). The relationship between the researcher and the social phenomena is thus seen as interactive (Ormston et al., 2013). In so doing, the current research deploys an 'integrated epistemology' whereby knowledge concerning the barriers to successful SE at OmanBank shall be sought both inductively and deductively (Ormston et al., 2013; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021) for two reasons. Firstly, an integrative epistemology is seen as a comprehensive method (Kalpokaite and Radivojevic, 2019) that combines the merits of both inductive and deductive epistemologies (Schulz, 2012): it acknowledges that while approaching the data with a theory-informed mindset is essential (Terry et al., 2017; Kalpokaite and Radivojevic, 2019) to avoid 'reinventing the wheel' (Joffe, 2012), equally crucial is to onboard serious data-driven findings (Schulz, 2012) that might not necessarily agree with the prior theory. Secondly, it is argued that a dual deductive/inductive logic alleviates the demerits of the individual approaches and thus it is frequently used in qualitative work of high quality (Kalpokaite and Radivojevic, 2019). Relatedly, the notion that qualitative inquiry is purely inductive is a "rather misleading simplification" (Ormston et al., 2013: 6) because inductive researchers cannot generate or interpret data with a blank mind (Blaikie, 2007; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Mashuri et al., 2022), and thus "there is no such thing as pure induction and or pure deduction" (Ormston et al., 2013: 6).

3.4 Research Methodology

Guided by the philosophy outlined above in terms of an idealist ontology and integrated epistemology, out of all the various contending paradigms that organise social sciences (Rabetino, Kohtamäki, and Federico, 2021; Thompson, Plummer, and Demireva, 2021), this study takes an interpretive methodology (Lincoln, Lyhnam, and Guba, 2018; Johnson, 2022). The interpretive methodology has three interdependent distinguishing characteristics:

(a) It is underpinned by the notion that human beings' knowledge of reality is a social construction (Walsham, 2006; Tracy, 2013; Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022), meaning that a single phenomenon may have multiple interpretations rather than one 'truth' determinable by a measurement process (Pham, 2018).

(b) It is rooted in the notion that the methods used to understand the natural sciences differ from those employed to understand the human and social sciences (Hammersley, 2013; Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022).

(c) It is centrally concerned with capturing the meaning and meaning-making, whether expressed via discourse, ritual, or emotion (Johnson, 2022). As pointed out by Pachirat (2014: 427), it is about "Humans making meanings out of the meaning-making of other humans." In this respect, interpretive researchers document, analyse, and interpret "the meanings people give to objects, experiences, events, actions, practices, and people" (Johnson, 2022: 1) in addition to capturing the process of meaning-making, i.e., "how meanings are constructed, established, transmitted, debated, contested, and changed" (ibid.: 1).

The interpretive methodology is, therefore, an approach in which both reality and knowledge are constructed and reproduced through communication, interaction, and practice (Tracy, 2013: 40), and that Knowledge about reality is constantly mediated through the researcher (ibid).

Considering the aforesaid description of the interpretive methodology and given the context of this research, which aims to identify what impedes successful strategy execution at OmanBank, the interpretive methodology is seen as the most appropriate methodology to drive this research. Accordingly, by matching the aims and needs of this study to the relevant features of

the interpretive methodology, Table 3.1 below offers the rationale for deploying the interpretive methodology as the framing approach for the current research.

Table 3.1: Justifications for Employing the Interpretive Research Methodology

What are the Particulars of the Study?	Why is the Interpretive Methodology most relevant?
Aim 1: This study's main aim is to produce high-quality research that is underpinned by the 'flexibility' to change the research design based on the evidence and findings from the data.	Interpretive methodology offers the flexibility of an 'emergent design' (Moorhouse, 2012) whereby the initial research plan is not necessarily hard and fixed, but rather subject to change once the researcher enters the field and starts data collection (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). It adopts an iterative research process (Easterby-Smith, et al, 2021; Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022) and does not limit the scope of the research (Fisher, 2010; Langos, 2014).
Aim 2: This study aims to understand the barriers and the reasons behind SE 'failures' at OmanBank', to avoid repetition of them in order to achieve successful SE.	Interpretive methodology is seen to best understand the 'failure or success' of organisational goals, practices, and policies (Marshall and Rossman, 1995) by seeking meaning (Putnam and Banghart, 2017; Johnson, 2022; Easterby-Smith, et al, 2021) that describes how the current situations emerged (Klein and Myers, 1999).
Aim 3: To achieve **Aim-2**, this study aims to acquire multiple and diverse narratives through OmanBank interviewees' 'lived-world' (Silverman, 2013). The learning is derived through their descriptions and interpretations of the barriers to SE (Creswell, 2014) as 'social property' based on the 'meaning' they attach to (Johnson, 2022).	Interpretive methodology stands out for its ability to focus on peoples' 'lived experiences' and the meanings (Mashuri et al., 2022) they attach to the structures, processes, and events in standard social settings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Easterby-Smith, et al, 2021; Johnson, 2022; Pervin, and Mokhtar, 2022). Moreover, interpretive methodology enables a diversified method of viewing 'social property' (Hammersley, 2013; Pham, 2018).
Field: Underpinned by strategy-as-practice (SAP) practitioner observation, this study investigates the issue of SE. Thus it falls within the scholarly field of 'strategic management' (Bettis, and Blettner, 2020).	Interpretive methodology is widely seen in the work of different strategy scholars, regardless of their theoretical dispositions (Rantakari and Vaara, 2016), particularly in the increasingly popular stream of SAP researchers (Rabetino, Kohtamäki, and Federico, 2021).
Nature: By its nature, SE is seen as a complex topic (Sull et al., 2017) that is affected by a range of overlapping factors that impact SE (Barrows, 2019). Given its complexity, the SE process is seen as 'social property' which cannot be handled in the same way as the phenomena of the natural sciences (Ryan, Scapens, and Theobold, 2002).	Interpretive methodology has the ability to develop a complex picture of the issue being studied (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014) by identifying all the factors involved, reporting multiple perspectives, and then drawing the larger picture that emerges (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, Interpretive methodology is rooted in the notion that the methods used to understand the natural sciences differ from those employed to understand the human and social sciences (Hammersley, 2013; Pervin, and Mokhtar, 2022).
Context: Key to uncovering the barriers to SE at OmanBank is the context. This study investigates a specific issue in a bank domiciled in a specific country, in a region with unique geo-cultural characteristics.	Interpretive methodology sees context as vital (Putnam and Banghart, 2017; Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022), supporting studying things in their natural settings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) and viewing and experiencing the world in its different contexts and cultures (Hammersley, 2013; Easterby-Smith, et al, 2021).
Perspective: From a business management perspective, the current research is being undertaken by a management researcher on a managerial issue aiming to uncover new knowledge from an under-researched (Maas, 2016) region.	Interpretive methodology has "provided new means of investigating previously unexplored questions, thus enabling management researchers to conduct research that has led to new forms of knowledge about management and organisation" (Sandberg, 2005: 41).

Source: Compiled by the researcher

3.5 Research Method

Having demonstrated how the interpretive methodology will enable exploration of the research question – 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?' – this section focuses on the research method used to uncover the barriers to SE.

Naz, Gulab, and Aslam (2022) contend that the trustworthiness of a study is impacted by the rigorousness of the data collection method. Of the diverse range of data collection methods hosted under the interpretive methodology (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012; Creswell and Creswell, 2018), this study selected the semi-structured in-depth interview (SSII) method for reasons that will be discussed in this section to offer a multi-perspectival view of SSII in terms of definition, objectives, salient features, advantages, and limitations. The section concludes with a justification for why the SSII method was selected for this research.

3.5.1 Definition and Objectives of In-depth Interviews

An in-depth interview is described as "a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation" (Boyce and Neal, 2006: 3). Charmaz (2014) and Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) defined it more briefly, terming it a 'directed conversation'; likewise, Magaldi and Berler (2020) and Mashuri et al. (2022) simplified it to an 'exploratory interview'.

The purpose of the in-depth interview is two-fold: "to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee concerning the interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 2008: 174) and to view the subject of the research through the interviewees' eyes, in order to extract a picture of why and how they gained a particular understanding (Boyce and Neal, 2006). Ultimately, therefore, the purpose is to derive interpretations and promote understanding and change (Mashuri et al., 2022).

3.5.2 Main Types, Features, Advantages and Limitations of In-depth Interviews

There are various in-depth interview types (Kabir, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), differing in form (Hofisi and Mago, 2014; Naz, Gulab, and Aslam, 2022) or medium (Kvale, 2008). In terms of form, three types are well-known:

structured, unstructured, and semi-structured (Adams, 2015; Kabir, 2016; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Naz, Gulab, and Aslam, 2022). In terms of the medium, interviews may be face-to-face or 'mediated' (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), i.e., via transmission media such as a phone, internet, or mobile device. Table 3.2 compares the three in-depth interview types in terms of features, advantages, limitations, and suitability.

Table 3.2: Comparison of the Main Types of Qualitative Interview Methods

Interview Type	Structured In-depth Interview	Semi-structured In-depth Interview (SSII)	Unstructured In-depth Interview
Definition	An interaction in which the interviewer asks each interviewee the same set of questions, uses the same wording, and follows the same sequence of questions (Mathers, Fox, and Hunn, 2002; Corbetta, 2003).	An interaction in which the interviewer prepares a list of questions, but does not strictly follow them. Instead the questions are used to guide the conversation and allow more open-ended questions to emerge, promoting a discursive type of interview (Doyle, 2019).	"An interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked in particular words and in a particular order" (Babbie and Mouton, 2011: 289).
Salient features	a. High degree of structure from which it is difficult to deviate. b. Interviewer uses a rigid interview guide. c. Questions are mostly closed with a few open-ended ones. d. The interviewer has greater control over the interview. (Kabir, 2016).	a. Medium degree of structure. b. Deploys an interview guide of predetermined questions to gather comparable types of data (Harrell and Bradley, 2009; Doody and Noonan, 2013; Kabir, 2016). c. Questions mostly open-ended (Mathers, Fox, and Hunn, 2002; King, 2004a; Kvale, 2008; Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2009) mixed with some closed questions. d. More like a conversation in which control is shared.	a. Loosely structured (Mathers, Fox, and Hunn, 2002). b. Interviewer has clear plan (Harrell and Bradley, 2009) with a few set topics (Mathers, Fox, and Hunn, 2002). c. May follow interview guide (Kvale, 2008), comprising themes vis-à-vis specific questions (Doody and Noonan, 2013; Kabir, 2016).
Key advantage(s)	a. Time-saving (Doody and Noonan, 2013). b. Limited subjectivity (Mathers, Fox, and Hunn, 2002). c. Ease of coding and comparison (Holloway and Wheeler, 2010).	a. Intermediate method with merits of structured and unstructured interviews offering distinctive package (Adams, 2015). b. Open-ended questions elicit rich data (Mathers, Fox, and Hunn, 2002; King, 2004a; Kvale, 2008; Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2009). c. Inherently flexible enabling interviewer to vary wording and sequencing of questions based on the situation (Harrell and Bradley, 2009; Power et al., 2010). d. Freedom to ask additional questions outside frame of interview guide; explore new emergent paths over course of interview (Mathers, Fox, and Hunn, 2002; Corbetta, 2003; Gray, 2004; Berg, 2009; Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2009; Legard, Keegan, and Ward, 2003). e. Enables interviewer to follow useful topical trajectories in the conversation that may stray from the guide (Kabir, 2016).	a. Interview highly flexible, non-directive (Doody and Noonan, 2013). b. Non-restrictive questions can generate rich data (Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2009; Holloway and Wheeler, 2010).

Table 3.2 continued

Key limitation(s)	a. Spoken, sounds like a questionnaire (Doody and Noonan, 2013): "most closely approximate a survey being read aloud, without deviation from the script" (Harrell and Bradley, 2009: 29), leaving no room for elaboration (Berg, 2009). Bears many disadvantages of the questionnaire survey. b. Difficulty generalising findings (Charmaz, 2006).	a. Time-consuming (King, 2004; Boyce and Neale, 2006; Adams, 2015). b. Data overload (King, 2004) as large amount of data is likely to be generated. c. Propensity for bias (Kabir, 2016) due to influence of interviewer's pre-suppositions (Boyce and Neale, 2006). d. Difficulty generalising findings (Charmaz, 2006).	a. Time-consuming, 'energy drainer' (Kvale, 2008). b. Data overload: likely to generate huge amount of data, making the task of data processing tedious in terms of coding and comparability. c. Propensity for bias given fluid nature. d. Difficulty comparing results due to lack of structure. e. Interviewer has minimum control over length or content of respondent's answers (Harrell and Bradley, 2009; Kabir, 2016). f. Requires high level of skill and unsuitable for novice researchers (Doody and Noonan, 2013; Kabir, 2016) g. Difficulty generalising findings (Charmaz, 2006).
Suitability	Highly appropriate for: a. Supplement to observational and other less structured methods (Kabir, 2016); b. Researcher has large sample data that needs generalising to a large population (Harrell and Bradley, 2009).	Primary strength is combination of the merits of both structured and unstructured interviews (Adam, 2015), thereby striking optimum balance of 'structure and flexibility' (Legard, Keegan, and Ward, 2003). Thus, popularity; most commonly used interview type (Holloway and Wheeler, 2010) in a variety of situations.	a. Useful for background data collection or when little is known about a topic (Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2009). b. Useful when researcher has grasp of a topic but is open to having his/her views revised by participants (Kabir, 2016); for insight into culture, experience, or setting little understood.

Source: Adapted by the researcher from various sources.

As is evident from the comparison, the semi-structured in-depth interview (SSII) prevails over the other types in combining the merits of the structured and unstructured interview types and alleviating the demerits of both (Adams, 2015). More so, the SSII was able to honour the underlining philosophy of this research in terms of its idealist ontology and integrated epistemology, as described above.

With the merits of the SSII aside (see Table 3.2), the four main limitations attached to SSII: time-consumption; data-overload; propensity to bias; and difficulty of generalisation, are discussed below with an explanation of how the researcher mitigated their risks in the research.

Time-consumption: Is a well-known limitation of SSII (Adam, 2015) that relates to the interviewer's need to travel to conduct face-to-face interviews when interviewees are domiciled in a different country or a remote location. Nowadays, telecommunication technologies have resolved this problem for researchers who can avail 'free' face-to-face video-calling applications such as Zoom (https://zoom.us/). As a result, these applications have become popular for saving time and cost and providing access to facial expressions and body language, which are vital in social research. This precisely describes the case of this research: when the original plan of conducting on-site interviews was impossible due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher used the Zoom application instead, and all eight interviews took less than 15 hours.

Data-overload: Is another perceived limitation of SSII (King, 2004a) rooted in the general flexibility of interviews and, thus, the likelihood of generating a large amount of data. While appreciating the issue, the researcher did not see this as a highly relevant risk to the current study context for three main reasons: first, the issue applies mainly to unstructured interviews and, to a lesser extent, SSII – the method used in this study. Second, in the context of this study, the interviewer was mindful of the issue while conducting the interviews and managed any possibility of data-overload by controlling the interview without compromising the data quality. Finally, data-overload, if any, was significantly reduced by technology software such as NVIVO (https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo), which is known to speed up data transcription and analysis. For this study, NVIVO was deployed and proved a tremendous time-saving aid in theme-building and graphic production.

Propensity to bias: Is not an issue unique to interviews (Kabir, 2016). However, it must be acknowledged that interviews and other types of qualitative research methods carried out by human beings are likely to fall foul of it (Tracy, 2013). Walsham (2006) notes that bias is an intrinsic human failing that inevitably will affect any research regardless of the method used. While there is much the interviewer can do to limit it, eliminating personal prejudice is unlikely to be attainable. However, a strength of the interpretive methodology followed in this study is its ability to allow for reflexivity (Johnson, 2022), enabling the researcher to dwell on the extent to which her/his role in the study impacted and shaped the interpretations and how s/he managed that. This has prompted Johnson (2022) to contend that interpretive researchers stress the vitality of scholarly reflexivity as a commitment rooted in acknowledging that scholarly work is intrinsically an act of world-construction in itself (see Table 3.4 and section 3.8.2).

Difficulty of generalisation: Is another limitation attached to interviews (Charmaz, 2014) due to small samples and the use of non-random sampling (Boyce and Neal, 2006; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Again, this limitation is not peculiar to interviews because, as has been claimed, what inflicts 'all qualitative methods' is that "the only generalisation is: there is no generalisation" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 110). Nevertheless, this argument might be refuted, since many authors, including Morse (1995), Guest et al. (2006), Kvale (2008), Mason (2010), Patton (2002), Baker and Edwards (2012), and Creswell and Creswell (2018), have counterargued that a smaller sample size does not necessarily limit generalisation, nor a larger sample size is a precondition for it (Guenther and Falk, 2019). Harrell and Bradley (2009: 33),

for instance, offered a counterargument to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) 'no generalisation' statement by stressing that "a well-conducted structured sample will result in more generalisable claims". Arguing differently, Easterby-Smith et al. (2021: 303) point out that "the contribution of qualitative research often lies in its uniqueness – and not whether it can be replicated" and further stress that the gold standard of qualitative research is internal generalisability, i.e., the ability to explain what has been researched within a certain context, and not 'statistical generalisability' (ibid).

Having noted this, it is not the intention of this study to generalise the findings. However, research transferability remains an open option for readers who wish to do so, as elaborated in the next paragraphs.

By design, qualitative research, in contrast with quantitative epistemology, does not aim for generalisability (Stahl and King, 2020). Nonetheless, qualitative researchers maintain that patterns and descriptions from one context may be transferred to another (Daniel, 2019). This has led to the notion of 'transferability'- sometimes referred to as 'applicability' (Amin et al., 2020) - as one of the four-factor criteria devised by Lincoln and Gupta (Lincoln and Gupta, 1985) to assure trustworthiness in qualitative research. Transferability, thus, does not adopt the generalisability of findings (Daniel, 2019) but rather suggests that findings from one research can be applied to other settings or groups of people (Stahl and King, 2020). In other words, findings gained in a particular context may have meaning and offer valuable lessons to other similar contexts (Amin et al., 2020), and readers can associate the findings with their own settings (Hastie and Hay, 2012; Daniel, 2019). Therefore, rather than offering generalisable claims, transferability is meant to provide sufficient details that make the transfer of findings possible in case readers wish to do so (Nassaji, 2020). Importantly, transferability is not necessarily judged by the researcher but rather inferred by those who wish to compare the research with their personal settings in the form of 'lessons from elsewhere'(Stahl and King, 2020). Therefore, the readers who wish to 'transfer' research findings to another context are responsible for judging the appropriateness of such transfer (Hastie and Hay,2 012).

With the above in mind, this study was conducted from the outset in such a manner to attain what it takes to make its findings transferable to similar settings, by adhering to the following

criteria that are widely seen by researchers as a prerequisite for transferability (Hastie and Hay, 2012; Forero et al., 2018; Daniel, 2019; Amin et al., 2020; Stahl and King, 2020; Nassaji, 2020):

(a) The researcher possesses expert knowledge of the participants (Daniel, 2019).

(b) Participants are knowledgeable about the phenomenon studied (Forero et al., 2018).

(c) The study provides detailed explanations of the context in which the study was conducted, i.e. thick descriptions (Stahl and King, 2020) of research activities and assumptions (Nassaji, 2020), including contextual information (Hastie and Hay, 2012) and thick interpretations of the study's findings (Amin et al., 2020).

(d) Clear reasoning for the theoretical perspectives and methodologies foundational to the design, implementation, and analysis of the study's findings (Hastie and Hay, 2012).

(e) The method, methodology, duration of the field study and timelines for data gathering in the original study are well described and documented (Stahl and King, 2020).

3.5.3 Why is a Semi-structured In-depth Interview Appropriate for this Study?

Justifications for deploying SSII are set out in the self-explanatory Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3: Justifications for Employing the Semi-structured In-depth Interview Method

What are the particulars of the Study?	Why is the Semi-structured In-depth Interview (SSII) most relevant?
2. **Ontology** This research follows an idealist ontology which assumes that social reality is subjective (Easterby-Smith, et al, 2021) and mind-dependent rather than objective (Berryman, 2019).	SSII is an ontologically congruent method that enables multiple perspectives of SE as a 'social property' to be acquired (Silverman, 2013; Creswell, 2014; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Applied to this study, SSII allowed the barriers to SE at OmanBank to be viewed not as 'reality' per se, but rather as multiple interpretations provided in a diversity of 'lived-world' narratives offered by interviewees from OmanBank (Naz, Gulab, and Aslam, 2022).
4. **Epistemology** Applying 'integrated' inductive-deductive epistemological logic, this study identified several predetermined topics from the literature review, in the form of SE barrier domains, which required further empirical investigation. Equally, the aim was to acquire new knowledge, outside the boundaries of the literature review topics, which were unique to the context of OmanBank.	SSII is an epistemologically congruent method. It is viewed as useful "when the researcher wants to delve deeply into a predetermined topic" (Harrell and Bradley, 2009: 27), allowing flexible movement from the specific to the general and vice versa (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Equally, the open-ended nature of SSII questioning (Kvale, 2008; Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2009) encourages new concepts to emerge (Dearnley, 2005; Kabir, 2016), thereby achieving depth, variety, and vitality in the data collected (King, 2004a; Boyce and Neal, 2006). Applied to this study, SSII served the integrated epistemological need well by unveiling fresh insights into issues such as 'Wasta' and 'Omanisation'. It also enabled the researcher to zoom into predetermined topics (Rabionet 2011) such as SF and CM.
5. **Methodology** A main aim of this study, justifying the IM over other methodologies, was to deploy a method that captured the power of a 'natural setting' (Hatch, 2002).	SSII avails the researcher the advantage of a 'natural setting', enabling the collection of data via face-to-face interactions in the field (Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Hatch, 2002; Creswell, 2014) and it also provides the opportunity to observe (Doody and Noonan, 2013) while listening to what is being said. Applied to this study, unfortunately, the original plan to conduct interviews in the field was thwarted due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but 'mediated' interviews were carried out instead which utilised 'immediate contextualisation' (Easter-by Smith, 2021).
4. **High-quality Data** An essential mandate of this study was to generate rich data to enhance its trustworthiness, thus it needed to deploy a robust qualitative research method that blended structure with flexibility. In addition, the SSII is widely recognized and used by qualitative researchers.	SSII offers a unique blend of structure through the interview guide's pre-set questions; and flexibility (Naz, Gulab, and Aslam, 2022) is acquired through the action of prompting and asking probing questions (Legard, Keegan, and Ward, 2003), ultimately producing rich and detailed accounts. Moreover, SSII is a prominent and common method seem in qualitative research (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Mashuri et al., 2022) because it allows the researcher, compared to other methods, to acquire rich, in-depth information from informants (Mashuri et al., 2022), thus it is described as flexible and unique (Naz, Gulab, and Aslam, 2022) and powerful (Mashuri et al., 2022). Applied to this study, this blend was ensured that control of the interview was evenly distributed between the interviewer and the interviewee, enabling rich discussion, much like a natural conversation (Harrell and Bradley, 2009). Ultimately, this method served the objective of producing rich data, as Chapter 4 details.
6. **Nature of Topic** As a research topic, SE is complex (Ryan, Scapens, and Theobold, 2002; Sull et al., 2017) with several overlapping barriers, thus to learn about the underlying causes of the barriers to SE at OmanBank, required a solid method of in-depth excavation and detailed questioning.	SSII allows questions of a more complex nature to be asked (Doody and Noonan, 2013) that are suited to excavation, construction and reconstruction of knowledge (Mashuri et al., 2022). Applied to this study, the need for complex questioning was served well by the method. For example, open-ended, multi-layer, broad-based probes on the topic such as 'How does Wasta look like in reality?'; and "What do you mean by the right people?" prompted discussion from different angles, providing rich data.
Source: Compiled by the researcher	

3.6 Research Setting and Process

With the focus of this study set on achieving successful SE at OmanBank through understanding the barriers thereto, this section aims to contextualise the research, thus offering the reader a rendition of the experience by (a) offering a brief background about OmanBank as the case study organisation, and (b) describing the interview experience.

3.6.1 Why was OmanBank Selected as the Case Study Organisation?

Four reasons supported the selection of OmanBank as the focus of this research:

(a) *Meaningfulness*: OmanBank is a well-established commercial bank that has existed for half a century, since 1973. Headquartered in Oman, OmanBank currently has a network of over 60 branches in three countries (Oman, UAE, and Egypt) and employs around 2,000 people. Overall, the bank has enjoyed stability since its inception. Locally, among the more than 20 banks in Oman, OmanBank's financial and overall performance has been declining over the last decade, a matter that stakeholders hope to fix in order to reinstate the bank to its top-perfuming rank of some two decades ago.

(b) *Familiarity*: Walsham (2006: 322) states, "interpretive researchers need to gain and maintain good access to appropriate organisations for their fieldwork". The researcher's employment at OmanBank spanned 17 years across two different tenures in middle and senior managerial positions. This long association was advantageous for the research in terms of holding in-depth knowledge about the bank, having access to management, good relationships, and long-established trustworthiness; all critical factors for successful interviews (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Thus, the researcher's role was more of an 'involved researcher' (Walsham, 2006), a 'member researcher' (Adler and Adler, 1987), and an 'opportunistic researcher' (Riemer, 1977; in Baker and Edwards, 2012: 10) – all terms meaning 'one of them'. During the interview process, such trust manifested in many ways; for example, interviewees would joke and laugh loudly, which evidences their comfort and thus openness and willingness to share information, a matter that has reflected positively on the research's trustworthiness. However, while capitalising on this, the researcher was constantly mindful of the ethical considerations and consistently adopted what Mertens (1998) describes as the stance of a 'friendly stranger'.

(c) ***Problem***: The researcher had detected an actual problem in the bank that manifested in the enormous gulf between strategising and execution where strategy existed as a 'dead document' and saw that the problem continued to persist when re-joining the bank after eight years. When the idea of researching this issue was shared with the management, both the CEO and the deputy CEO of OmanBank supported it, hopeful that some helpful insights would emerge from it.

(d) ***Context***: Context is one of the fundamental tenets of the IM that has guided this study (Johnson, 2022; Mashuri et al., 2022; Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022). For example, Mashuri et al. (2022) argue that qualitative researchers view knowledge and evidence as contextual, situational, and interactional, while Putnam and Banghart (2017: 8) contend similarly that "for interpretive scholars, all inquiry is value-laden and context-bound".

According to the United Nations, Oman and the other GCC states are classified as developing countries (DPAD, 2014). These countries are significantly under-researched concerning SE (Alves, Martins, and Trez, 2017; Trapero, 2019), constituting only about 10% of total research on the subject (O'Toole, 2000; Saetren, 2005; Maas, 2008). The remaining 90% of SE research it is claimed to have been carried out in advanced economies, predominantly from a Western cultural perspective (Maas, 2008; Trapero, 2019). These findings make the present research contextually relevant, not least because some of the contextual factors that might impact SE may not have been explored yet, or perhaps have attracted less attention due to being in developing countries. In the current research, this proved to be the case with three major novel SE barriers unearthed from the OmanBank interview data findings: 'Omanisation', 'Wasta', and 'Omani Labour Law', shown in this research to have the most serious impact on successful SE. Moreover, the literature review (Chapter 2) showed that these issues had been insufficiently explored in this context.

3.6.2 Describing the Interview Process

This section describes the interview process's different stages and weaves the theory and practice as it happened in the field. The literature indicates that there are several stages of conducting SSII (Robson, 2002; Legard, Keegan, and Ward, 2003; Boyce and Neale, 2006) that are broadly consistent across all research models (King, 2004a, Bryman and Bell, 2011),

namely: (a) planning the interview; (b) developing an interview guide; (c) conducting a pilot interview; (d) conducting the actual interview; and (e) analysing the interview data. These are briefly described below, as they happened in the field.

(a) **Planning Semi-structured In-depth Interviews (SSII)**

Professional interviewing involves meticulous planning (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003; Mashuri et al., 2022) that comprises four main steps (Kabir, 2016):

Completing Ethical Standards Requirements: Adhering to ethical norms is critical in research (Kabir, 2016) as it ensures that the research is conducted fairly and ethically (Walsham, 2006; Rabionet, 2011). For the current research, compliance with NTU's ethical research guidelines was assured, as detailed in 3.8.2.

Identification of Potential Interviewees: Careful selection of target participants is vital for the success of the SSII (Mathers, Fox, and Hunn, 2002; Walsham, 2006; Rabionet, 2011). As justified in the Introduction chapter, this study targeted the second layer of senior management at OmanBank, to complement the research already accomplished in Document-3 and Document-4 and to answer various unresolved issues. The total interview population was 12 employees: 11 males and one female, of whom eight agreed to participate.

Defining the Interview Sample: Interviews overwhelmingly follow non-probability and non-random sampling, in which only a part of the target audience has a chance of participating in the study (Dudovskiy, 2022). This contrasts with probability sampling, where every member of the target population has a chance of being chosen to partake in the study (ibid.). This research uses 'purposive sampling' as the most commonly used form of non-probability sampling (Morse et al., 2002; Guest et al., 2006; Baker and Edwards, 2012).

Concerning sample size, Guest et al. (2006: 59) contend that the "guidelines for determining non-probabilistic sample sizes for qualitative research are virtually non-existent". Bryman and Bell (2011) argued in agreement that the issue of representativeness is less important in qualitative research, while Terry et al. (2017) see sample size as a fraught, contentious, and debated topic. Accordingly, Baker and Edwards (2012: 1) concluded that: "the riposte to the question of how many […] is 'it depends'".

However, to provide the much-needed depth and richness of data, for this study, an initial sample size of 75% of the total audience (nine out of 12) was targeted, of whom eight (67%) agreed to participate.

Like the question of sample size, the question of 'who' to select in the sample is not something answered in the literature. For example, Bryman and Bell (2011: 489) state, "it is sometimes more or less impossible to discern from researchers' accounts of their methods either how their interviewees were selected or how many there were of them". Here, however, with sights set on collecting diverse data about SE, 'structured sampling' (Harrell and Bradley, 2009) was selected vis-à-vis 'strict random sampling', wherein the selected sample is random, however, also constrained so that a particular group or category is not over-represented, i.e., to avoid having two managers from the same division. Accordingly, two sampling modifiers were applied: cross-functional representation to ensure the selection of participants from different divisions of OmanBank, thus mitigating against repetitive experiences arising from the same division, and a gender-mix to represent both male and female employees. However, since only one female was in the target audience, she was selected. The demographics of the eight interviewees are shared in Table 3.4 below:

Table 3.4: Demographics of Interview Participants

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Age Range	Total Years of Experience	Years of Experience at OmanBank	Functional Title at OmanBank	Division	Managerial Layer
Participant-1	M	Omani	35-45	20	20	Divisional Head	Overseas Business	Senior Management (Second layer)
Participant-2	M	Omani	25-35	12	12	Divisional Head	Mid-Corporate	Senior Management (Second layer)
Participant-3	M	Omani	45-55	36	30	Divisional Head	SME	Senior Management (Second layer)
Participant-4	F	Omani	35-45	19	18	Divisional Head	Islamic Banking	Senior Management (Second layer)
Participant-5	M	Omani	35-45	22	6	Divisional Head	GCC Business	Senior Management (Second layer)
Participant-6	M	Omani	45-55	23	16	Divisional Head	Consumer Banking	Senior Management (Second layer)
Participant-7	M	Omani	55-65	31	9	Divisional Head	Retail Banking Operations	Senior Management (Second layer)
Participant-8	M	Omani	35-45	18	13	Divisional Head	Information Technology	Senior Management (Second layer)

Scheduling the Interviews: Following the return of the signed Participant Information and Participant Informed Consent forms (Appendix 2 and 3), interviews were initially scheduled to take place face-to-face in Oman in August 2020; however, Covid-19 lockdowns prevented this, and the Zoom meeting application was used instead. As Easterby-Smith et al. (2021: 198) pointed out, the "Covid-19 pandemic meant that, for a while, remote interviews were the only option available for many researchers". Among the various videoconferencing applications, the Zoom meeting application was selected specifically due to its ranking above other interview platforms for both convenience and security (Archibald et al., 2019).

(b) **Developing an Interview Guide**

The interview guide is instrumental in directing the questions or issues explored during the interviews (Boyce and Neale, 2006; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Naz, Gulab, and Aslam, 2022). It is essential to steering the SSII (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014; Naz, Gulab, and Aslam, 2022; Mashuri et al., 2022), to generate spontaneous, in-depth, intense, exclusive responses from the participants (Naz, Gulab, and Aslam, 2022) and, thus, producing reliable data (Kabir,

2016). The interview guide questions must have three essential qualities to facilitate a successful interview (Naz, Gulab, and Aslam, 2022): (a) predominantly open-ended to prompt the participant to speak freely (King, 2004a; Kvale, 2008; Silverman, 2013), (b) Clear, neutral, and sensitive (Doody and Noonan, 2013), and open to probing afterwards for more depth (Kabir, 2016), and (c) not exceed 15 main questions (Boyce and Neale, 2006).

For this study, the above guidelines inspired the interview guide titled 'A View from the Top' (Appendix 4), in which the questions mainly focused on the barriers to SE at OmanBank as the central theme, framed around the four main barrier domains that had emerged inductively from the literature review and which formed the conceptual framework (see Figure 2.1).

(c) **Conducting a Pilot Interview (PI)**

A pilot interview is a rehearsal (Smith, Flower, and Larkin, 2009), otherwise known as 'convenience sampling' (Harrell and Bradley, 2009), where the researcher selects a trial group with similar qualities to the target group and conducts a preliminary run (Dikko, 2016). The pilot interview aims to test all aspects of the interview to achieve two main objectives (Kvale,

2008; Rabionet, 2011): (a) to refine the questions in terms of coverage, need, sequencing, number, and blend between open and closed-ended questions (Mathers, Fox, and Hunn, 2002), and (b) to manage time (Rabionet, 2011). The PI, thus, helps establish the construct and content, validity and reliability of the interview as a data collection method, which ultimately enhances the research's trustworthiness (Dikko, 2016).

Guided by the above, the researcher conducted three pilot interviews with a cohort from the same industry comprising senior bankers employed with three different UAE-based banks and known well by the researcher. The pilot subjects mirrored the intended audience in four ways: industry, seniority, banking practices and regulations (Kearney, 2009), and cultural context (Kearney, 2009; Al-Nahdi, 2016). This 'rehearsal in the field' (Dikko, 2016) was an invaluable experience, not least in reducing the number of questions from 15 to ten, merging two questions, and rewording three that were ambiguous. Moreover, it has helped the researcher rehearse essential interviewing skills such as choreographing questions to the interview flow – picking up a thread and not feeling compelled to follow the sequence of questions strictly. For example, when Participant-1 was asked: "Do you recall any recent examples of strategic initiatives that were successful or failed?", her/his response was: "Look, I am not aware of the current strategy […]. It is a weakness, but I am not aware." When probed: "Why do you feel like this?", s/he replied: "I see it as a weakness of the management." This thread took the line of questioning from strategy formulation to leadership and then from leadership to Omanisation.

(d) **Conducting the Interview**

It has been argued that a professional interview relies on the opacity of a competent interviewer (Kvale, 2008; Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2009; Kabir, 2016; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021) who possesses personal and professional qualities that include listening skills, innate curiosity, adaptability, logical mindedness, and the ability to build rapport (Charmaz, 2014; Bruno, 2018; Mashuri et al., 2022). Being acutely mindful of this prior to the interviews, the researcher (although experienced in HR interviewing techniques) further sharpened his skills by studying numerous videos on effective interview skills in similar research contexts to enhance his ability to stage-manage the interview process (Legard, Keegan, and Ward, 2003). Four key

considerations of which the researcher was mindful and exercised to the best of his abilities in the field are pertinent:

Starting the interview: The interviewer enacted all five recommended key actions before beginning the interviews proper (Walsham, 2006; Kvale, 2008; Rabionet, 2011): thanking the interviewee for participating; re-explaining the purpose of the interview and why the interviewee was selected (as per signed consent); clarifying the role of each party in the interview; gaining permission to record the interview; finally, verbally reaffirming confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected. In the field, these actions gave the interviews the feel of a natural discussion or a conversation, creating a relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere where interviewees could freely express their ideas and thoughts (Smith, Flower, and Larkin, 2009).

Recording the interview: A vital part of conducting a successful interview is recording it, either via audio or video or in written notes (Kabir, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Fortunately, all eight participants agreed to be recorded, making the interviewing process smooth.

During the interview: The researcher guided the interviewees through the main themes of the interview, exploring each in-depth by asking probing questions and prompting answers (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003; Doody and Noonan, 2013). For example, Participant-2 replied to a question about SE by describing it as "challenging, but possible […] if you have the right people." To this, the interviewer probed further: "What do you mean by the right people?"

Ending the interview: Ending the interview on a positive note is basic decency. In this study, the researcher thanked participants for their time and participation after each interview. In exchange, ending the interviewee with a feel-good impression, each said they enjoyed the opportunity to participate, and all offered additional help should it be needed.

The eight interviews took place between August 2020 and February 2021 and went smoothly but for a couple of technical glitches that were easily fixed. All interviews were audio-recorded and conducted in English (since all participants have a good command of the language), thus requiring no translation. As interviews progressed, data was gathered in the form of inductive emergence of new evidence and deductive affirmation of existing evidence from the literature. Notably, a point of data saturation (Saunders et al., 2018) was felt by the sixth interview (Baker

and Edwards, 2012), following which the data sounded repetitive and more redundant (Sandelowski, 2008), both at the micro-level of the individual questions (Legard, Keegan, and Ward, 2003) and the macro-level of the dataset overall (Guest et al., 2006).

(e) **Analysing the Interview Data**

Data analysis represents the final and most vital stage of the interview (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Schulz, 2012; Maguire and Delahunt, 2017) because, here, the richness of data and meaningfulness of findings are decided (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Bazeley, 2007). Given its importance, data analysis comes in two parts for the purposes of explanation in this study: the first part covers the theory and method of data analysis and is presented next in this chapter as a section on its own. The second part covers the practice of data analysis, namely the findings and discussion, to which the whole of Chapter 4 is dedicated.

3.7 Definition and Method of Data Analysis

Prior to presenting and discussing the key findings of this study, this section aims to furnish a conceptual scaffolding of qualitative data analysis that sets the stage for the empirical work by first defining qualitative data analysis and then introducing and justifying Reflexive Thematic Analysis as the chosen data analysis approach.

3.7.1 Defining Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis represents a fundamental stage of qualitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Schulz, 2012; Maguire and Delahunt, 2017), which Braun and Clarke (2019: 591) describe as:

> *"About telling 'stories', about interpreting and creating, not discovering and finding the 'truth' that is either 'out there' and findable from, or buried deep within, the data. For us, the final analysis is the product of deep and prolonged data immersion, thoughtfulness and reflection, something that is active and generative."*

This definition infers that qualitative data analysis is a creative and interactive process (Sunday, 2015; Braun et al., 2019) of interwoven stages (Curry, 2015; Terry et al., 2017; Lester et al., 2020) that involves back-and-forth movement between the different parts of the research

process to ensure resemblance among them. This is seen as both logical and essential: logical because, at the macro-level, it reflects the nature of qualitative research in which the investigation of complex phenomena is far from being a straightforward process (Kiger and Varpio, 2020; Lester et al., 2020) – and essential to enable rich interpretation and analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Curry, 2015).

3.7.2 Method of Qualitative Data Analysis

The vast and diverse qualitative data analysis landscape (Lester et al., 2020) is in constant flux (Kalpokaite and Radivojevic, 2019) and uses an array of methods (Sunday, 2015; Walden University, 2015; Cassell and Bishop, 2019), representing a varied range of epistemological, theoretical, and disciplinary perspectives (Guest et al., 2006; Kalpokaite and Radivojevic, 2019). While the methods may differ in terms of the researchers' epistemological and theoretical orientation and the analytical process's main focus (Spencer, Ritchie, and O'Connor 2003), nonetheless, their overarching similarity is the processes of 'coding' and 'theming' the dataset (Kiger and Varpio, 2020; Lester et al., 2020).

(A)   Justification for the Choice of Thematic Analysis

The most common qualitative data analysis approaches and methods (Cassell and Bishop, 2019; Lester et al., 2020) are listed in Table 4.2 (see Appendix 6). Out of these, this study adopts thematic analysis due to its relevance, and prevalence with five distinct advantages (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017; King and Brookes, 2018; Cassell and Bishop, 2019) compared to other methods.

First: 'flexibility' is the absolute advantage of thematic analysis vis-à-vis other methods of qualitative data analysis (Joffe, 2012; Braun et al., 2019; Kiger and Varpio, 2020). Unlike other methods wedded to one or other philosophical approach (Cassell and Bishop, 2019), thematic analysis has no ties to any particular philosophical or epistemological approach (Clarke and Braun, 2013). This feature provides "tremendous theoretical flexibility" (Lester et al., 2020: 98) that can be deployed alongside most chosen methodologies (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017; King and Brookes, 2018) and be used with all types of qualitative data (Smith, Flower, and Larkin, 2009; King and Brookes, 2018), primarily interview data (Kenny and Briner 2010; in Cassell and Bishop, 2019) as well as for a range of dataset sizes (Lester et al., 2020).

Applied to this study, thematic analysis resonates constructively with the fundamental tenet of the interpretive methodology that guides this research in seeking to acquire unconstrained and diversified narratives, interpretations, and, thus, knowledge produced through the lived experiences (Sandberg, 2005; Creswell and Creswell, 2018) of senior managers at OmanBank. Furthermore, thematic analysis's inherent flexibility reverberates equally well with the SSII used as the data collection vehicle in this study, also characterised as "flexible in that they can be presented in a number of ways and that there is no specific format to follow" (Boyce and Neale, 2006: 8).

Second: Thematic analysis is an ideal method for novice qualitative researchers (Kiger and Varpio, 2020; Lester et al., 2020) due to its being one of the most accessible analytic techniques (Kalpokaite and Radivojevic, 2019) and relatively easy to learn (Lester et al., 2020). Applied to this research, since the researcher is a novice, both accessibility and relative ease were requisites.

Third: Thematic analysis is particularly advantageous for the analysis of interview data. Joffe (2012) asserts that verbal interview data tends to be at the root of TA, which applies to this research method.

Fourth: Thematic analysis is a 'holistic' method (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Lester et al., 2020) that has been "used in almost every conceivable field of scholarship in the social and health sciences" (Terry et al., 2017: 32), and thus can answer diverse research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Joffe, 2012; Lester et al., 2020). This breadth covers, among other things, the 'lived-experiences' of a particular social group and examines the 'factors' that influence, underpin, or contextualise specific processes or phenomena (Joffe, 2012; Kiger and Varpio, 2020). This feature is particularly relevant to this study, which aims to understand the 'factors' that cause SE to fail at OmanBank by grasping the 'lived-experiences' of OmanBank's managers.

Fifth: Thematic analysis scores top when it comes to the systematic organisation of the whole dataset (Cassell and Bishop, 2019) as (a) it allows specific questions to be asked; (b) enables comparison of all participant's responses on specific issues; and (c) allows the emergence of patterns and themes between chunks of data. A well-organised dataset has been vital to this study, as it constituted the foundation for robust data analysis and credible findings.

Sixth: A final comparative advantage of thematic analysis – perhaps the culmination of all those just cited – is that among all the qualitative data analysis methods thematic analysis is the most commonly used (Braun, Clarke, and Rance, 2014; Maguire and Delahunt, 2017) and hence has been described as the most popular technique of qualitative data analysis (Silverman, 2013; King and Brookes, 2018; Cassell and Bishop, 2019). Such wide acceptance provides another reason for the selection of thematic analysis here, not necessarily because of its popularity per se, but due to the inference that thematic analysis produces 'high-quality output' that is more credible vis-à-vis other techniques.

(B)   Limitations of Thematic Analysis

While seen as a distinctive data analysis method (Joffe, 2012; Braun et al., 2019), thematic analysis is not without limitations. The two fundamental limitations of thematic analysis are discussed below, with an explanation of how each was mitigated during the data analysis process.

First: Paradoxically, the first limitation relates to the primary meritorious attribute of thematic analysis: 'flexibility' (Kiger and Varpio, 2020), emanating from the claim that its flexibility might create the perception that thematic analysis is only a tool and not a rigorous method, especially if manuscripts do not visibly indicate the theoretical temperament of the work and its role in the analysis (ibid.). Terry et al. (2017: 32) provide more clarity about this: "in describing thematic analysis as a tool, we do not advocate its use outside of theory"; and Braun et al. (2019: 807) endorse this view, asserting that "good quality thematic analysis requires a degree of theoretical knowingness". To mitigate this in the current research, action was taken to always theoretically underpin the analysis and interpretations, to have "theory meshed into everything" (Braun et al., 2019: 807).

Second: Thematic analysis is seen as more prone to inconsistent use of 'terminology' compared to other methods with better-defined and less flexible frameworks (Kiger and Varpio, 2020; Lester et al., 2020). To counterargue this, however, the vagueness in terminology is perhaps rooted in the conception that thematic analysis is 'an umbrella method' (Braun et al., 2019; Lester et al., 2020) that serves different theoretical approaches. Therefore, so long as the researcher identifies which version of thematic analysis is theoretically congruent with the research question, the label attached should not constitute a hindrance. For the current study,

this perceived limitation was not felt to apply because within the wider thematic analysis, Reflexive Thematic Analysis was chosen due to its being "conceptualised as a fully qualitative approach" (Braun et al., 2019: 848) and, therefore, congruity with the interpretive methodology that guides this study. Reflexive Thematic Analysis contrasts with other versions of thematic analysis with positivist roots, such as 'Codebook Thematic Analysis', which uses a structured codebook in which themes are generally determined before analysis.

3.8 Research Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Conduct

> *"Just as good well-prepared ingredients are vital for a chef, so too are good and well-prepared data vital for a researcher"* (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021: 301)

3.8.1 Research Validity and Reliability

Upholding the notions of validity and reliability is central to the success of any research (Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden, 2001; Davies and Dodd, 2002; Morse et al., 2002; Ribbs, 2012) because "meticulous attention to these two aspects can make the difference between good research and poor research" (Brink, 1993: 35).

The literature indicates that the terms validity and reliability are rooted in the positivist paradigm (Golafshani, 2003) and are traditionally associated with the quantitative research tradition (Sandberg, 2005); however, they also apply to qualitative research. In quantitative research, validity checks "whether the research truly measures what it was intended to measure, or how truthful the research results are" (Golafshani, 2003: 599), while reliability measures whether the scientific results are duplicatable over time in identical settings (Sandberg, 2005; Carcary, 2009; Lakshmi and Mohideen, 2013). In qualitative research, reliability "refer[s] to the stability of findings" (Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle, 2001: 523), while validity "represent[s] the truthfulness of findings" (ibid.: 523).

However, slotting the two positivist-rooted notions neatly into the qualitative paradigm is not so straightforward, since no universally accepted standards or criteria for evaluating trustworthiness have been identified (Morse et al., 2002; Tong, Sainsbury and Craig, 2007; Northcote, 2012; Leung, 2015; Noble and Smith, 2015; Buus and Perron, 2020). As a result, researchers are split into two definite camps in the literature regarding the use of the two terms in qualitative research and the notion of 'qualitative evaluation criteria' generally.

The first camp, led by Lincoln and Guba through their seminal work in the 1980s (Morse et al., 2002), contended that the use of the two positivist-rooted terms in qualitative research was inappropriate for qualitative researchers due to the incongruence between a quantitative epistemology and qualitative methodology (Sandberg, 2005). Accordingly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) were the first to coin parallel terms (Golafshani, 2003), merging reliability and validity into the word "trustworthiness", which they defined as "the extent to which the data is plausible, credible and trustworthy; and thus, can be defended when challenged" (Bashir, Afzal, and Azeem, 2008: 35). Lincoln and Guba's work of 1985 yielded the first qualitative evaluation criteria (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006) which has since been followed by over 100 other attempts (Stige et al., 2009) to establish the qualitative evaluation criteria (Northcote, 2012), generating a plethora of new terms (Morse et al., 2002).

The opposite camp of qualitative scholars posits that the positivist-rooted terms of validity and reliability remain apposite concepts for attaining rigour in qualitative research (Morse et al., 2002; Bashir, Afzal, and Azeem, 2008) where both terms are used (Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle, 2001). Clearly, therefore, while the first camp saw the need to match the research paradigm with the research methodology, the second camp did not (Northcote 2012).

Applied to this research, the preceding debate among qualitative researchers concerning validity and reliability in social research infers a lack of consensus on the applicability of the two terms in the field and, thus, a uniform qualitative evaluation criterion (Creswell, 1998; Morse et al., 2002; Northcote, 2012; Leung 2015; Noble and Smith, 2015). A complete analytic account of the qualitative evaluation criteria's array is beyond this research's bounds. Therefore, given the constraints, this study deployed a qualitative evaluation criterion based on Lincoln and Guba's formative work of 1985, for two reasons: (a) its theoretical and methodical coherence with the interpretive methodology and SSII method that guide this study, and (b) its established value in research trustworthiness seen in its popularity among qualitative researchers as the most commonly cited and used standard in social research (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). Table 3.5 below offers a self-explanatory account of the qualitative evaluation criteria as applied in this research.

Table 3.5: Qualitative Evaluation Criteria Applicable to the Current Study

Qualitative Evaluation Criteria	When used	Key techniques applicable for establishing trustworthiness
Confirmability: The extent to which the study's results are shaped by the respondents and not by the researcher's bias; i.e. degree of neutrality.	During research	**Reflexivity**: Refers to the practice of systematically attending to the context of knowledge construction at every step of the research process to benefit the researcher (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006; Spiers, et al., 2018). The process can be done through a reflexive journal (Noble and Smith, 2015), in which the qualitative inquirer makes regular entries during the research process. This technique is widely supported (Britten et al., 1995; Popay, Rogers, and Williams, 1998; Mays and Pope, 2000; Yardley, 2007). For this research, a 'reflexive journal' was maintained by regular entries during the research process, including reflecting on (a) personal values, preferences, preconceptions, beliefs, and assumptions present during the research process, (b) methodological decisions and the reasons for them, and (c) the logistics of the study such as travel plans. Note that the reflexive journal is an obligatory requirement for our cohort of NTU DBA (See Document 6).
	After research	**External audits (Output):** Refers to an external researcher independent of the research process evaluating the 'output' of the research for accuracy and whether the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data (Miller, 1997a; Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). Examining the product (thesis) addresses confirmability: Miller (1997a) and Cohen and Crabtree (2006) are key advocates of this technique. For this study, independent viva examiners will examine the thesis against NTU's DBA (Program Learning Objectives (PLOs) to achieve the confirmability goal.

Table 3.5 continued

Dependability: Demonstrating that the findings are consistent and repeatable.	During research	**Audit Trail:** Accurate and transparent description and documentation of the research process was maintained as evidence during the research processes. The audit trail is a popular technique (Carcary, 2009) used widely to establish qualitative trustworthiness. A wide cohort of qualitative scholars support it (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Popay, Rogers, and Williams, 1998; Giacomini and Cook, 2000; Carcary, 2009). A comprehensive audit trail of all relevant records related to this research was maintained including (a) ethical approval form, (b) participant informed consent, (c) supervisory meeting records, (d) research data, (e) data management plan, and (f) interview transcripts. Noteworthy, most of these documents are annexed to the thesis is an obligatory requirement of NTU DBA (see Appendix).
	After research	**External Audits (Process):** Refers to an external researcher independent of the research process evaluating the 'process' of the research for accuracy and whether the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data (Miller, 1997a; Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). Examining the process addresses the study's dependability. Key advocates of this technique include Miller (1997a) and Cohen and Crabtree (2006). For this study, independent viva examiners will examine the researches 'processes' followed in the thesis, hence serving the dependability goal.

Table 3.5 continued

Credibility: Confidence in the truth of the findings.	Before research	**Pilot Interview:** Gathering the appropriate data, known as 'validity of data generation' (Carcary, 2009), is essential for research credibility (King, 2004a; Boyce and Neal, 2006; Guest et al., 2006; Van Wijk and Harrison, 2013). The chosen instrument for data gathering, therefore, must pass the tests of reliability and validity before being employed in the inquiry (Dikko, 2016). For this study, three pilot interviews were conducted to establish the construct and content validity and reliability of the interview instrument, which turned out to be an invaluable exercise (see 3.6.2).
	During and after research	**Member-checking:** The researcher checks back with participants either formally or informally to request additional data and/or to test and validate interpretations and conclusions (Birt et al., 2016; Livari, 2018). Numerous scholars support this technique (e.g. Miles and Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Mays and Pope, 2000). While 'member-checking' is credited as crucial to establishing qualitative credibility according to Lincoln and Gubta's criteria of 1985 (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006), it has non-the-less been criticised on several grounds. The main critique is philosophical, whereby 'member-checking' is seen to rely on the assumption that reality has a fixed truth that the researcher can account for and a participant can reconfirm (Sandelowski, 1993; Angen, 2000). Respondents could, therefore, disagree with the researcher's interpretations due to their own views of what constitutes a fair account (Angen, 2000; Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). This goes against the principal tenet of the interpretive paradigm that drives this research, which stipulates that there is no objective truth or reality to which the results of the research can be matched, since understanding is co-created (Morse, 1994). Thus, while the alarm of philosophical incompatibility did sound, the researcher considered that this critique was valid only if 'member-checking' involved sending the entire interview, analytical interpretation, and conclusions to the interviewee for *validation* in terms of verification, modification, and confirmation, as Birt et al. (2016) have argued. To resolve the possible theoretical incongruence, the version of 'member-checking' that would have been applied in this research – had the need arose – would not seek 'validation' and would be strictly limited to *requesting additional information* (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006) for 'data adequacy' considerations.

Source: Compiled by the researcher from Lincoln and Guba (1985) and other sources.

3.8.2 Research Ethical Conduct

Ethics are integral to any research (Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden, 2001) and are vital to achieving qualitative research credibility (Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle, 2001; Kabir, 2016). Since qualitative interviews involve one-to-one communication and are likely to delve into sensitive issues, the interviewer must contemplate and address all ethical aspects of the research (Doody and Noonan, 2013; Kabir, 2016), including, crucially, the ethical considerations relating to and underlying the design of the interview questions and the in-depth interviews themselves (Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle, 2001).

Conventionally, research ethics focused on avoiding harm (Walsham, 2006; Blandford, 2013). Later research, however, has broadened the scope to encompass other ethical considerations covering deception, confidentiality, lack of informed consent, the right to withdraw, and debriefing (Walsham, 2006; Blandford, 2013; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

In the practice of this research, besides complying with NTU's ethical approval requirements (Appendix 1), the researcher has fully complied with the following ethical norms:

Access to participants: The researcher deployed the six-step criterion developed by Saunders et al. (2003: 118), which stipulates: (i) explain the purpose of the research, (ii) describe the benefits to the organisation, (iii) make it easy for the person to reply to your questions, (iv) assure privacy and anonymity, (v) assure no harm, and (vi) obtain voluntarily signed consent forms. This criterion was applied both in writing (see Appendices 2–3) and verbally during the interviews.

Transparency: Moravcsik's (2014: 2) definition of transparency as "the obligation to make data, analysis, methods, and interpretive choices underlying their claims visible in a way that allows others to evaluate them" situates the word as a cornerstone in social science (Kapiszewski and Karcher, 2021). This research was made accessible to participants, readers, and assessors in compliance with the ethics of transparency. The adopted qualitative evaluation criteria in Table 3.5 enhance the notion for readers by providing a description and documentation of the research processes and the techniques and measures taken by the researcher to assure trustworthiness.

Bias: Given this research's interpretive methodology with its foundational notion that a single objective reality does not exist, the researcher recognises the difficulty of making the research objective and value- or bias-free (Carcary, 2009; Mashuri et al., 2022) because "completely objective and bias-free research is impossible for anyone" (Tracy, 2013:229). However, while bias is an issue in all types of research (Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle, 2001), it is seen as particularly problematic in qualitative research where the researcher is viewed as the human research instrument (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006; Tracy, 2013) and part of the research process (Carcary, 2009).

Social science researchers have tackled the issue of interviewer bias from various angles and levels, falling into three categories. On one end, King (2004a) argues that the interviewer's presuppositions should be consciously 'set aside', while Mathers, Fox, and Hunn (2002), in agreement, use the expression 'avoid' interviewer bias. On the opposite end, Walsham (2006: 321) sensibly counterargues that "we are all biased by our own background, knowledge and prejudices to see things in certain ways and not others"; a view endorsed by Pervin and Mokhtar (2022: 424) who, quoting Ryan (2018: 9), state: "researchers are in no way capable of distancing themselves from their inbuilt values and morals and that inevitably affects their information collection, its interpretation, and analysis". Tracy (2013) and Mashuri et al. (2022) agree with this stance, however, adding that while bias is unavoidable in interviews, it can be controlled. Somewhere in the middle of the two poles are: Malterud (2001: 484), who views that "preconceptions are not the same as bias unless the researcher fails to mention them"; and Cohen and Crabtree (2006), who state that when different researchers approach the same study from different perspectives and preconceptions, this should be viewed as providing a richer understanding of complex phenomena rather than being seen as a bias or reliability problem.

From this, it may be concluded that bias can neither be 'set aside' nor 'avoided', but it can be controlled (Mashuri et al., 2022). Accordingly, this research has done all it can to control and minimise bias mainly by using 'confirmability' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) through the vital technique of reflexivity (Ormston et al., 2013; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022) as elaborated in Table 3.5. This is a position described by Ormston et al. (2013: 8) as 'empathic neutrality', meaning a position falling between objective observation and value-

mediated observation, which acknowledges that research cannot be value-free. However, as the same authors warn: "researchers should try to make [such values] transparent, striving […] as far as possible to be neutral and non-judgemental in their approach. In this context, reflexivity in qualitative research is considered particularly important" (ibid.). In addition to the actions stated in Table 3.5, interviewer bias was further mitigated via Document-6, as the mandatory 'reflexive journal' of this study, which contains the notes, thoughts, and reflections made during the entire DBA research journey, including the researcher's reflections on his values, preferences, preconceptions, and beliefs.

Acknowledgement: While this study has put the best possible ethical due diligence in place to produce credible and trustworthy research, the researcher acknowledges three issues that can impact its credibility:

First: Having received voluntary informed consent, the researcher questioned himself: how voluntary is participation; to what extent might voluntary participation (if not entirely voluntary) shape participants' responses? The possibility of this ethical issue arising was mitigated by reiterating the 'no harm', 'privacy', 'anonymity', and 'option to withdraw' clauses in the consent form before and after the interview.

Second: There is the issue that what participants tell the researcher may only partially reflect what they really believe. They may fail to mention relevant issues due to reluctance or knowledge deficit, or their views may reflect a limited understanding (in the case of this study) of strategy and how one should be executed. In this study, the possibility of these issues arising was managed primarily by employing open questioning and probing to entice the maximum response from interviewees on aspects of SE. Interestingly, the participants — being senior bank members – demonstrated thorough knowledge about the research topic, exceeding the researcher's expectations. And had there been a knowledge deficit, this would have been viewed as one of the barriers to SE rather than a challenge to the credibility of the research.

Sample size: The relatively small interview cohort can be considered a limitation of this research. However, as discussed in 3.6.2, the sample size is not the determinant of quality in social research (Morse et al., 2002; Guest et al., 2006; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Baker and Edwards, 2012; Terry et al., 2017). Instead, the trustworthiness of qualitative research is seen

in the employment of specific practices and techniques to enhance credibility, dependability, and confirmability (see Table 3.5).

3.9 Chapter Summary

To summarise, Chapter 3 was inspired by the research question: 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?' that was formulated following an extensive literature review and underpinned by the conceptual framework. The chapter has introduced, discussed, offered a critical account of, and defended the interpretive methodology and the SSII as the most appropriate research approach and method to tackle the research question as stated. It then presented the research setting, arguing and offering justification for the choice of institution and interviewees, in addition to offering a visual rendition of the fieldwork by describing the interview process. Qualitative data analysis was then introduced, and thematic analysis as the method of qualitative data analysis was presented and justified. Finally, the chapter ended by arguing the case for the research's validity, reliability, and ethical conduct. In this spirit, the thesis now opens to the data analysis of Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

Triggered by the principal research question of this study: 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?', the identification of a research gap through a detailed literature review in Chapter 2, and the presentation and justification of the selected research methodology and method in Chapter 3, have laid the foundations for the fieldwork and data analysis.

This chapter, thus, is wholly dedicated to the vital mission of data analysis, the key objective of which is to capture, understand, synthesise, categorise, analyse, present, and discuss the key findings from the narratives of the senior OmanBank managers in service of the aforesaid research question. To achieve this, the chapter proceeds in two phases. The first phase offers a visual description of the empirical work undertaken, aiming to provide the reader with a simulated experience of joining the researcher in the field. As Easterby-Smith et al. (2021: 304) point out, good qualitative research builds on the researcher's "willingness to account for the research process in a transparent way". The second phase dives into data analysis by first introducing and describing the main themes and subthemes, followed by presenting the key findings, and then discussing the findings, before closing with a summary.

4.2 Description of the Data Analysis Process

For a well-organised data analysis process, scholars, e.g., Braun and Clarke (2006), Terry et al. (2017), and Lester et al. (2020), named different phases of thematic analysis that differ largely in their labels but not in their essence. Of such models, Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework "has become the most widely adopted method of thematic analysis within the qualitative literature" (Kiger and Varpio, 2020: 3). Inspired by these models, the data analysis process was organised in this research in seven phases as depicted in Figure 4.1, below, and described in the key underneath.

Figure 4.1: Stages of Data Analysis
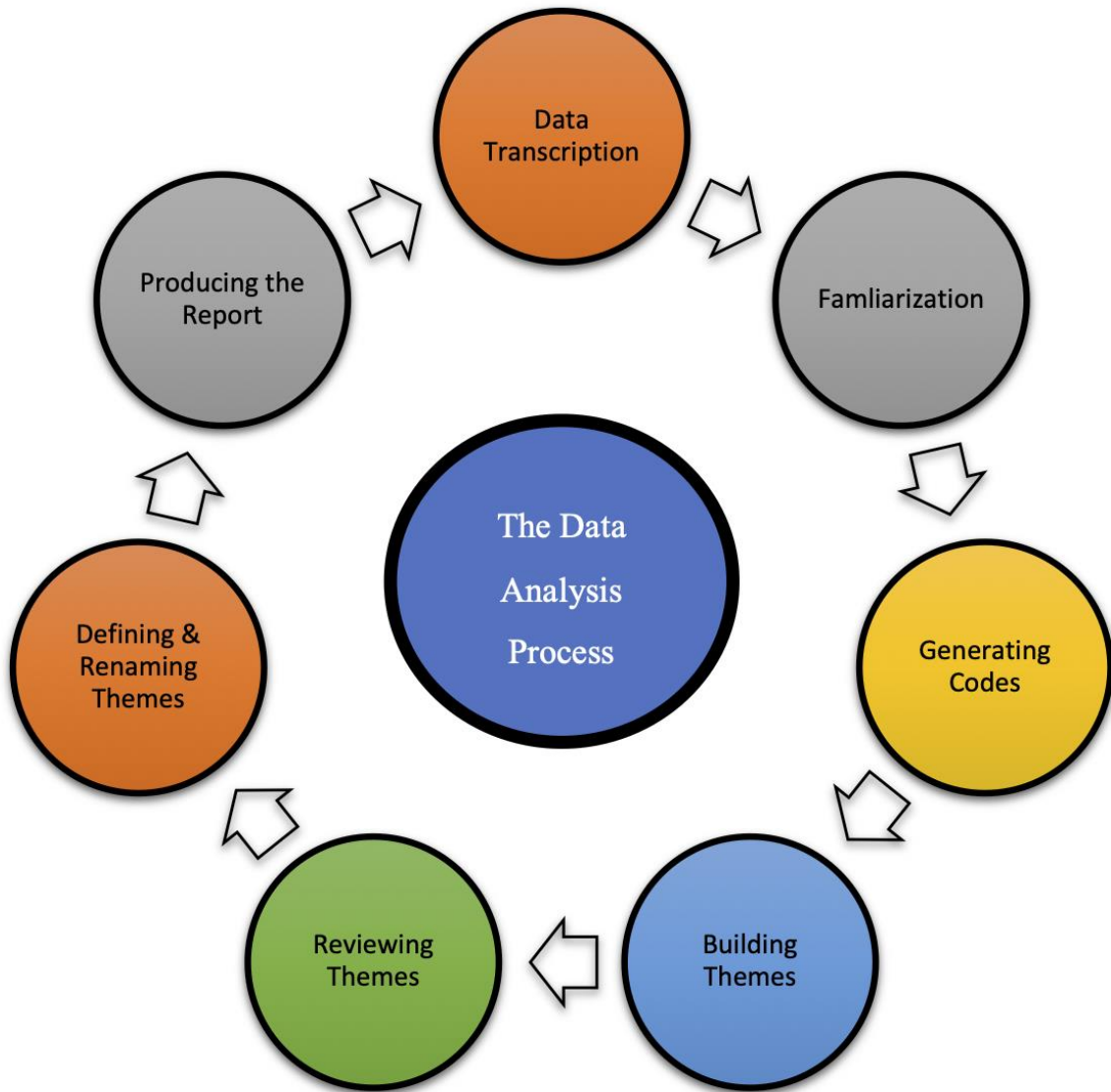
Source: Developed by the researcher

Key to Figure 4.1: Description of the Data Analysis process as exercised in the field:

The circles in the Figure describe the following actions:

a. *Data transcription*: the researcher studied a sizable quantity of material on professional transcription before transcribing the interviews. This highly instrumental process (involving playing, replaying, slowing, and pausing the recordings) was indeed the steppingstone to *familiarisation* with the material (Lester et al., 2020).

b. *Familiarisation*: with the research question in mind, and being mindful that familiarisation is regarded as the bedrock of 'good' thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017), the researcher performed repetitive readings of the transcripts and watched the video-recordings to align facial expressions and body language with the transcripts. This experience turned invaluable in terms of deep engagement with the data (Terry et al., 2017) and getting immersed in the dataset, notetaking, and preparing for the coding process (Braun et al., 2019).

c. *Generating codes:* with the research question central, this stage represented the first 'genuinely' analytic step (Kiger and Varpio, 2020) as it entailed focused attention on systematic and meticulous sense-making of the data (Braun et al., 2019). The researcher approached the raw data open-mindedly to make sense of it, looking inductively for emerging themes, while observing deductively for themes that tied-up with the conceptual framework. The coding process was performed using NVIVO software. Initially, the data was labelled broadly into different buckets through an iterative process, moving data between different data buckets. This stage was particularly helpful for the researcher in building the audit trail to support the trustworthiness of the analysis (Nowell et al., 2017; Kiger and Varpio, 2020).

d. *Theme-building*: the researcher has approached this stage with the understanding that well-constructed themes are distinctive – each having its central organising concept – yet interrelated (Terry et al., 2017), and ultimately should tell a coherent and insightful story about the data, underpinned by the research question (Braun et al., 2019). It thus involved initial observation and sense-making of the (inter)relationships and crossovers between the 12 different codes, which has helped to reduce these to ten 'candidate themes' through merging, clustering, or collapsing codes (Terry et al., 2017; Kiger and Varpio, 2020). Throughout the theme-building and refinement process, forefront were three considerations: (i) the research question; (ii) approaching the data with a dual-mindset – one eye on inductively emerging themes, while the other looking for themes deductively validating the conceptual framework that had emerged

e. *Theme-review:* Themes were then reviewed at two levels: first, the researcher looked at each 'candidate theme' to ensure coherence and meaningfulness of the data within (Kiger and Varpio, 2020); and second, revisiting the thematic map, based on the first review, to ensure that it was an accurate representation of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The theme-review process was beneficial in further reduction of themes from ten to six, and ascertaining that the story being told by the themes answered the research question (Terry et al., 2017). At this stage, the researcher's 'memoing' and notetaking reflected the themes' evolution process, to reinforce the trustworthiness of the findings (Nowell et al., 2017) (see Reflexivity in Table 3.4) as much as to furnish the content of Document 6.

f. *Theme-naming*: the theme-naming process involved adding a textual narrative description representing each theme's 'central organising idea' (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Kiger and Varpio, 2020) to ensure clarity, cohesion, and precision of the final six themes with their respective subthemes (Terry et al., 2017). This is finally reflected in Figure 4.3.

g. *Report-generation:* this final stage of data analysis was the most important of all, as it involved the critical mission of extracting the key findings from the data and interpreting these in relation to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006) that seeks to understand the barriers to successful SE at OmanBank. As described below, presenting this outcome involved meshing theory with the data (Braun et al., 2019: 807), underpinned by the research's ontological, epistemological, and methodological orientations.

4.3 Main Themes

The OmanBank data analysis process uncovered the following six main themes forming strategy execution (SE) barrier domains:

(1) OmanBank contextual barriers

(2) Organisational leadership barriers

(3) Process management barriers

(4) Strategy formulation barriers

(5) Change management barrier

(6) Resource management barriers

4.3.1 Description of the Main Themes

Before the key findings are presented under each of the six main themes, there are some key considerations relating collectively to the themes, which were pertinent from the outset:

(a) Conceptually, the six themes hybrid the inductive emergence of new evidence and the deductive affirmation of existing evidence.

(b) The first of the six themes listed above (OmanBank contextual barriers) inductively emerged from the data to offer fresh insight and new knowledge about SE barriers specific to OmanBank. Importantly, at the macro-level, the emergence of OmanBank contextual barriers has led to re-categorisation of the barriers into two main groups of barriers:

(i) 'Conventional Barriers': referring to the generic barriers commonly cited across the literature and revalidated via the primary research at OmanBank.

(ii) 'Contextual Barriers': referring to the novel context-related barriers, namely Omanisation, Wasta and Oman Labour Law, that arose at OmanBank, or any similar barriers that may arise in other organisations in Oman or elsewhere.

(c) The remaining five 'conventional barriers'[2 to 6], deductively validated the literature review findings; however, the difference between what emerged from OmanBank's data, and the literature findings is a matter of scale and intensity, as section 4.4 reveals.

(d) Each main theme comprises subthemes, the latter indicative of the different SE barriers

raised by participants under a particular theme. For each subtheme, 'files' and 'recurrences' were created. 'Files' indicate how many participants talked about a particular subtheme, while 'recurrences' refer to the number of mentions of each subtheme during the interview discussions. The higher the number of 'files' and 'recurrences', the more important the subtheme. Table 4.1 illustrates this.

(e) The six themes interconnect in a loop. The strength of inter-theme connectivity varies depending on certain factors discussed below under the respective themes. Textually, the interconnectivity is evidenced in the excerpts taken from participants' statements that may fit equally under several themes.

(f) Structurally, each theme or subtheme commences with a brief introduction followed by a presentation and then a discussion of the key findings under each subtheme.

(g) The themes are presented logically and chronologically based on their respective weight and value to the study (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993). Accordingly, OmanBank's contextual barriers (OCB), representing this study's new finding and original contribution to research, come first, followed by the remaining themes.

(h) Since the discussion of all the findings falls beyond the bounds of this study, only the 'key findings' are presented. To qualify as a 'key finding', the criteria was that the subtheme should have been endorsed by over 50% of participants and have attracted a minimum of ten interview-mentions (i.e., mentioned at least twice by each participant). Subthemes that did not qualify according to the criteria were dropped.

Table 4.1: Codebook of Themes and Subthemes of SE Barriers at OmanBank

Themes and Sub-Themes	Files (Participants' Endorsement)	Recurrence (Interview Mentions)	Recurrence %
1. NBO Contextual Barriers	**8**	**95**	**29%**
a. Omanization (Nationalisation)	8	39	
b. Wasta (Nepotism/Favouritism)	8	29	
c. Oman Labour Law	7	27	
2. Organisational Leadership Barriers	**8**	**71**	**22%**
The Leadership Factor	8	71	
3. Processes Management Barriers	**8**	**53**	**16%**
a. Strategic Communication Failure	8	27	
b. Lack of Employee Motivation	7	26	
4. Strategy Formulation Barriers	**8**	**50**	**15%**
a. Lack of Involvement of Lower-level Staff	8	26	
a. Inappropriate Strategy (Unrealistic, unclear, conflicting)	7	24	
5. Change Management Barriers	**8**	**35**	**11%**
Lack of a Structured Change Management Programme	7	35	
6. Resources Availability Barriers	**5**	**20**	**6%**
a. Lack of Human Resources	5	10	
b. Lack of Technology	5	10	

Source: Developed by the researcher

4.4 Key Findings

This section, which is a culmination of the work accomplished so far, represents the most crucial part of the thesis. It presents the key findings of the data analysis that answer the research question of this study: What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank? as governed by the key findings criteria (see 4.3.1).

The findings are presented by theme, quoting verbatim for purposes of illustration and validity (Burnard et al., 2008) and thus capitalising on the narrative presentation of data as one of the prime merits of the interpretive methodology that guides this study (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993). As Neuman (2000: 419) states: "words are powerful conveyors of meaning, more powerful than statistics". Therefore, direct quotes from participants, conveying their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and the context in which this happened, will be interpreted and meshed into theory (Braun et al., 2019: 807) in the hope of bringing this research 'to life' and making it more meaningful to the reader (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993; Wertz, 2005).

4.4.1 Theme-1: OmanBank Contextual Barriers (OCB)

Underpinned by the research question: 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?', OCB captured the most important findings of this study in terms of new, strong, and contextually-novel SE barriers, and thus deserved to be discussed at the onset. Its importance is rooted in the following four key considerations:

(a) being contextually-novel at OmanBank with no similarities whatsoever in the literature.

(b) their endorsement by all eight participants as a severe domain of SE barriers, commanding the highest number of total interview-mentions among all the six main themes at both the main theme and individual subthemes levels (see Table 4.1).

(c) having led to the redefinition and re-categorisation of the SE barriers into 'contextual barriers' and 'conventional barriers' (see 4.3.1) and, thus, the modification of this study's 'conceptual framework' (see Figure 2.1).

(d) representing this study's original contribution to the corpus of research on strategy execution, Omanisation, and Wasta, hopefully adding to both academia and professional practice.

Three major subthemes formed under OCB: (A) Omanisation (nationalisation), (B) Wasta (nepotism or favouritism), and (C) Omani Labour Law (see Figure 4.2). These are elaborated upon below in the order of their impact on the research question

Figure 4.2: OmanBank Contextual Barriers (OCB) to Strategy Execution
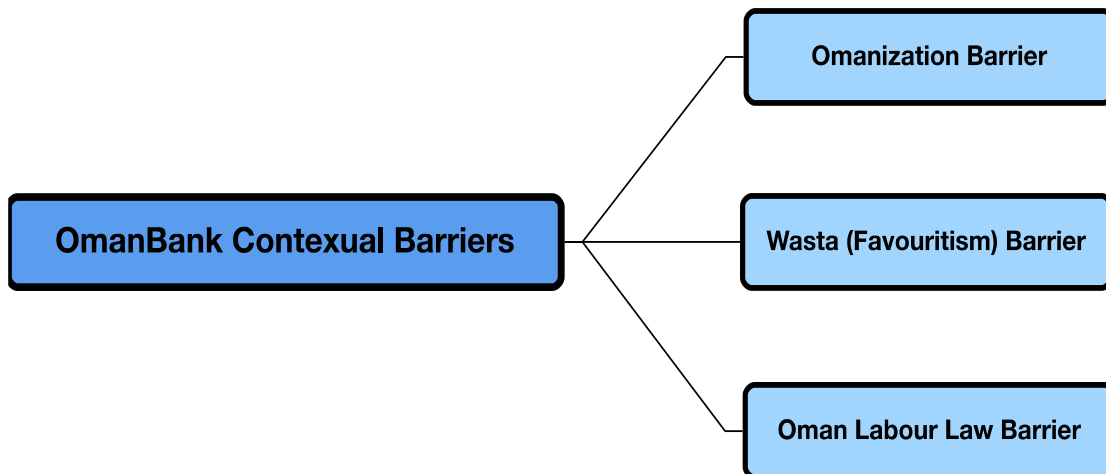
Source: Developed by the researcher

(A) Omanisation

Omanisation, as highlighted in the literature, is the nationalisation policy of Oman that seeks to replace expatriate labour with Omanis to attain socioeconomic and political benefits (Al-Lamki, 2005). Several relevant findings emerged under the Omanisation subtheme.

Omanisation Key Findings

As per the 'key findings criteria' (see 4.3.1), Omanisation stood at the apex of the barriers hindering successful SE at OmanBank, attracting the highest number of interview-mentions in the entire dataset (39) and the endorsement of all eight interviewees. All participants conceded that Omanisation has profoundly hurt the bank's strategies, reasoning that failure was primarily attributable to 'wrong decisions', emanating from inexperience and the lack of skills and qualifications of the Omanisation-imposed CEOs. The following excerpts illustrate the point:

"If you put unqualified Omani people in charge, not only the strategy execution but the strategy itself will be wrong. So, even if your execution is perfect, it will be the right execution of the wrong strategy [laughs loudly]." (Participant-2)

"I'm an Omani, and I like the Omanisation policy because one day I want to be a CEO [smiles], but those guys are rushing it, so the banks suffer, and of course, the strategy suffers." (Participant-5)

In response to the question of what Omani CEOs generally lack, participants prominently singled out 'leadership skills' as observed from the following remark:

"The problem is that all the last three Omani CEOs [...]in my opinion, and also the opinion of all the good people who left the bank, are not the right CEOs, and they lack even the basics of leadership." (Participant-8)

When prompted to support their claims about the negative impact of Omanisation on SE, participants provided two types of evidence:

First, participants compared Omani CEOs with expatriate CEOs, suggesting the former lacked leadership skillset, education, and experience:

"Yes, expat CEOs are always better. See, those guys come with lots of good training and skills and long experience in big, big banks, unlike Omani CEOs who lack such skills, and they are there because of Omanisation." (Participant-6)

Second, participants shared examples of failed strategies, which they attributed mainly to Omanisation. For example, the majority of the participants held up the 'decentralisation strategy' as a notorious example of strategy failure, as seen in the following statements:

"The best and more recent example is the decision made by our Omani CEO [...] on decentralisation of Banking Operations, and he wanted to do that within about a month! I swear everybody thought that was crazy. He said decentralisation leads to quicker customer service." (Participant-2)

"They said they wanted to speed up customer service. Believe me, they ended up losing most of the key customers to competition because customer service has become worse due to rushing the strategy without proper preparation." (Participant-3)

"That is a good example of a wrong strategy because of a fellow Omani with little experience who isn't willing to listen." (Participant-8)

Despite the stark critique of Omanisation as a process, there was consensus among interviewees that Omanisation exemplifies a 'good idea' that is poorly executed, as revealed by the following expressions:

"Omanisation is a good strategy, bad implementation." (Participant-8)

"If you are looking for a failing strategy, Omanisation is the best example [...]. In the end, it's an implementation problem, like you're researching now [smiles]." (Participant-1)

In response to subsequent questioning as to why Omanisation was failing and how it could be done better, participants provided their reasons for why Omanisation was failing and offered solutions. These included robust education and training systems, focus on quality rather than quantity, and not rushing it, as the following excerpts divulge:

"I think OmanBank is currently close to 98%, which means for every 100 employees, you have two expats only, which isn't logical at the moment. I believe this could be the percentage after

maybe 15 years, given that you put a strong training and education plan for all Omani staff in good international schools and banks." (Participant-2)

"Omanisation can be done better, like done slowly, not rushed and let Omanis first take time to learn the skills from expats and have more experience and education." (Participant-4)

Finally: participants went on to share the adverse consequences of the failure of strategy at OmanBank, directly linking it to Omanisation in terms of the bank losing its leading market position:

"Omani CEOs who came over the last decade, maybe four of them, have not been great leaders and the evidence to [...] what I said, is the decline of OmanBank from the best bank, number one really, to very low rank now, and most of the good people left." (Participant-1)

"You can imagine the cost to the bank and even to the country. I call that the cost of Omanisation; I mean wrongly implemented Omanisation." (Participant-2)

(B) Wasta (Nepotism/Favouritism)

As explained in the literature review, for this research, the definition of 'Wasta' has been confined to the 'undeserved appointment of relatives, friends and tribal mates in leadership and key decision-making positions'. The Wasta subtheme unveiled four key findings in relation to the research question, which this section will unpick to understand its impact on the bank's (lack of) strategic success.

Wasta Key Findings

Wasta was prominent in the interview data as a grave and contextually-novel SE barrier at OmanBank, with no parallel found in the literature consulted. What made Wasta of special interest is not only its contextual novelty but also its severity as a strategic barrier, commanding the ratification of all eight participants through 29 interview-mentions, ranking second after Omanisation across all themes.

In response to the questions 'How does Wasta look like in reality?', and 'In what manner does it prevail?', participants agreed that they see the effects of 'Wasta' in jobs being given without merit to unqualified people, and that this represents the greatest damage inflicted by it on the bank, as reflected below:

"You see Wasta in the people who get these positions or promotions." (Participant-6)

"Here in OmanBank, we see Wasta when senior people hire relatives, friends, or (aah), like people from the same tribe." (Participant-1)

In their responses to the question 'Does Wasta impact the bank's strategy, and if yes, in what way?', participants agreed that Wasta directly impacts strategy and that it emanates from the wrong decisions taken by Wasta appointees. This view is seen through the following excerpts:

"It impacts the strategy negatively because Wasta means putting the wrong people in charge." (Participant-5)

"Unqualified 'Wasta' people sometimes make wrong decisions and ask you to implement it, so what is the point of implementing a wrong strategy?" (Participant-8)

"Wasta is another killer of strategy." (Participant-3)

To the question: 'How widespread is Wasta, and who practices it in Oman?', another vital finding was unveiled. Participants consented that Wasta is a severe nationwide phenomenon in Oman that is overwhelmingly practised by Omanis and has become part of Omani culture. The following remarks showcase this:

"The problem with Wasta is that it is a nationwide thing." (Participant-1)

"Wasta is everywhere in Oman [...] basically, the more Omanis you have, the more likelihood of Wasta." (Participant-2)

"Sadly, it is part of the culture." (Participant-4)

An interesting analytical thread emerged in response to the question of 'whether Wasta is linked to Omanisation'. Participants believed that Wasta and Omanisation represented 'two faces of the same coin' because Omanisation itself is seen as a form of Wasta to Omanis who can leap over better-qualified non-Omani candidates. The following excerpts illustrate the point:

"I believe Omanisation is a form of Wasta for Omanis by the government […] because it is forcing businesses to give senior positions to Omanis before they are even ready." (Participant-6).

"Wasta has the same impact as, ahh, Omanisation because it leads to placing the wrong person sometimes in key posts." (Participant-2)

Moreover, participants went beyond describing the similarity of Wasta and Omanisation to directly accusing them of being the real strategic barriers, as evident from the following comment:

"Most if not all government strategies are born dead because of the inefficiencies and bureaucracy resulting from Wasta and Omanisation; those are real barriers to any strategy and to our progress." (Participant-3)

(C) Omani Labour Law

Omani Labour Law is the law that regulates the labour market in Oman and was first issued in 2003 via Royal Decree No. 35/2003 (Ministry of Manpower, 2012). Omani Labour Law represents the third most important novel subtheme to emerge under OCB after Omanisation and Wasta, of which several key findings have a bearing on answering the research question of this study.

Oman Labour Law Key Findings

The primary finding of the Omani Labour Law subtheme is participants' agreement that the law's stipulation that an employee, once hired, cannot be removed except in extreme cases (such as committing a felony) is problematic because this means that Omanisation/Wasta-appointed underperforming Omanis cannot be terminated. According to the interviewees, this provides Omanis with unmerited lifelong job security, which is counterproductive to strategic success, as projected in the following statements:

"How can you implement a strategy with the wrong people? This law is against the strategy." (Participant-5).

"How can you achieve strategic success with underperforming staff?" (Participant-6)

In response to the question about whether Omani Labour Law links in any manner to Omanisation, participants opined that the two are related – both aim to offer undue rights to Omanis – however, both are seen as failures as described below:

"In my view, this Labour Law and Omanisation are a package of failed strategies and practices by government, and they need serious reconsideration." (Participant-3)

In response to the question: 'How would you like to see Omani Labour Law and Omanisation in future?', participants recommended rethinking the law while Omanisation needs to be redone properly otherwise, the two will continue to impede strategic success. These views are unveiled in the following remarks:

"I think the government should rethink both the law and Omanisation to make them logical and to support business success." (Participant-7)

Figure 4.3: OWL – A Novel Interwoven SE Barrier Triangle at OmanBank
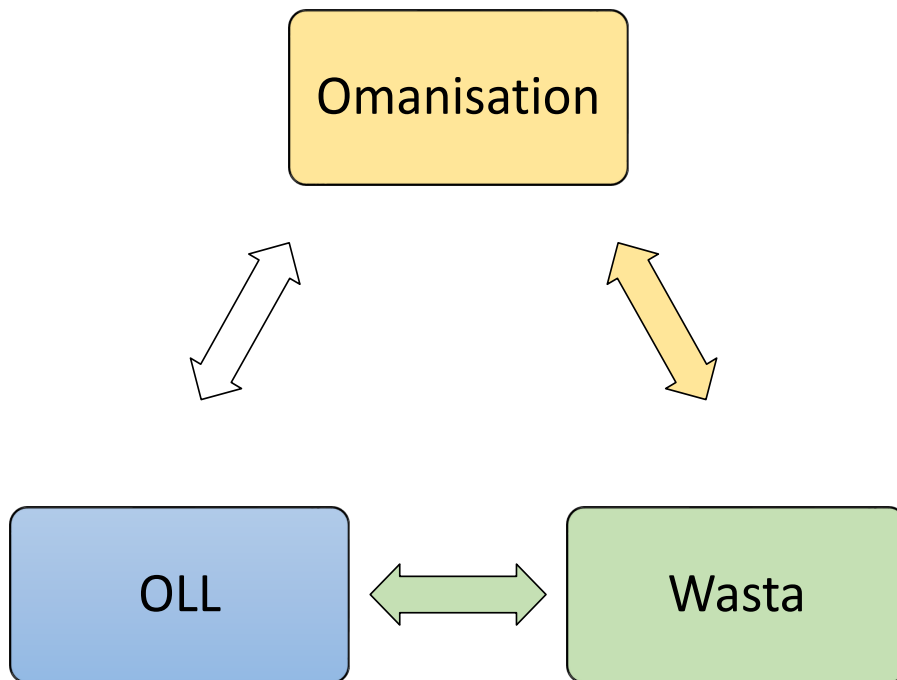
Source: Developed by the researcher

Narrative to Figure 4.3

An illustrated, mathematical simulation to explain the interdependence among the three OmanBank-only SE Barriers: Omanisation, Wasta, and Omani Labour Law (OWL)

☐ Omanisation mandates an Omani as leader of OmanBank. The best among the Omani candidates is (X). If hired, X would lack experience and key leadership skills in comparison to an expatriate leader (X+10) who is 10 times more competent and likely to increase the chances of successful SE (SSE) at OmanBank by the same multiple. So, the 'Cost of Omanisation (COO)' on SSE would be COO=(X+10)-(X)=10.

☐ Instead of an Omanisation-appointee (X), (X-10) is hired due to Wasta. The Wasta-appointee is 10 times more incompetent than the Omanisation-appointee (X) and over 20 times more incompetent than expatriate leader (X+10). Accordingly, the Cost of Wasta (COW) given Omanisation would be: COW=X-(X-10)=10; and the 'Composite Cost of Wasta (CCOW)' on SSE not under Omanisation – i.e., under an expatriate regime – would be CCOW=(X+10)-(X-10)=20.

☐ The Wasta Appointee (X-10) who has a secure job-for-life due to OLL, will use Wasta to hire several incompetent team members, who, once appointed are, too, guaranteed jobs-for life under OLL and will hire some other Wasta followers, and so on and so forth the multiplier goes.

☐ Envisage the shape of SSE at OmanBank under an a Wasta-appointee Omani leader (X-10) and her/his incompetent team holding responsibility for SF and SE. The outcome would be the likes of the infamous decentralisation strategy (see 4.4.1) that was meant to improve customer service, however, resulted in increased customer dissatisfaction, customer attrition, quality-staff attrition, and contributed to the loss of the bank's leading rank.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Organisational Leadership Barriers (OLB)

OLB emerged prominently as a theme from the OmanBank data due to the remarkable interest and density of participants' views on the role of leadership in successful SE. OLB has a single subtheme: 'The Leadership Factor', which unveiled four key findings relevant to the research question.

Key Findings of 'The Leadership Factor'

The first eye-opening observation while discussing the issue of leadership is that all interviewees demonstrated a remarkable 'leadership knowledge repository', which they said had been gained through experience and (past) formal training. Their 'leadership knowledge repository' was exposed specifically through an ability to describe the importance of leadership to strategic success and the effects of good/bad leadership on the same. Below is an example of the 'leadership knowledge repository' manifestation:

"Leadership is the most important thing for any business. Without good leadership, no business will succeed because see strategy is the 'bawsala' [Arabic for 'compass'] that directs the business, so without bawsala, you are like in the desert […] but without good leadership, who will put the bawsala? Or maybe they put the wrong bawsala, and the business goes in the wrong direction, like our OmanBank's bawsala [laughs loudly], which is kharbana [Arabic for 'faulty']." (Participant-5)

"Look, leadership basically guides you to get the best out of people. So, to me, it is simple, if you are not a good leader, you will never get the best out of people […] your strategy will fail." (Participant-7)

Participants not only stressed theoretically how critical organisational leadership is for strategic and business success but also shared examples of 'good leaders', describing what 'good leadership' output looked like in terms of strategic success (thus OmanBank's success overall), as revealed in the statements below:

"The best example to share is that of Mr. XYZ, an expat, he was an exceptional leader […]. During his time, OmanBank had a vision, a strategy, and core values; the bank used to be the top-performing bank in terms of profitability, all financial indicators, as well as other indicators." (Participant-3)

"During the period of Mr. XYZ, we were number one for maybe four or five years." (Participant-4)

When probed about what 'good leadership' is, participants' 'leadership knowledge repository' unveiled numerous critical leadership competencies, which the majority agreed with, for effective organisational leadership. These included envisioning, strategising, communicating, teamworking, motivating, listening, innovation, humility, and charisma. The following excerpt is indicative of this:

"Leadership is about someone who has a vision; you must have a vision, and it is also about strategic thinking, being a team-builder and motivator. [Pause] He is somebody who listens and encourages openness and creativity, and also importantly, he has charisma (yaani shakhsiya and hidden) [Arabic: meaning character and presence]." (Participant-3)

Benchmarking the above-cited critical leadership competencies, the interviewees singled out inappropriate organisational leadership at OmanBank over the last few years due to Omanisation. This sentiment is visible in the following remarks:

"Omani CEOs who arrived over the last decade, maybe four of them, have not been great leaders." (Participant-1)

"The problem is that all the last three CEOs, aah, all Omanis […] are not the right CEOs, and even lack the basics of leadership, aaah." (Participant-8)

4.4.3 Theme 3: Process Management Barriers (PMB)

With the research question in mind, the PMB theme emerged visibly from the data to describe the ability of OmanBank's organisational leadership in managing key business processes effectively, with two subthemes underneath the main theme: (A) strategy communication failure and (B) lack of employee motivation.

While findings will be highlighted under their respective subthemes, at the main theme level, the main finding is that this theme commanded the third highest total of interview-mentions (53) following the OCB (95) and OLB (71) themes. This finding indicates the importance of

Processes Management for OmanBank's SE success and reveals its absence as a significant barrier to successful SE.

(A) Strategy Communication Failure

The 'strategy communication failure' subtheme emerged from participants' insights describing the extent OmanBank's organisational leadership is effective in communicating the strategy as a critical measure of SE success. It revealed two important findings that are relevant to the research question.

Strategy Communication Failure Key Findings

As an individual subtheme, strategy communication failure was viewed by all eight interviewees in 27 interview-mentions as a significant barrier to successful SE (ranking fifth out of the 11 subthemes), stating that they lacked information about OmanBank's strategies. The importance of this finding mandated a focused literature review on strategy communication failure (see 2.3.4), and is reflected through the following excerpts:

"Look, I am not aware of the current strategy […] as a leader." (Participant-1)

"All that they give us is the plan for next year with the numbers […] not the full strategy." (Participant-3)

Participants directly attributed the strategy communication failure to weaknesses in OmanBank's organisational leadership, namely Omani CEOs, comparing the current era with the time past when communication effectiveness was evident during the expatriate CEOs' regimes. The below sentiments reveal this:

"It's a weakness I see of the management […] before the change in leadership, the strategy was communicated to all members of the staff." (Participant-1)

"I remember in the past years under Mr XYZ; they used to make strategy presentations to all staff in a hotel and share the details." (Participant-4)

(B) Lack of Employee Motivation

The subtheme 'lack of employee motivation' emerged as an important SE barrier with 26 interview-mentions by seven participants, ranking sixth out of the 11 subthemes in terms of its negative impact on the bank's strategic success, thus mandating a further focused literature review on the topic (see 2.3.4). Lack of employee motivation revealed three key findings.

Lack of employee motivation Key Findings

Majority of the participants conceded that lack of employee motivation has been commonplace at OmanBank over the last decade and that, in the context of strategy, it does constitute a hindrance to successful SE at OmanBank. This widespread lack of employee motivation has been ascribed to 'improper leadership' (which proved to be a popular topic among participants), as in this comment:

"The morale of the staff isn't stable. Emotionally they are all unstable, […]. I really get demotivated because I don't have a proper leadership that knows how to deal with emerging leaders and to really appreciate their value." (Participant-1)

Prompted to explain 'improper leadership', interviewees offered specific examples of actions and behaviours of OmanBank's current organisational leadership, whom they believe to be responsible for the lack of employee motivation, including empty promises, not listening, lack of training, and lack of engagement in decision-making, as seen in the following statements:

"If they keep on promising and over-promising, and then at the end of the day, I deliver and deliver and don't get what I'm promised, then your motivation levels sooner or later will drop." (Participant-2)

"We lost everything, really everything, no training, no motivation, not participating in key decisions." (Participant-8)

When asked to define the specific impact of lack of employee motivation on OmanBank's strategy, participants described the adverse consequences on strategy and the bank's success overall in terms of good staff leaving, customer attrition, declining profitability, and loss of its top-ranking position in the Omani banking sector. The following sentiments summarise the situation over the last few years:

"I think whatever happens, it will not be worse than the current situation, actually the last few years." (Participant-7)

"[OmanBank] is losing on everything, customers, staff, profit, rating." (Participant-8)

4.4.4 Theme 4: Strategy Formulation Barriers (SFB)

The SFB theme represents another SE-barrier domain at OmanBank. Participants widely believed that the bank is devising strategies; however, such strategies are dysfunctional in many respects. The key findings are described under two subthemes: (A) lack of involvement of managers and lower-level staff in the strategy formulation process, and (B) inappropriate strategy (IS), i.e., strategies that are unclear, unrealistic, or conflicting.

(A) Lack of Staff Involvement in Strategy Formulation

The lack of involvement subtheme measures the extent of lower-level managers' and employees' engagement at OmanBank, primarily in the strategy formulation process. It emerged as one of the important subthemes with (26) interview-mentions and endorsements by all participants, commanding sixth place within the 11 subthemes in terms of the total negative impact on the bank's SE success. lack of involvement offered several key findings relevant to the research question.

Lack of involvement Key findings

The consensus among participants was that over the last few years, strategy formulation had become the sole domain of OmanBank's top-tier seniority, the CEOs and General Managers (GMs), with other staff side-lined, including the interviewees of this study who represent the second-tier of seniority at the bank. The following answers to the question: 'Who participates in the bank's strategy-making?' revealed the following insights:

"Only GM's and the CEO [participate in strategy formulation]." (Participant-2)

"Mr. Hussein, I have been in [OmanBank] for 13 years, of which five years as AGM. I have never been invited to participate in the bank's business plan or strategy, not even to watch it [laughs loudly]." (Participant-8)

Participants' comments went beyond criticism of OmanBank's organisational leadership for lack of involvement, rather demonstrating the value of involving relevant stakeholders in terms of strategic success, as observable in the following comment:

"The people down there who are facing the challenges and facing the reality on the ground, they should be part of developing, assessing, and setting up the strategy." (Participant-3)

Finally, participants pointed out how lack of involvement had not been an issue in the past when the bank's expatriate organisational leadership engaged all staff in strategy formulation, as described in the following excerpt:

"Earlier, I used to know everything. The level of engagement we used to have, was totally different to now. This is bad, and a shame on our management." (Participant-1)

(B) Inappropriate Strategy (Unrealistic, Unclear, Confusing, Conflicting) (IS)

The emergence of the 'IS' subtheme showed the extent to which the current organisational leadership at OmanBank is failing to formulate and communicate realistic and clear strategies successfully. This is another observable subtheme under the strategy formulation theme that commanded 24 interview-mentions by seven interviewees, ranking seven out of the 11 subthemes. The 'IS' subtheme yielded a few findings relevant to the research question.

Inappropriate Strategy Key Findings

Participants agreed that in recent years the bank's strategies have generally been unclear, confusing, and conflicting, as revealed through the following comments:

"No clear strategy [pause], actually too many conflicting strategies over the past few years." (Participant-8)

"Every time we start a new strategy, someone comes and changes it in the middle, so we are really confused." (Participant-5)

Interviewees also pointed out that not only are OmanBank's strategies unclear, confusing, and conflicting, but that they are also rather unrealistic and do not reflect market realities, as the excerpt below reflects:

"Initially, the strategy unit thought it would take around six months to achieve the result. However, I realised it takes years to produce the results." (Participant-3)

Participants also evidenced SE failure, which they attributed to an inappropriate strategy designed by OmanBank's OWL-leadership, such as the 'decentralisation' and 'loan processing' strategies. This is seen in the following remark:

"We used to promise people loan-processing in seven days and do it in three weeks, while the market is doing it in seven days [...]. What we planned is not what we executed in the field [...] the strategy is not realistic." (Participant-3)

Finally, alongside other factors, participants put 'IS' down to the high turnover of incompetent Omani CEOs:

"The problem is that each new Omani CEO comes with a different strategy, and he does not want to look in the past." (Participant-6)

4.4.5 Theme 5: Change Management Barriers (CMB)

CMB emerged from the OmanBank data with one subtheme: 'Lack of structured change management programme'. This subtheme describes the extent to which organisational leadership at OmanBank can set up a robust change management programme that not only responds to external and internal change but also proactively predicts change by launching pre-emptive measures to lessen the impact of change and convert it into business opportunities. A few key findings relevant to the research question were captured.

CMB Key Findings

The main finding under CMB is that it attracted 35 interview-mentions by seven interviewees; however, it ranked fifth (11%) out of the six main themes in terms of its total negative impact on SE, indicating a moderate impact. Participants offered evidence through various examples of how the 'Lack of structured change management programme' had manifested in a range of the bank's strategies, such as managing the business under Covid-19 (an externally mandated change) and the decision to decentralise the bank's operating model (an internally initiated change).

In response to the critical question about whether the bank's strategy is continuously revisited in response to change, participants agreed that it is never revisited, regardless, as seen in the following statement:

"It is given at the beginning of the year, that is it." (Participant-3)

For example, in response to a further probe about whether their business targets and numbers were revisited due to the outbreak of COVID-19 as an 'externally mandated change', participants agreed unanimously that business targets had remained unchanged, as seen in the statement below:

"Noooo [...], in fact, if they find a way, they will increase the figures [...] these guys don't know Covid." (Participant-4)

Another example reflecting OmanBank's organisational leadership's inability to manage change initiated internally came in response to a request for participants to share a recent example of strategy failure. Most participants provided an example of a recent 'decentralisation strategy', agreeing that it was a total failure, not least because the change had been rushed out. This statement exemplifies the general view:

"From the implementation view, the main reason for failure is that the change was rushed out, and they didn't give us sufficient time to implement it properly." (Participant-6)

Finally, evidence of the 'Lack of structured change management programme' relating to SE failure – where most of the bank's business units failed to achieve their business targets during the Covid-19 year – is demonstrated in the following statements:

"This year [2020] only myself, I mean [Division-A] and [Division-B], we met the business targets, all other divisions like corporate are below target." (Participant-4)

4.4.6 Theme 6: Resources Availability Barriers (RAB)

The RAB theme emerged from the data to highlight the extent to which OmanBank's organisational leadership has managed to avail itself of and deploy resources to meet the demands of the formulated strategy. This theme had one notable finding. Among the six main

themes, RAB commanded the lowest number of interview-mentions (20) by five of the eight interviewees, split under the two subthemes: 'Lack of human resources' and 'lack of technology'. Given these subthemes' low scores, which barely met the 'key findings criteria' (see 4.3.1), the name of the main theme (RAB) was retained for the sake of analysis.

RAB Key Findings

While RAB did not rank highly as a critical SE barrier, it nonetheless met the 'key findings criteria', presenting as a barrier – although mild – to SE in the two areas of HR and IT, where availability of recourses seemed to be lacking, as illustrated by following excerpts:

"My support team is working 24/7. That's why we asked for additional staff because we are short of staff." (Participant-8)

"This system […] reached its full capacity and became very slow […]. I continued to follow up for the past four years with the GM to change the system with no success." (Participant-8)

4.5 Discussion of the Key Findings

Having presented the key findings from OmanBank data, this section aims at stressing the importance and discussing the meaningfulness and relevance of such findings in answering the research question: 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?'. To achieve the said aim, with the research question in mind, the key data findings shall be seen within the overall milieu of the literature findings, theory, and professional practice (Braun et al., 2019; Lester et al., 2020). As was the case of the presentation of findings, the discussion of findings shall adopt the same order, beginning from the most important theme to the least important theme in answering the research question. By adopting this order, it is hoped that the meaningfulness, importance, and relevance of the findings will forcefully be driven home for the reader.

4.5.1 Theme-1: OmanBank Contextual Barriers (OCB)

Omanisation Discussion

These findings under Omanisation help in many respects to answer the research question that seeks to understand the barriers to successful SE at OmanBank.

Firstly, participants agreed that "Omanisation is a good strategy, bad implementation" (Participant-1), thus presenting itself as a 'model' SE failure. This finding corroborates with the literature, where it is found that despite nearly three decades of Omanisation, the policy has failed considerably (Al-Nahdi, 2016; Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer, 2019). This view is upheld by a recent 2020 study in Oman which found that "Omani citizens hold only 12.5% of jobs in the private sector" (Ennis, 2020: 759).

Secondly, in terms of why Omanisation is a failure, interviewees collectively opined that Omanisation is failing because it was rushed, unaccompanied by proper training, and that the focus was more on quantity than quality. This finding largely agrees with the literature that puts Omanisation's failure down to three main factors: (i) the country's HRM system (Al-Nahdi, 2016), be it in education (Ismail and Al Shanfari, 2014) or talent management (Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer, 2019); (ii) Oman governments' consistent use of punitive logic, dictating quantitative quotas and bans and imposing fines (ibid.); and (iii) the prevalence of the 'hidden' barrier of 'Wasta' in recruitment and promotions, further exacerbating the negative impact of a weak education system and the punitive measures (Common, 2011; Sidani and Thornberry, 2013).

Thirdly, crucially, the poorly implemented Omanisation strategy has seriously impacted OmanBank over recent years, having had a devastating impact in terms of failed strategies due to appointing unqualified Omani CEOs lacking essential leadership skills (De Souza, 2017; Ferraro, Argüelles and Maoret, 2017). This was evidenced by participants in three different ways:

1. Verbally such as: "the problem is that all the last three Omani CEOs are not the right CEOs, and they lack even the basics of leadership." (Participant-8)

2. Through examples of failed strategies such as the 'decentralisation' and 'loan processing' strategies.

3. By comparing Omani CEOs and expatriate CEOs, interviewees suggested that lack of skills (MacLennan, 2014), namely leadership skills (De Souza, 2017; Ferraro, Argüelles and Maoret, 2017) and quality education, made a huge difference in favour of the latter.

Fourthly, the ineffectiveness of Omanisation-mandated leaders and their negative impact on SE (Bossidy and Charan, 2012; Paten, 2015; Gandolfi and Stone, 2016) infers two essential acumens. First, it re-emphasises the key derivation of organisational leadership (see 2.3.2) as

the overarching factor impacting and shaping every other SE barrier, as repeatedly stressed throughout this thesis. The literature supports this, wherein Beer (2020), for example, argues that top-team ineffectiveness was reported as the reason for failed strategies in almost all the organisations he and his team studied. Second, it infers that by strongly impacting the dominant factor (leadership) via the appointment of unqualified leaders, Omanisation takes precedence as the dominant factor, and thus contextually frames and shapes every other SE barrier, such as lack of communication, lack of motivation, and lack of engagement. Under Omanisation-appointed leadership, therefore, the other SE barriers mentioned tend to take on a different tempo, as will be explained under the respective themes, a matter that validates the claim in the literature that different contexts reveal different forms of leadership (Reiche et al., 2016; Coulson-Thomas, 2021b). Alves, Martins, and Trez (2017: 298), who studied SE in BRICS countries, for instance, concluded that "context has an influence on the implementation of organisational strategies". Ultimately, this means a case of novel contextual SE barriers working interdependently (Cândido and Santos, 2019), thus producing a greater negative 'cumulative impact' than the impact of individual barriers.

Wasta Discussion

The above findings concerning Wasta offer significant insights that contribute to answering the key research question: 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?'.

Firstly, the overwhelming endorsement of all participants through 29 interview-mentions, ranking second across the dataset, implies that Wasta, much like Omanisation, is a major hindrance to SE success at OmanBank. Numerous participant expressions provided insight into Wasta's severe impact, like Participant-3's: "Wasta is another killer of strategy", which is something mainly seen in the unmerited appointments of unqualified contacts in key decision-making positions, which ultimately results in wrong decisions, hence the wrong strategies, and hence the wrong execution. The unmerited appointments are seen in comments like Participant-1's: "Here in OmanBank, we see Wasta when senior people hire relatives, friends, or (aah), like people from the same tribe." Notably, the synthesis of the extant literature did not uncover another case where Wasta's impact on SE success was the focus. Since no similar studies were detected in the literature review, Wasta's profound negative impact on successful SE at OmanBank represents one of this study's original contributions to academic and professional knowledge.

Secondly, in terms of the finding that Wasta is a nationwide phenomenon in Oman, the findings confirm the contention in the literature that while Wasta is very common in the Arab-Middle East (Ali and Weir, 2020), it is "rife throughout Omani society and Omanis are very keen to use it to gain employment opportunities" (Al-Nahdi, 2016: 234). Moreover, in terms of participants' assertions that Wasta has become part of Omani culture, the literature supports this, arguing that Wasta's prevalence is remarkably visible in Oman and the larger Arab-Middle East as a source of significant cultural influence on every strategic business, economic, and social decision (Ali, 2016; Lee Park and Paiva, 2018; Bachkirov, 2019; Ali and Weir, 2020). More starkly, the literature indicates that in societies with a strong sense of tribalism, individuals who do not provide Wasta are viewed as disgracing themselves, their tribe, family, and friends (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993). The data from OmanBank validates this, as in Participant-1's: "You know that Oman is tribal." Al-Hamadi, Budhwar, and Shipton (2007) confirm this, stating that tribe and family are the second most influential factors of HRM in Oman after Islam, even though Islam forbids tribal prejudices (Sidani and Thornberry, 2013). These shreds of evidence suggest that Wasta in Oman has shifted from a state of cultural embeddedness to an emboldened and legitimised phenomenon, and likewise, this would explain its severe impact on SE success and the difficulty of isolating, let alone eradicating it.

Thirdly, the data revealed an exciting anomaly concerning participants' agreement that, while Wasta is rife and part of the Omani culture, Omanis are ashamed of its presence. This is seen in Participant-1's statement: "We call it the big 'W' [laughs] because people are ashamed to say the full name." In fact, Oman is a theocracy in which Islam instructs Muslims: "the best that you can hire is one who is competent and trustworthy" (Quran: 28: 26).

This apparent behavioural incongruity agrees with the literature's contention that "despite their negative belief towards Wasta and nepotism, Omanis are very keen to use it" (Al-Nahdi, 2016: 234), and might also be largely interpreted by Leon Festinger's Theory of cognitive dissonance (1957), explaining how people behave in ways contrary to their beliefs if the reward for doing so is significant (Harmon-Jones and Mills, 1999). For an Omani, therefore, gaining an undeserved job in a labour market with high unemployment (15% in 2015) (Al-Nahdi, 2016: 17) may be considered a high reward. This evidence, once again, makes it hard to isolate the severe negative impact of Wasta on SE success, as put forward powerfully by Participant-1: "Wasta is cancerous."

Finally, the finding on the relationship between Omanisation and Wasta, that "Omanisation is a form of Wasta for Omanis" (Participant-6), and that "It has the same impact as Omanisation" (Participant-2), signal two implications. First, from an Omani-Omani perspective, Wasta disqualifies the competent in favour of the incompetent, hence undermining Omanisation. In agreement, the literature indicates that Wasta represents a hindrance to Omanisation by disallowing competent Omanis to take up positions (Al-Nahdi, 2016). Second, it was indicated under the 'Omanisation subtheme' that, through its substantial impact on leadership as the dominant factor that affects all other SE barriers (Bossidy and Charan, 2012; Paten, 2015; Gandolfi and Stone, 2016; Cândido and Santos, 2019; Beer, 2020; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020), Omanisation takes precedence in reshaping all the SE barriers. Furthermore, since Wasta undermines Omanisation, this suggests that Wasta takes the front seat in terms of the domino effect on SE, by framing and reshaping every other SE barrier inclusive of Omanisation. This conclusion, once more, invites the notion of the intertwinement of SE barriers and their severe negative cumulative impact on SE, causing greater damage than any damage individual barriers might cause. However, what makes the case of OmanBank novel is a negative reinforcement between two contextually distinct 'OmanBank-only' SE barriers.

Oman Labour Law Discussion

The findings from the Oman Labour Law subtheme offer interesting acumens that help answer the research question that guides this study: 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?'.

Firstly, the belief among interviewees that Omani Labour Law is obstructive to OmanBank's SE success, predominantly by prohibiting removal of underperforming employees, mainly Omanisation/Wasta appointees, came out strongly in 27 interview-mentions and endorsement by seven of the eight participants, ranking third after Omanisation and Wasta across the entire dataset. This finding did not have an equivalent within the literature, which generally describes a Western context (North America and Europe) (O'Toole, 2000; Saetren, 2005; Maas 2016), and does not indicate that the labour laws of the Western countries stood as a barrier to SE success. Participant-8's statement indirectly confirms this evidence: "I have seen in most countries of the world that if someone is underperforming, he is fired. Here you can have dozens of underperforming […], but you cannot release them." The aforesaid suggests

that Omani Labour Law is a novel SE barrier at OmanBank, and, therefore, added to Omanisation and Wasta, represents the third original contribution of this study to academic and professional knowledge.

Secondly, the finding that Omani Labour Law and Omanisation are related and that "both are failure strategies" according to Participant-1 and others, offers yet more interesting insight of three OmanBank-only SE barriers working in alliance, whereby Omanisation and Wasta provide undue job privileges that are secured by undue job-protection through Omani Labour Law. This setting presents a new SE challenge to OmanBank, representing a novelty among the SE barriers.

Finally, the recommendations to revise Omani Labour Law and Omanisation indicate that participants are well-informed of the negative ramifications of Omani Labour Law on the bank's strategy and are aware of the need to improve SE. Regarding this, the interviewees – all of whom are Omani nationals – candidly based their opinions on cancelling Omani Labour Law on the premise that Omanis should rid themselves of their false sense of job security and improve their skills by competing in an open, fair job market. Participant-2's comment: "Why can't you allow them to compete in a free market so as to improve?" chimes with Al-Nahdi's (2016: 278) contention in the literature that "the current labour law [in Oman] is no longer in-tune with the global competitive labour market [...] therefore, amendment of current labour law becomes essential".

An important conclusion to close the discussion on the OmanBank Contextual Barrier theme (OCB) is that the three major and novel SE barriers at OmanBank: Omanisation (government-mandated policy), Wasta (a cultural phenomenon), and Omani Labour Law (a government-enacted labour law), abbreviated (OWL), have two interrelated features:

(a) They work to reframe and reshape all other SE barriers through their impact on leadership as the dominant factor impacting SE (Cândido and Santos, 2019; Beer, 2020; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020).

(b) They are interdependent between themselves. While SE barriers are generally found to interact (Ranjbar, Shirazi, and Blooki, 2014), OWL seem to overlap in a fashion that creates a magnified self-reinforcing chain of SE blockages at OmanBank (Cândido and Santos, 2019). This setting generates a novel contextual leadership and SE barrier

challenge and an exclusive strategic challenge for OmanBank, whose policymakers should work at fixing the barrier without delay to achieve success. The novelty of this contextual leadership setting is seen in Hauc and Kovac's (2000) contention that managers in developing countries have distinct contextual problems that require new approaches to SE. The interdependence among OWL is illustrated in Figure 4.3 followed by a hypothetical narrative.

4.5.2 Theme-2: Organisational Leadership Barrier (OLB)

'The Leadership Factor' Discussion

The findings under the 'The Leadership Factor' theme provided four highly relevant insights toward answering the research question guiding this study:

Firstly, OLB was a prominent theme unanimously endorsed by all interviewees and received the second-highest number of interview-mentions (71) after the OmanBank Contextual Barrier theme (95). As per 'the key findings criteria' (see 4.3.1), this finding suggests that organisational leadership at OmanBank represents a major SE barrier. The literature validates this (Bossidy and Charan, 2012; Paten, 2015; Gandolfi and Stone, 2016; Cândido and Santos, 2019; Beer, 2020; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020) where it is argued that "most of the obstacles to successful strategy implementation are organisational factors that fall under management control" (Cândido and Santos 2019: 45). Hiršsons and Ludviga (2020) second this, maintaining that organisational leadership is a major influencing factor of SE, since leaders can transform organisations.

Secondly, the agreement between the OmanBank data and the literature on the criticality of organisational leadership reaffirms its precedence and control over all the other barriers impacting SE (see 5.4.2), namely strategy formulation, change management, communication, employee motivation, engagement, and training (Cândido and Santos 2019; Beer, 2020; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020) and thus may turn them either into barriers or boosters.

Thirdly, and most importantly, despite its established dominance over other barriers, organisational leadership at OmanBank – as explained under the OCB theme – is significantly reframed and reshaped by OmanBank's novel SE barrier-triangle: Omanisation, Wasta, and Omani Labour Law (OWL). This setting means OWL takes antecedence, inflicting the greatest influence over the rest of the SE barriers by compounding the negative impact on organisational leadership (see Figure 4.3), thus hampering the chances of SE success. Additionally, this

provides insight into the inter-thematic overlaps among the SE barriers that include organisational leadership, Omanisation, strategy formulation, and SE, reaffirming the earlier deduction that the barriers do not necessarily independently sabotage SE, rather they do so collectively, which is likely to exacerbate the severity of the individual barriers. The literature supports this notion of barrier interdependence (Ranjbar, Shirazi, and Blooki, 2014), stating that a barrier may "lead to and reinforce other barriers, eventually forming long chains of blockages" (Cândido and Santos, 2019: 39) – i.e., barriers "may simply accumulate, interact with each other, as well as be linked in cause-and-effect chains" (ibid.: 47). Furthermore, the barrier interdependence is clearly illustrated in the conceptual framework of this study (Figure 2.1), which emerged inductively from the literature review.

The above has led to the contention that the themes do not tell the entire story individually (Lester et al., 2020), nor do they merely emerge fully-formed from the dataset (Braun et al., 2019; Kiger and Varpio, 2020), and that it is the role of the investigator to uncover how themes (inter)relate (Lester et al., 2020).

Finally, the data unveiled the interesting anomaly that, while the evidence suggested that 'The Leadership Factor' represents a stern SE barrier at OmanBank, interviewees who represent the second tier of seniority at OmanBank demonstrated a high standard of 'leadership knowledge repository'. This prompted the interview question: 'Why did OmanBank's organisational leadership not deploy this evident 'leadership knowledge repository' to improve SE success?' To this, participants responded by saying that over the last decade, organisational leadership at OmanBank – all of whom happened to be Omanisation-appointed CEOs – ignored their skills and did not involve them in the strategic management process, because they brought in their Wasta-related people. The statement from Participant-1 puts this widely-held perception among the interviewees into perspective: "Look, I have not been involved in this kind of strategy process for a long time […], so I do not know what is happening"; a view

upheld by the comment of Participant-6: "To be honest, many people enter the bank through Wasta." Therefore, the implication is that the valuable 'leadership knowledge repository' remained dormant, whereas had organisational leadership at OmanBank deployed it appropriately; it may have improved SE success at the bank.

4.5.3 Theme 3: Process Management Barriers (PMB)

Strategy Communication Failure Discussion

The 'strategy communication failure' subtheme findings reveal three essential insights that help to answer the research question – 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?' – that guides this study.

Firstly, the data brought to the fore the criticality of strategic communication to achieve successful SE at OmanBank, prompting a further literature review on the topic that revalidated the strategy communication failure data findings. Strategy communication failure is often cited as having a profound negative impact on the success of SE (EPL, 2020; Loch, Kavadias, and Yang, 2021; Wiles, 2021). Pereira, Durão, and Santos (2019: 4), for example, argue that "there are several proven barriers to strategic implementation, with communication being more identified by people as the one that causes the most trouble to this process within a company".

Secondly, the above congruence between the data and the literature on the vitality of effective strategic communication to successful SE suggests that strategy communication failure overlaps with, rather sits at the crossroads of all the other identified SE barriers and, thus, magnifies the negative compounded effect on SE. To emphasise the centrality of strategic communication, Pereira, Durão, and Santos (2019: 1) state: "in the organisational arena, business and communication are two inseparable issues [and therefore] effective communication should be at the hub of organisational constituents and must occur at each level of the firm".

Finally, and most importantly, the comparison of effective communication between Omani and expatriate CEOs clearly points to the failure of Omanisation-appointed CEOs to communicate strategy effectively, turning it into a strategy execution impediment. That infers the negative shadow of Omanisation, Wasta, and Omani Labour Law (OWL) on OmanBank's organisational leadership and re-emphasises the conclusions drawn earlier about how OWL reframes and reshapes the leadership model at OmanBank, producing a contextually-novel negative impact on SE that cascades across every other SE barrier.

Lack of employee motivation Discussion

The findings cited under 'lack of employee motivation', progress in answering the study's research question through the following inferences.

Firstly, given its importance as an emergent data finding hindering the success of SE at OmanBank, lack of employee motivation mandated a focused literature review (see 2.3.4), which revalidated the former indicating that motivation in organisations is vital to achieving organisational strategic objectives (Badubi, 2017). According to Loch, Kavadias, and Yang

(2021: 29), for instance, a key to successful SE is "giving everyone a voice – which motivates people emotionally to contribute rather than resist". This view is supported by Hiršsons and Ludviga (2020: 100), who contend that employee motivation "has a positive impact on strategy realisation". Conversely, the consequences of lack of employee motivation, such as depression, staff turnover, and burnout, are seen as catastrophic to organisational success (Badubi, 2017), representing a barrier to successful SE (Ranjbar, Shirazi, and Blooki, 2014; Lynch, 2018; Olivier and Schwella, 2018).

Secondly, philosophically, the 'lack of employee motivation' findings can be interpreted using Herzberg's Two-factor motivation theory (Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman, 2011), which is regarded as one of the most commonly used theories in the management literature (Chelladurai, 2006; Fitzgerald and Schutte, 2010). The theory stresses the importance of employee motivation, stating that two clusters of factors – 'motivator factors' and 'hygiene factors' – decide it. The former concerns the 'content' of the work, like responsibility, achievement, and recognition, while the latter concerns the 'context' of the work, like working conditions, human capital policies, and pay. It is apparent from the interviewees' statements that OmanBank's employees are denied both: the 'motivator factors' as perceived in Participant-8's comment, "not participating in key decisions"; and 'hygiene factors' as seen in Participant-7's remark, "when I deliver and deliver and do not get what I am promised".

Finally, and most importantly, agreement between the theory, OmanBank data findings, and the literature reaffirms lack of employee motivation as an established impediment to successful SE primarily attributed to 'improper leadership', as seen in Participant-1's: "I get really demotivated because I do not have proper leadership." This feedback echoes the earlier, similar, comment under strategy communication failure: "It is a weakness I see of the management" (Participant-3), leading to the same conclusion: that 'improper leadership' mandated by Omanisation, which in turn is undermined by Wasta, and both are undeservedly legitimised by Omani Labour Law. This again highlights the recurring emphasis on the role of the contextual OWL-leadership having a domino effect on every SE barrier at OmanBank (Bossidy and Charan, 2012; Paten, 2015; Gandolfi and Stone, 2016; Cândido and Santos, 2019; Beer, 2020; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020).

4.5.4 Theme 4: Strategy Formulation Barriers (SFB)

Lack of involvement Discussion

The 'lack of involvement' findings offered meaningful deductions that help to answer the research question that steers this study – 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?'.

Firstly, OmanBank's organisational leadership failure to engage lower-level managers and staff in strategy formulation, as expressed in comments such as Participant-1's: "Look, I am not involved in this kind of strategy process for quite long", suggests that lack of involvement represents a SE barrier at OmanBank. This finding agrees with the literature, where it has been argued that lack of involvement of lower-level managerial staff in strategy formulation breeds adverse behavioural issues, including lack of commitment, motivation and initiative, and resistance to change, all of which are seen as barriers to successful SE (Lynch, 2018; Cândido and Santos, 2019; Wasilewski, 2020; Brown, 2021).

Secondly, it is surprising that the lack of involvement in strategy formulation included even the second-tier senior-management hierarchy, which echoes Beer's (2020: 1) criticism of lack of involvement that "strategy is often developed by the leader along with the chief strategy or marketing executive and only then communicated to the rest". Evidence from OmanBank, therefore, suggests that its OWL-leadership operates contrary to the best advice in the literature, which recommends that "if formulated strategies are to be successfully realised, it should not be an exclusive preserve of senior managers" (Obembe, Al Mansour, and Kolade, 2021: 1955), again hinting at lack of involvement being a serious barrier to successful SE at the bank.

Thirdly, through their description of the present and the past, participants offered two interesting acumens: (i) they demonstrated knowledge of the value of involving all relevant staff levels to improve SE success, as seen in Participant-2's comment: "Even junior staff who are touching base with customers on daily bases need to give their input in the strategy." And (ii) looking back, they shared examples from the past under the expat CEO leadership when involvement was high, as seen in Participant-1's: "Earlier, I used to know everything." These threads indicate participants' awareness of the damage lack of involvement can inflict on SE success; equally they reveal their frustration: were they involved in strategy formulation, they could have helped to improve the quality of strategy formulation, which would eventually reflect in more successful SE, because strategy formulation is an essential pre-requisite of successful SE as pointed out by Montgomery (2012) and Stadler et al. (2022).

Finally, participants made comparisons time and again between the unfavourable present under the OWL-leadership and the more favourable past under expatriate leadership, underlining and re-emphasising the recurrent conclusion of the novel contextual compounding impact of OWL-leadership on the success of SE at OmanBank.

Inappropriate Strategy Discussion

The aforementioned findings shed yet more light on answering the research question of this study through two insights:

Firstly, the endorsement of seven interviewees in 24 interview-mentions suggests that inappropriate strategy represents a visible SE barrier at OmanBank. Comments about unclear, confusing, unrealistic, and conflicting strategies, including specific examples of SE failures directly emanating from IS (e.g., the 'loan processing strategy'), support this finding. The literature upholds the data findings, with Cândido and Santos's (2019: 67) opinion: "if the scenario assumptions on which strategy formulation are based are flawed, that would constitute a SE barrier". This view is further endorsed by evidence from the 2020 Gartner Execution Gap Survey, which revealed that up to 83% of strategies fail due to faulty assumptions (Wiles, 2021).

Secondly, attaching 'IS' formulation to Omani CEOs in comments such as Participant-6's: "each new Omani CEO comes with a different strategy, and he does not want to look in the past", places the responsibility for the failure of strategy formulation, thus the failure of SE on OWL-leadership and highlights the interdependence of SE barriers, more particularly OmanBank's OWL-barrier triangle and the resultant negative impact on SE.

4.5.5 Theme 5: Change Management Barriers (CMB)

CMB Discussion

The findings for CMB reveal insights that help to answer the research question that seeks to understand the barriers to successful SE at OmanBank:

Firstly, the 'Lack of a structured change management programme' hindered SE at OmanBank. This was evidenced through the numerous examples of failure to manage change, as in Participant-6's "From the implementation view, the main reason for failure is that the change was rushed out, and they didn't give us sufficient time to implement it properly." And as to the resultant failed strategies, Participant-4's comment is revealing: "This year [2020], only

myself, I mean [Division-A] and [Division-B], we met the business targets, all other divisions like corporate are below target." This finding agrees with those in the literature, that

SE is about driving rapid and effective change (Chase, 2019); thus, failure to manage change is a failure to manage SE (Miller, 1998; Alamsjah, 2011; Pindelski and Mrowka, 2011). While the inextricable connection between change management and SE is acknowledged by authors including Miller (1998), Brazukas (2018: 1) goes further, contending: "strategy execution is change management disguise".

Secondly, the agreement between the OmanBank data and the literature provides one overarching conclusion that is highly relevant to the research question: over the last few years under OWL-leadership, OmanBank has been facing great difficulty in change management, be that externally or internally, thus leading to failure of SE. This deduction, once again, reinforces the recurring conclusion about the negative impact of OWL in the exclusive contextually-novel leadership setting (Alves, Martins, and Trez, 2017; Coulson-Thomas, 2021a) of OmanBank, and which has been reframing and reshaping every other factor influencing SE (Bossidy and Charan, 2012; Paten, 2015; Gandolfi and Stone, 2016; Cândido and Santos, 2019; Beer, 2020; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020), namely strategy formulation, change management, process management, and resources management (Al-Alawi, A. et al., 2019).

4.5.6 Theme 6: Resource Availability Barriers (RAB)

RAB Discussion

The findings under RAB (barely qualifying for a theme with only 20 interview-mentions by five participants) suggest that the unavailability of resources, while factoring as a SE barrier, does not seem to be of high severity, according to the interviewees. This finding is contrary to the findings in the literature, where a recent citation states that despite resource availability being demonstrably critical to SE success, many organisations fail to allocate resources for SE (Wiles, 2021) or align resources and SE requirements (Eresia-Eke and Soriakumar, 2021: 57). Hence, it could be inferred that, despite the apparently reasonable abundance of resources at OmanBank, which otherwise represent a serious SE barrier for organisations in general (Wiles, 2021) and those in the Middle East in particular (Obeidat et al., 2017: 389), the OWL-leadership has nonetheless continued to fail in SE through failures in other areas, namely strategy formulation, change management, and operational management factors.

4.6 Chapter Summary

To summarise, Chapter 4 took charge of the vital undertaking of data analysis aiming to capture, understand, synthesise, categorise, analyse, present, and discuss the key findings from the narratives of the senior OmanBank managers in service of the research question: 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank'. To achieve this, the chapter began by offering a description of the empirical work that was aimed at providing the reader with a visual rendition of the fieldwork. Chapter 4 then dived into the real work of data analysis by first introducing and describing the main themes and subthemes that have emerged from the thematic analysis process, followed by presenting and concurrently discussing the key findings of the data analysis under each theme in relation to the aforesaid research question. This has set the grounds clear for the next concluding Chapter 5, which will mainly summarise such findings, present the original contribution of the study, and describe how the research question was answered under the given limitations.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter wraps up the inquiry of the thesis. It sets out by reintroducing the research problem and the research question that arose to investigate it. Next, it describes the research approach and method used to examine the problem, followed by a summary of the key findings relevant to the research question. It then delineates how the findings have answered the research question and the value and contribution thereof. The chapter concludes by highlighting the limitations of the research and proposes how future research might pursue related avenues to enrich and build upon this study's findings.

5.2 The Research Problem, Question, and Aim

The principal research question that has guided this study is: 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?' – a bank domiciled in Oman, which is a developing country located in the Arabian Peninsula. This research question was intrinsically triggered by a 'practitioner's observation in the field'; the researcher having been a long-serving management practitioner in several large organisations operating in three countries of the Arabian Peninsula. During this time, he had observed that these organisations persistently invested sizable sums of money in building strategic plans, aiming to monetise such strategies to attain the main goal of the strategic management process: 'sustained competitive advantage and financial success'. However, invariably, such strategies suffered failures in strategy execution (SE); thus, the investments seldom paid off, and the aspirations toward success were far from reach. With OmanBank being the last of these organisations for which the researcher worked, the questions of failures in SE had continued to echo in his mind: What return on investment (ROI) does OmanBank expect, and what are the barriers, if any, to attaining ROI from an SE standpoint?

5.3 How Was the Research Question Validated and Approached?

A thorough literature review was undertaken in the quest to answer the research question. The literature confirmed the practitioner's observations that organisations worldwide (particularly in the West, where about 90% of the extant SE research located had taken place) fail massively

in SE, with numerous scholars quoting failure rates in SE at around 90%. Paradoxically, despite ample evidence to support the vital role SE plays in organisational success, the literature confirmed how the area has been significantly under-researched and that what has been written is incohesive, fragmented, and has no agreed conceptual model. Thus, evidence of a research gap was unveiled. Moreover, the literature review revealed four key domains of SE barriers: organisational leadership, strategy formulation, change management, and operational management. These barriers, having emerged inductively, then went towards building the conceptual framework for this study, with the relationship between these barriers visualised and textually described in Figure 2.1.

Following the literature review, the research philosophy in terms of an idealist ontology and an integrated epistemology paved the way for deploying the interpretive methodology to capture the lived experiences of eight senior OmanBank managers through a semi-structured in-depth interview method (SSII). Furthermore, to complement the interpretive methodology and the SSII with a congruent data analysis method, Reflexive Thematic Analysis was deployed to analyse the interview data.

5.4 Summary of Key Findings

Analysis of the data from OmanBank uncovered the following six major themes, forming SE barrier domains:

    (1) OmanBank contextual barriers (OCB)

    (2) Organisational leadership barriers (OLB)

    (3) Process management barriers (PMB)

    (4) Strategy formulation barriers (SFB)

    (5) Change management barriers (CMB)

    (6) Resource availability barriers (RAB)

Several key findings emerged under each theme. These are summarised below according to their importance in answering the research question.

5.4.1 OmanBank Contextual Barriers (OCB) Theme

OCB represented the major finding of this study concerning the research question, in terms of

new, strong, and contextually-novel SE barriers that appeared to have the most devastating impact on the bank's SE success. Based on the 'key findings criteria' imposed in this study (see 4.3.1), OCB's three subthemes: (a) Omanisation (the nationalisation policy), (b) Wasta (nepotism), and (c) Omani Labour Law – abbreviated OWL – collectively, scored the highest number of interview-mentions (95) across the dataset, and obtained the endorsement of all eight interviewees.

Omanisation stood at the apex of the barriers hindering successful SE at OmanBank, attracting the highest number of interview-mentions in the entire dataset (39) and the endorsement by all interviewees. Omanisation's contextual novelty is rooted in having no similarities in the literature that generally describes a Western context (Maas 2008; Trapero 2019) and does not indicate that a nationalisation policy has stood as a stern barrier to SE success elsewhere.

Both the data and the literature agree that Omanisation is a good idea that has been poorly executed (Al-Nahdi, 2016). In terms of strategic influence, all participants concluded that the badly-implemented Omanisation policy, a view validated by the literature (Ennis, 2020), had seriously harmed OmanBank's strategies over recent years. Among other indicators, this was seen starkly in examples of failed strategies that were directly attributed to appointing unqualified Omani CEOs, i.e., OWL-leadership, who lacked essential leadership skills (De Souza, 2017; Ferraro, Argüelles and Maoret, 2017), thus hurting the strategy through 'wrong decisions', as attested by the participants. The severity of Omanisation, thus, is seen in the creation of a novel 'contextual leadership model' at OmanBank. And, with leadership, evidenced as the overarching factor (Beer, 2020), Omanisation reframed every other barrier to SE, namely strategy formulation, change management, and operational management, through a cascading severe negative impact on SE.

Wasta emerged as another major novel hindrance to SE's success at OmanBank. Wasta's severity was revealed through the overwhelming endorsement of all the participants in 29 interview-mentions, ranking second to Omanisation across the dataset. As a finding, Wasta's novelty stems from having no parallel in the literature, which generally describes a Western context (Alves, Marten, and Trez, 2017) and does not indicate nepotism as a barrier to SE success.

At OmanBank, Wasta's influence is seen mainly in the unmerited appointment of unqualified friends, relatives, and tribal mates in decision-making and leadership positions, thereby undermining Omanisation and inflicting a further negative impact on the already Omanisation-reframed leadership model. In terms of its severity, both the data and the literature agreed that Wasta is rife in Oman (Al-Nahdi, 2016) and engraved in the national culture (Horak and Taube, 2016) and that, paradoxically, Omanis are very keen to use Wasta to gain employment despite being ashamed of its presence (Ali and Weir, 2020).

This seeming behavioural incongruity prompted recourse to Leon Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957) (Harmon-Jones and Mills, 1999), which explains how people behave in ways contrary to their beliefs if the reward for doing so is significant.

Oman Labour Law was shown to further compound the gravity of Omanisation and Wasta as a novel severe SE barrier at OmanBank. Its seriousness is indicated by standing out prominently in 27 interview-mentions and endorsement by seven of the eight interviewees, ranking third after Omanisation and Wasta out of the 11 subthemes. Participants agreed that by hardening the termination of employees (specifically Omanis) once hired, Omani Labour Law is obstructive to OmanBank's SE success because it makes the removal of underperforming or redundant employees a challenging mission (Al-Nahdi, 2016). Like Omanisation and Wasta, Omani Labour Law emerged as a contextually-novel finding to OmanBank with no equivalent in the literature, which generally describes a Western context (Trapero, 2019) and does not indicate labour laws as constituting barriers to SE success.

An important conclusion about the OCB theme is that its three subthemes – 'Omanisation', 'Wasta', and 'Oman Labour Law', abbreviated (OWL) – are interdependent. This confirms findings in the literature, whereby SE-barrier interdependence is found to create a magnified self-reinforcing chain of SE blockages (Obeidat et al., 2017). However, the interdependence of OWL among themselves (see Figure 4.3) does represent a novel setting and an exclusive SE challenge for OmanBank by creating a contextually distinctive OWL-leadership model that reshapes all other SE barriers, namely strategy formulation, change management, and operational management, thus severely sabotaging SE success (Cândido and Santos, 2019; Beer, 2020; Hiršsons and Ludviga, 2020).

5.4.2 Organisational Leadership Barrier (OLB) Theme

In answer to the research question, the OLB theme represented the second major theme of SE barriers emerging from the OmanBank data after OCB, with 71 interview-mentions and unanimous endorsement by all the interviewees. This finding corroborates with the literature, which states that among the identified SE barriers, organisational leadership takes precedence over all the other SE barriers (Cândido and Santos, 2019) because they fall within the prerogative of organisational leadership (Lowy, 2015; EPL, 2020), which may turn them either into barriers or boosters, depending on the quality of leadership.

What was novel about the OLB in the OmanBank context is its direct overlap with Omanisation, which mandates Omani leadership, and which - according to participants - it lacked the necessary leadership skills. And, whatever a slight chance of having a competent Omani leader there might be, this was impaired by Wasta and unduly legitimised by Oman Labour law. This setting resulted in a contextually-novel OWL-leadership model, which in turn has led to the repetitive strategic failures unveiled in the numerous examples quoted by the interviewees.

5.4.3 Process Management Barrier (PMB) Theme

In the OmanBank interview data, the PMB theme took third place in terms of SE barrier severity, commanding 16% of its total negative impact on the bank's strategic success, following OmanBank Contextual Barriers and the Organisational Leadership Barrier themes commanding 29% and 22% respectively. The failure was mainly attributed to the two key processes of 'strategy communication failure' and 'lack of employee motivation'. The importance of these processes in relation to the research question led to a (re)focused retrospective literature review, which affirmed the findings from the interview data, indicating in various shreds of evidence that both strategy communication failure (Wiles, 2021; Yang, 2021) and lack of employee motivation (Kavadias, and Yang, 2021) are well-established SE barriers. Moreover, the 'lack of employee motivation' at OmanBank seemed philosophically to defeat the stipulation of Herzberg's two-factor motivation theory (Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman, 2011), which stresses the importance of employee motivation in terms of 'motivator factors' and 'hygiene factors', both of which, according to the interviewees, were starkly denied to OmanBank employees.

While the PMB theme is generally in tune with the literature findings, the recurring contextual remark concerning the particularity of OmanBank holds, because PMB takes on a different 'barrier intensity' at OmanBank compared to the evidence provided in the Western-focused literature. That is because PMB falls to an OWL-reshaped leadership that exacerbates the negative impact of lack of employee motivation and strategy communication failure on SE.

5.4.4 Strategy Formulation Barriers (SFB) Theme

SFB represented another visible SE barrier domain to emerge from the OmanBank data. Participants widely held that while the bank was devising strategies, many of the strategies it devised proved to be dysfunctional. This was primarily due to (a) the lack of involvement of lower-level managers and staff in the strategy-making process and (b) inappropriate strategy formulation, i.e., strategies that are unclear, unrealistic, or conflicting. These two subthemes collectively accounted for 15% of the bank's total negative barrier impact on SE.

The SFB revalidated the literature, which revealed that proper strategy formulation, in terms of both stakeholder involvement (Coulson-Thomas (2021a) and strategic clarity (MacLennan and Markides (2021), are prerequisites for successful SE. However, while the SFB is generally in tune with the existing literature, non-the-less it takes a special contextual dimension at OmanBank (similar to the OLB and PMB discussed above) being in the hands of OWL-leadership that impinges a greater negative impact on SE.

5.4.5 Change Management Barriers (CMB) Theme

The CMB theme represented the fifth barrier domain to emerge from the OmanBank data, constituting a moderate 11% of the total negative impact on the bank's strategic success. In agreement with the literature, which indicates that change management and SE represent two faces of the same coin (Brazukas, 2018), the data revealed that the 'lack of a structured change management programme' stood out as a barrier to SE at OmanBank. Evidence was provided through various examples of how the 'lack of a structured change management programme' manifested in a range of the bank's strategies, like the failure to manage the business under Covid-19 (an externally mandated change) and the decision to decentralise the bank's operating model (an internally initiated change). However, the particularity concerning the OmanBank-context regarding CMB again holds for the CMB theme. As with the above-mentioned barriers

supported by the literature, CMB's 'barrier intensity' on SE takes a different tone under OWL-leadership.

5.4.6 Resource Availability Barrier (RAB) Theme

The RAB wraps up this summary of SE barriers at OmanBank, ranking last among the six barrier themes with a 6% negative impact on SE success, pointing to a lack of human and technology resources. Interestingly, RAB barely met the 'key findings criteria', suggesting that interviewees did not see its impact on SE as greatly significant. This finding contradicts the literature, where the evidence indicates that RAB represents a significant SE barrier (Petersen et al., 2021) and that despite its proven criticality, many organisations fail to avail the resources necessary for execution success (Wiles, 2021). This infers that although apparently there is reasonable availability of resources at OmanBank, which otherwise represents a serious SE barrier for organisations generally, the bank's contextually OWL-shaped leadership fails in SE via other barriers.

5.5 Research Contribution

The above summary of SE barrier findings at OmanBank in reply to the research question: 'What are the barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank?' collectively provided a good understanding of what impedes the bank's SE success, and hence the research question was addressed. Having answered the research question, therefore, this study's contribution to the existing bodies of knowledge and professional practice comes from three angles:

First, the research uncovered a set of new and major, contextually-novel SE barriers, namely, Omanisation, Wasta, and the Oman Labour Law (OWL). The finding of the OmanBank OWL-barrier triangle, which proved to be the most harmful to the bank's SE success across the dataset, has no equivalent in the literature consulted. Furthermore, beyond contextuality, OWL's novelty is also seen in the unexpectedness of its constituent elements, as well as in their intertwinement: Omanisation imposes unqualified leadership, then Wasta undermines Omanisation by placing a much less-qualified leadership, and then Omani Labour Law legitimises Wasta-appointees (see Figure 4.3). This interwoven relationship, as validated by the literature (Cândido and Santos, 2019), creates a contextually novel OWL-leadership model as an overarching factor that reframes and reshapes the rest of the SE barriers at OmanBank,

namely, SFB, CMB, and OMB, thus breeding a severe cumulative sabotaging impact on SE. Reasonably, therefore, it can be claimed that OWL, as barriers to SE success, given their contextual-novelty and severity, represent this study's original contribution to both bodies of knowledge and practice.

Second, the other SE barriers that arose from the OmanBank data – namely the OLB, PMB, SFB, CMB, and RAB – while they generally confirmed the findings in the existing literature and theories (see 2.3), however, suggest that they have a deeper adverse intensity on SE emanating from their direct association to OWL-leadership.

Third, the macro context of this research is a developing country outside the Western research zone that accounts for about 90% of SE research, as testified by the literature (Maas, 2008). Even within the immediate greater context of the GCC states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), no previous research focused on the barriers to SE. It could thus be reasonably claimed that this research invites fresh insight into the under-researched subject of SE from a developing, under-researched geography.

Accordingly, the implication of this study from both the theoretical and professional perspectives is seen as follows:

(a) From a theoretical perspective: given its perceived novelty, this contribution hopes to help fill the gap identified in the SE body of knowledge and practice that is seen to suffer fragmentation, incohesiveness, and lack of a unifying conceptual model (Tawse and Tabesh, 2021). Moreover, it hopes to enrich the discussions in the three scholarly disciplines/topics of strategy execution, Omanisation (nationalisation), and Wasta (nepotism/favouritism).

(b) From a professional perspective: firstly, regarding the specific case of OmanBank, and reflecting on the initial observation underpinning this inquiry, this contribution to contemporary research on SE is hoped to improve SE managerial practice at OmanBank. The bank's leadership may choose to 'reflect' on the key findings of this study and start a cycle of 'action learning' for example. Secondly, since transferability of this study is an option, and reflecting on the researcher's lengthy professional experience at several large organisations within the GCC states, it is likely that these findings will turn beneficial to many organisations across the GCC region (Bahrain, Qatar Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia,

UAE). This claim emanates from the literature evidence that the GCC states share similar demographics (Waxin, Kumra, and Zhao, 2020), work nationalisation programs (Glaister, Al Amri, and Spicer, 2019), and cultural characteristics, namely Wasta/nepotism (Bachkirov, 2019; Ali and Weir, 2020), in addition to the lived personal experience of the researcher spanning over thirty years in banking organisations at three of these States, namely, Oman, Qatar and the UAE, which indorse the literature findings.

5.6 Research Limitations

Every research has its limitations, and this study is no exception. While limitations and the means to mitigate them are elaborated in 3.7, this section offers a recap.

Firstly, as a student thesis, this research was constrained by budget and time limitations. Logically, the more abundant the budget and time, the higher the likelihood of reflecting positively on the research's trustworthiness, mainly in terms of consulting more literature, taking a larger sample, and conducting empirical application through action learning.

Secondly, this research was built upon an idealist ontology, approached through a qualitative interpretive methodology, and carried out via an SSII, following which the researcher is the research instrument. This is argued to invite bias. However, the researcher counterargues that bias is an intrinsic human failing that inevitably will affect any research regardless of the method used(Walsham, 2006), and that a strength of the interpretive methodology is its ability to allow for reflexivity (Johnson, 2022) which permits the researcher to dwell on the extent to which her/his role in the study impacted and shaped the interpretations. These arguments are set out in Table 3.5. Moreover, it has been counterargued that, when acknowledged, preconceptions are not the same as bias (Malterud,2001), and that differences in perception, therefore, should be viewed as providing a richer understanding of complex phenomena rather than bias or a reliability problem (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006).

Thirdly, lack of generalisability is another limitation attached to this type of research, as with all qualitative methods, wherein it has been claimed that 'the only generalisation is there is no generalisation'(Lincoln and Guba, 1985). However, the researcher counterargues that "the contribution of qualitative research often lies in its uniqueness – and not whether it can be replicated" (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021: 303) and that the gold standard of qualitative research

is internal generalisability, i.e., the ability to explain what has been researched within a certain context, and not 'statistical generalisability'. Central to this debate is the issue of sample size and representativeness. This has also been refuted on the grounds that sample size is not the determinant of quality in social research (Baker and Edwards (2012). Instead, the trustworthiness of qualitative research is seen in the employment of certain practices and techniques to enhance credibility, dependability, and confirmability(see Table 3.5). For this research, the sample size represented 67% of the audience, and all the 'relevant techniques' of research-trustworthiness, namely pilot interviewing, reflexivity, audit trail, external audit, and member-checking, were either adequately exercised or will be exercised as necessary post-completion (see Table 3.5). Having noted this, while it is not the intention of this study to generalise the findings, transferability remains an open option for readers who wish to do so because this study was conducted from the outset in such a manner to attain what it takes to make its findings transferable to similar settings, by adhering to the transferability criteria elaborated under 3.5.2.

5.7 Prospects for Future Research

Finally, this section recommends alternative avenues that future researchers might consider pursuing in order to build on, enrich, or confirm the content of this research to better understand the barriers to successful strategy execution.

First, at the macro-level, researchers are invited to focus on studying any aspect of SE in developing and underdeveloped countries to unearth their particularities, as this study hopefully has. This would be a worthwhile endeavour in a geographic location starkly underrepresented in SE research.

Second, of particular interest, would be research that builds on one of this study's key findings: 'researching the interdependence of SE barriers and measuring the cumulative impact of the barriers on strategic success'. This is an endeavour the researcher is personally interested in pursuing in the future.

Finally, an interesting question arose in the process of answering the research question of this study, although irrelevant to its aim and, therefore, not further pursued within the stipulated bounds of the current research. This is: why is there only one female among a total audience

of 12 senior managers at OmanBank, despite this cohort representing the bank's second-tier seniority? It could be valuable to both academia and practice to delve deeper into this question through the theoretical lenses of women's leadership and gender equality in the context of developing countries.

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Appendices

Appendix	Name
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Appendix-2	Participant Information Sheet
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Appendix-4	Interview Guide - A View from the Top'
Appendix-5	Interview Protocol
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Appendix 1: Research Ethical Approval

APPROVED: ELHAFYAN 2020/201 request for ethical review

📎 3 ⌄ ⊞

Cali, Annabel
To: El Hafyan, El 2013 (PGR)
Cc: Champion, Donna; Samra, Dalvir

👍 ↩ ⇜ ↪ ⋯
Thu 7/30/2020 11:25 PM

📄 Exhibit-1-Ethical Application ... ⌄
136 KB

📄 Exhibit-6-PIS-15 July 2020.do... ⌄
21 KB

⌄ Show all 3 attachments (173 KB)   ☁ Save all to OneDrive - Nottingham Trent University   ↓ Download all

Message sent on behalf of the Chair of the College Research Ethics Committee

Dear Elhussein

Thank you for the recent resubmission of your application (no. 2020/201) to the BLSS College Research Ethics Committee (CREC) on 15 July 2020 requesting ethical clearance for the project entitled: *How to achieve successful strategy execution at the National Bank of Oman through understanding the barriers and factors in the realization of strategy.*

We are pleased to inform you that the reviewers were happy to confirm that in their judgement there were no further outstanding ethical concerns that required further discussion or exploration prior to data collection and they are satisfied that your resubmission now meets with their ethical approval.

We would like to wish you well in the completion of your project.

Sent on behalf of
Chair CREC

Annabel Cali
Research and REF Administrator
Research Operations
Nottingham Trent University
Arkwright Room B113
Tel: +44 115 848 8157
E-mail: annabel.cali@ntu.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

Dear Participant

Thank you for agreeing to consider participating in this research project. Before you decide whether to grant me an interview, it is important that you understand the reason why this research is being carried out, and what your participation will involve. I would be grateful if you would take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with colleagues or other people if you wish. Please feel welcome to get back to me if anything is unclear, and to take the time you see necessary to decide whether or not to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study aims to understand how to achieve successful strategy execution at National Bank of Oman (NBO) through understanding the barriers and factors to the realization of strategy,

and thus, successful strategy execution at the bank.

Who this study is presented to? And who is funding it?

The research comes in partial fulfilment of a Doctoral degree in Business Administration presented to Nottingham Business School of Nottingham Trent University (NTU), UK, and it is self-funded.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

I'm asking you to give an interview, because you are one several senior executives of the bank targeted to be interviewed so as to understand their views and experience on the topic and your name has been picked up randomly.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are absolutely free to take part or not.

If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep, and you will also be asked to sign the enclosed CONSENT FORM. You will still be free to withdraw up to 4 weeks after I have given the interview without giving any reason, and without any implications on your legal rights.

What do you want me to do?

I would like you to take part in an interview lasting approximately an hour. It will take place in city of domicile and will be arranged at a time and place convenient to yourself. The interview be carried out by myself, following a pre-set schedule and will generally cover the topic of strategy execution at NBO from different angles.

I will ask for your written permission to audio-tape the interview, to ensure that the information you give me is accurately recorded. This is, again, voluntary, because while you may agree to participate, you may decide not to give permission for recording the interview.

What will happen to the information I give in my interview?

The tape of your interview, if permitted by you, will be transcribed. I will then analyse the information and feed it into my results.

At the end of the study, all the transcripts will be deposited in the archive of research material maintained by Nottingham Trent University (NTU). This is usual practice, by the degree-awarding institutions because it makes valuable research data available to other researchers. However, the transcripts will be fully anonymised before they are archived. Any information that identifies you or your organisation, or that gives any clues to your personal identity or your organisation, will be removed. I'm confident that these precautions will ensure that no-one will be able to trace your transcript back to you.

How will you protect my confidentiality and anonymity?

Once collected, the data will be fully anonymised by me before the analysis stage and all participants will be allocated pseudonyms.

Any non- anonymised part of the data that carries personal identities such as the participant informed consent forms and the interview audio-recordings (when allowed), or reference to the organisation will be destroyed after completion of the project as per NTU guidelines.

During and after the project, access to electronic data, wherever stored and backed-up, in computers or iCloud, shall be restricted and encrypted through authentication passwords not accessible to any other person. Hard copies of research notes will be kept in locked secured filing cabinets.

The tape and transcript will be handled only by myself-and possibly my two research supervisors, who are both seasoned academicians and ethical professors- in line with NTU's data protection principles and my approved research protocol.

Once the transcripts have been deposited in NTU archive, the tape of your interview will be destroyed and the relevant files erased from my computers following NTU data management guidelines.

You or your organisation will never be named or otherwise identified in any publication arising from this project. No unpublished opinions or information will be attributed to you or your organisation, either by name or position.

I will further exercise all possible care to ensure that you or your organisation will not be identified by the way I write up the findings.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?

The main cost to you will be the time needed to be interviewed. The main risk is my failure to keep confidentiality and anonymity of the data. However, I'm confident that the arrangements described above will prevent any of your information being shares outside the arrangements described above. For this reason, I believe that the risk of detriment is very low.

What are the possible benefits?

I hope that; firstly, you will find the interview interesting and will take satisfaction from helping to develop knowledge of this important topic. Secondly, that you will find the results of the project helpful to your work and to your organisation.

What will happen to the results?

I will write up the results as a separate chapter of the Doctorate thesis. Once approved, I will be more than happy to share with you such findings that will hopefully improve strategy execution at NBO.

Who is responsible if there is a breach of confidentiality and anonymity?

Myself, as the principal investigator, because that would emanate from lack of following the data management procedures stipulated by Nottingham Trent University. You have the right to take whatever action, inclusive of legal action, against me.

Contacts for further information

Please feel very welcome to contact the me for further information, at the following address:

ElHussein Elhafyan
The Business Centre, Dubai World Central
P O Box 390667
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Tel: +971-569565699
Email: hafyan@gmail.com

Dear Ms./Mr. _____ _____

My name is Hussein Elhafyan, and I'm a doctoral student at Nottingham Trent University (NTU), UK. My address is: The Business Centre, P. O. Box 390667, Dubai, UAE. Tel: +971-569565699, email: hafyan@gmail.com

Being an ex-staff of NBO, I'm conducting research that aims to help the bank by improving the strategy execution process at NBO. The research comes in partial fulfilment of a doctoral degree, and it entails conducting interviews with the executive management of NBO to get their perspective on the subject because of their seniority and experience.

As such, you have been selected to participate in this study. However, your participation is VOLUNTARY, and you may opt not to participate.

The interview shall take place face-to-face in Muscat during the period (   ) in a place, and at a time convenient to you.

The data will be used ONLY for the research, and will be stored, backed-up, and destroyed according to Nottingham Trent University regulations and GDPR and (General Data Protection Regulation).

Should you agree to participate, please complete, sign off, and date this form as part and parcel of the ethical approval requirements of NTU, which also strictly stipulate that your participation and information will be CONFIDENTIAL and ANONYMISED.

Please read and confirm your consent to participate in the interview by initialling the appropriate box(es):

	1	I confirm that the purpose of this project has been explained to me, that I have been given enough information about it, and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and receive satisfactory answers.
	2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up to 4 weeks after I have given the interview without giving any reason, and without any implications on my legal rights.
	3	I understand that all data and analysis will be anonymised.
	4	I fully agree to take part in this project.
	5	I fully agree to have the interview audio-recorded

Name of participant: Job Title   :

Date   :   Signature :

Research question: Understanding the Barriers to successful strategy execution at OmanBank

'A view from the top: Interviewing OmanBank's Senior Managers'
<u>**Semi-Structured In-depth Interview Guide**</u>

1. Can you tell me briefly about your role in the bank?

2. What does strategy mean to you in general and to the business?

3. Does NBO follow a formal strategic management process i.e. formulation, execution, and control? (Probe if no, why you think so? If yes, can you describe it to me in terms of process and participants?)

4. Does the strategy get communicated to NBO staff? How and how frequent? (Probe: what's the best/worst communication you have been to? Why do you think so? , How clear are you and your team about the bank's strategy?, etc

5. Can you tell me your experience of a specific bank-wide strategy that was executed so successfully or so poorly? (Probe: in your opinion, what were the main reasons behind such success/failure?)

6. Do you recall instances where you and your team found it easy or difficult to implement a specific strategy, and what made it so? (Probes: What are the reasons for success/failure?

7. Does the bank's strategy get updated? How, and who performs that? (Probe: has OmanBank made any strategic decisions in relation to Covid-19?), how about your business targets?, etc.

8. Can you describe your experience of running the business during Covid-19 'New Normal' i.e. working from home, in terms of people reaction, technology, people, resources in general? And how did you manage that?

9. Can you tell me what leadership mean to you and how do you describe the bank's leadership?

10. Does NBO follow a particular leadership model that stresses specific leadership skills through which all of you as senior managers are trained uniformly? (If yes, what are those specific leadership skills, and how frequent do you get trained on the same?), etc.

☐ Finally, do you want to add anything else, not covered by me, that you think may help OmanBank become more successful in strategy execution?

<p align="center">-End-</p>

	Questions underpinned by **Strategy Formulation** as a key component of the conceptual framework that has inductively emerged from the literature.
	Questions underpinned by **Strategy Execution** (Processes management and Resources Availability) as the central component of the conceptual framework that has inductively emerged from the literature.
	Questions underpinned by **Change Management** as a key component of the conceptual framework that has inductively emerged from the literature.
	Questions underpinned by **Organizational Leadership** as the overarching factor of the conceptual framework that has inductively emerged from the literature.

NB: This is just a basic guide to maintain structure, however, there was a lot more that has emerged and got covered outside this guide, namely key issues of Omanization, Wasta, and the Oman Labour Law that were int known in advance.

(A) Before the Interview

1. Carefully plan the interview: Identify the prospectus interviewees, explain and send the informed consent form (approved by NTU), have it agreed, signed and returned and agree on a place and convenient time for the interview.
2. Prepare questions in advance: I will have my *interview guide* ready with questions written down and arranged in a logical sequence and indicate any possible probes. My focused questions should be broad, mostly open-ended questions to elicit sufficient information and allow the interviewee latitude in constructing an answer.
3. Pilot the interview: Before starting the actual interview, I shall dry test the interview at least two times to test all the components such as the questions, the tape-recording, managing time.

(B) During the Interview

4. Put the interviewee at ease: on the day of the interview, before starting the interview, I shall provide an overview of my purpose, my intended uses for the interview data, reemphasise the ethical approvals process and the measures I have taken to protect confidentiality and anonymity. Seek permission for tape-recording or note-taking.
5. Put the interviewee in the interviewing mindset: beginning with a couple of easy-to-answer background questions such as the interviewee's job title and responsibilities that warm up the interviewee and alleviate any apprehension.
6. Focus on developing - rapport with the interviewee: by establishing a relaxed, comfortable climate. I shall try to be myself and be aware of my nonverbal communication: e.g., smiles, seating position, open/closed body posture, eye contact.
7. Watch out for what is said and what is not said: throughout the interview, I shall continuously try to understand and capture both the interviewee's verbal language, meanings, and body language.
8. Use probes and prompts intelligently: to get more in-depth answers or to follow up on points of interest, and use silence as a form of probe wherever applicable to encourage the interviewee to continue. I shall also refrain from asking leading probe questions.

(C) Ending the Interview

9. To end the interview professionally: I shall ensure the following:

    a. Summarise the key points offered by the interviewee as a trigger for him/her to expand, clarify or correct any points as the final chance.

    b. Follow the best practice of asking "is there anything else you would like to tell me regarding the issue of strategy execution?", (especially post turning the tape recorder off).

    c. Ask if I may contact the interviewee later in case I missed out an important question or to seek clarification.

    d. Thank the interviewee for the time and provide my contact details for him/her to reach me any time.

    e. Assure the interviewee that s/he can obtain the final evaluation report, once the project is complete to promote a sense of ownership of the material they have shared.

    f. Test the recording: immediately after the interview, I shall take time to test the recorder to see if I have recorded the whole interview, fill in the gaps in my notes, and write down my impressions immediately while fresh in my mind.

-End-

NTU DBA Programme, Dubai Cohort 3, Hussein Elhafyan, Student # N0559082

Appendix 6: Table 4.2 : Most Commonly Used Approaches and Methods to Qualitative Data

Approach	Focus in Brief
Thematic Analysis	Focuses on identifying patterns across the datasets wherein the qualitative researcher actively looks for emerging themes within the dataset and codes excerpts of the data accordingly.
Content Analysis	Focuses on analyses of both the content and context of documents. The researcher identifies themes, focuses on the manner the theme is addressed, its frequency of occurrence, and links the analysis to external variables such as the gender and role of the participant.
Discourse Analysis	Focuses on the manner knowledge is produced within a particular discourse by using distinctive languages such as medical discourse and financial discourse, or by using implicit theories to make sense of social action such as gender relations, power, and poverty.
Narrative Analysis	Focuses on the analysis of various aspects of a narrative or an account, namely, the meaning of the basic story being told, the manner an account is constructed, the intention of the teller and the nature of the audience.
Grounded Theory	Focuses on generating analytical categories, understanding their dimensions, and identifying the relationships among them. The process of data collection and synthesis continues until saturation, wherein new data do not add to the developing theory.
Conversation Analysis	Focuses on analysing the structure of conversation and classifying the interaction in terms of key linguistic systems.
Ethnographic Accounts	Focuses on describing and detailing the way of life of individuals, groups, or organisations.
Policy and Evaluation Analysis	Focuses on providing answers concerning the impact and effectiveness of social policies and programmes.
Life Histories	Focuses on analysing a single narrative or a collection of stories around common themes.

Source: Adapted from Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor (2003), Cassell and Bishop (2019), and Lester et al. (2020).

Appendix 7: Research Data Management Plan

A. PROJECT DETAILS

Creator: Elhussein Elhafyan

Affiliation: Nottingham Trent University

Funder: Self-funded

Template: NTU Data Management Plan

ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4158-1150

Grant number: No grant

Provisional project title: How to achieve successful strategy execution at National Bank of Oman through understanding the barriers and factors to the realisation of strategy

Project start date: 2013-10-11

Project end date: 2021-04-30

Project context:

This research project is an individual project that comes in partial fulfilment for the degree of a DBA by NTU, and is self-funded. The study tries to understand how to achieve successful strategy execution at National Bank of Oman through understanding the barriers and f actors to the realization of strate gy.

The research is an interpretive qualitative research that deploys semi-structured In-depth Interviews to collect data from the senior management of the bank at its HQ located in Muscat, the capital of the Sultanate of Oman.

Project abstract:

Most profit-seeking organisations around the globe create strategic plans to help them achieve their business goals and realize their visions. To achieve that, such organizations spend money, time, and effort formulating strategic plans. Nonetheless the lived experience of the researcher augmented by the desk research indicate that a large percentage of organisations (50-90%) fail to execute such strategies. That has given rise to the key question that has underpinned this study: why, after believing in strategy as a means for organizational success and investing large monies, committing significant resources, exerting huge efforts, and spending a lot of time formulating strategies, do organizations overwhelmingly fail to execute strategies? And thus, the focused research question of this research project : How to achieve successful strategy execution at the National Bank of Oman through understanding the ba rriers and factors to the realization of strategy?

Last modified: 28-06-2020

B. DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN (DMP) DETAILS

1. DEFINING YOUR DATA

Describe your data and how you will be working with it

- I will collect qualitative interview data from nine senior managers of the bank about their opinions, beliefs and personal experience on the topic.
- If respondents agree to recording the interviews with be recorded using a digital audio recorder, and then transcribed into text.
- If respondents do not agree to be recorded, I will be taking hand-written notes that will be scanned and saved as digital JPG data.
- The data is of personal nature, and it is obviously confidential as long as it has the personal identities of the participants.
- However, once anonymised, the data may be shared as per NTU guidelines.(see point # 4 below on SHARING YOUR DATA).

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What formats and software will you use?

- Interview audio recordings (when permitted by participants) will be saved as MP3 files.
- Non-digital interview notes will be scanned and saved a s JPG files.
- Interview transcripts will be created in and saved as Word documents.
- Data will be analyzed using NVivo software (NVivo 12 for MS Windows).
- The NVivo projects data will be saved in the in my 'Documents' folder as (. nvp files)

How much data do you expect to generate?

- I expect to audio-record 9 interviews with an average length of 45 minutes each. That will be about 22.8MB X9 = 205MB .
- I will transcribe these into Microsoft Word (.doc) documents of about 100 KB each, which makes a total of about 1BM.
- The written thesis and related literature occupy around 2.5GB
- The expected total storage volume should be around 4GB maximum.
- The non-digital data I have is books and journals that I have bought f or this research and a re taking about 3 filing cabinet drawers.
- I also may have 9 non-digital interview notes . All these will be scan and transfor med into JPG di gital data and stored along with inter view audio-recording. Their expected total storage capacity would be around 18MB.

2. COMPLIANCE & DATA OWNERSHIP

Is some/all data subject to any institutional, legal, ethical, or commercial conditions?

- I have consulted the following policies:
  - The NTU RDM Policy
  - Data Security- Portable Devices and Media Policy Opens in a new window
  - Information Classification Policy
  - NTU Records Retention Policy
  - NTU Research Ethics Policy
- Section 2b outlines the conditions and what I will do to comply with them

What do you need to do to comply with these obligations?

- Access to the data must be restricted to myself and my supervisors.
- The data underlying my published results will be kept for at least ten year s from the date of deposit as per NTU retention policy.
- I will obtain the informed consent from participants to implement my plans for data storage, retention and sharing (as outlined in sections 3, 4 and 5).
- My research involves personal confidential data, so I will put necessary safeguards in place to protect participants' privacy and secure data. These are de tailed in sections 3, 4 and 5.

Who owns the data?

- As per NTU Intellectual Property Policy (p2), for research-based degrees, the generate d data is an Intellectual Property of the student, however, this right is transferable to NTU. Accordingly, NTU shall have the non-exclusive right to retain, use and make available for academic research and teaching purposes all IPR and associated materials produced by a Student during their programme of study at the University (p4).
- NTU requires that I keep the data supporting my research outputs at the end of the project and make it openly available with as few restrictions as possible.

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    ☐   During the research project the data will initially be stored in 3 places (b) Copy on my PC desktop (2) Copy on my iCloud store, and (c) copy on an external hard drive. This data, being work-in-progress will not be made publicly available.

    ☐   Data that will be made publicly available (see Sections 5b and 5c) will be deposited NTU Designated Data Repository under an embargo until the final, approved version of thesis is submitted to IRep before the conferment of my degree.

How will you back-up your data?

    ☐   Data will be backed up in my free 5TB storage in NTU OneDrive for Business.

Who else is allowed to access this data during the project?

    ☐   My research supervisors will be granted viewing rights; not editing rights.

    ☐   Data will be exchanged as needed with my supervisors. Data will be transferred to them via Zendto which is a GDPR compliant and allows for the encryption & decryption of uploaded files, using a user-selected passphrase, to protect personal or restricted data.

How will you organise your data folders?

    ☐   For this project, data and documentation files will be held in two main folders, named (Document-5) and (Document-6.)

    ☐   Within each folder, I will have the following subfolders :
- Main Chapter
- Literature
- Forms and exhibits
- Relevant Policies

How will you name your files?
    ☐   Data files will be organized as follows:
- Chapter Number, followed by
- Chapter Name, followed by
- Version Number, followed by
- Date of last editing.

    ☐   Example: Chapter 4-Data Analysis-V2-May 5th 2020.

How will you manage different versions of your files?

    ☐   Since this is a small-scale project, version number will be part of the file name as explained under (how will you name your data) above.

How will you ensure your data is understandable to others?

    ☐   I will create a separate metadata text document that provides clear data description, annotation, contextual information and documentation that explains how data were created or digitised, what data mean, what their content and structure are, and any manipulations that may have taken place.

3. ARCHIVING YOUR DATA

What data should be kept, or destroyed, after the end of your project?

    ☐   Generally, the part of data that carry personal identities such as the participant informed consent forms and the interview audio recordings (when allowed) will be destroyed after completion of the project. However, an anonymised text version will be kept for ten years as per NTU record retention policy.

    ☐   Rest of the data such as the literature review data and the data analysis output will be retained as per NTU policy.

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Appendix 7: Research Data Management Plan

Where will you archive your data?

- After consulting re3data.org and the NTU Research Data Management Officer, the finalised dataset will be deposited in NTU Designated Data Repository.

When will you archive your data?

- Data will be deposited in the repository prior to my output being submitted for publication/ peer review.
- Data that will be made publicly available (see Sections 5b and 5c) will be deposited under an embargo until the final, approved version of thesis is submitted to IRep before the conferment of my degree.

How long will the data be archived for?

- In accordance with the NTU Records Retention Schedule, the research data will be retained for 10 years from the date of deposit.

4. SHARING YOUR DATA

How will others learn that your data exists?

My data will be made discoverable in a number of ways:
- NTU Designated Data Repository is fully searchable and indexed.
- All publications will include a data citation and data access statement, so readers will know where and how to access the underlying data.
- After depositing my project data in NTU Designated Data Repository ,I will register my data with NTU by submitting a Data Registry Form. A metadata record for my research data will be created in NTU IRep. This record will offer a full description of my data, as well as linking directly to the record of all associated publications. Each published output record will also link to the dataset metadata record so that people who locate my publications will also be directed to its underpinning data.

Which data will be accessible to others?

- Once anonymised, all of my data may be shared openly following publication of its associated output/s, subject to the explicit agreement of the participants in the consent forms.

Who will you share your data with and un der what conditions?

- My data will be available to download from NTU Designated Data Repository under a CC-BY 4.0
- The anonymised summary data will be available to anybody who has registered with the UK Data Service and agreed to the terms and conditions of their End User License. The full survey data will be placed unde r controlled access that is only available to users who have been trained, accredited and their data usage has been approved by the relevant Data Access Committee.
- Bone fide researchers conducting ethically approved research will be granted access to the data in the NTU Data Archive upon request under a CC-BY-NC 4.0 license.

How will you share your data?

- The data is available for immediate download from NTU Designated Data Repository.
- Users will email the Library Research Team for access to the data in the NTU Data Archive.
- The data will be available to download from the UK Data Service once users have registered and agreed to the End User Terms and Conditions.

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Appendix 7: Research Data Management Plan

5.   IMPLEMENTING YOUR DMP

How often will this plan be reviewed and updated?

- ☐   My DMP will be reviewed and updated as the needed in terms of new developments or changes that occur over the course of the project.
- ☐   Such updates will be shared with my research supervisors as and when they happen.

What actions have you identified from the rest of this plan?

- ☐   Ge informed consent forms approved by participants inclusive of an agreement to share their anonymised data.
- ☐   Sore and backup data in multiple places during the course of the project.
- ☐   Apply for data archiving at NTU repository by completing and submitting Active Research Data Storage request form.
- ☐   Request access to research team data storage.
- ☐   Set up and periodically test my backup system.
- ☐   Learn how to anonymise my data so that it can be shared if agreed by participants.
- ☐   Contact NTU Chief Data Management Officer at: LIBResearchTeam@ntu.ac.uk. for any clarification such as finding out the appropriate repository for my data, and when I can deposit my data with them.
- ☐   Ensure that my DMP is a live document that is updated as the research progresses.

What support/ information do you need to complete these actions?

- ☐   I will need information from three key sources, which I have already identified as:
    - o   NTU Library RDM webpages
    - o   UK Data Service
    - o   NTU Research Data Management Officer at LIBResearchTeam@ntu.ac.uk.
- ☐   In addition to my tapping on the invaluable experience of my research supervisor.