Ambidextrous coping strategies of Strategic Frontline Employees in minimising the effect of role ambiguity

A qualitative study on ambidextrous coping strategies of SFLEs in dealing with role ambiguity

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ABSTRACT:

Strategic frontline employees (SFLEs) often have to manage a wide variety of stakeholder interests, as these interests can be conflicting, role ambiguity in some form can occur. Managing role ambiguity by SFLEs can be done by employing ambidextrous coping strategies. This qualitative study identifies a research gap in the literature and develops a conceptual framework based upon existing models and frameworks. These are aggregated to form a new conceptual framework. Furthermore, the study identifies the main characteristics of ambidextrous SFLEs and which characteristics they should have to be able to ambidextrously manage role ambiguity. It also provides some examples of ambidextrous coping strategies in the form of conflict management, role clarification, and to a lesser extent creativity. Current literature on the subject however is not exhaustive and inconclusive. These examples together with the conceptual framework can serve as an excellent basis for further research.

Keywords

Ambidexterity, Strategic Frontline Employees, Role ambiguity, Role Conflict, Stakeholder Theory, Ambidextrous behaviour.

1.INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1.Research aim and question

As firms aim to deliver constant quality and quantity of products and services, it is important to remain responsive to customer demands and expectations as these can shift over time (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). The role of the strategic frontline employees (SFLEs) cannot be understated in achieving quality and quantity as SFLEs are one of the most important, valuable and significant employees of a firm (Singh, 2000). These employees are often the ones that make and/or deliver the product to the customer and play a vital role in achieving quality and quantity of service (Babakus, Cravens, Johnston, & Moncrief, 1999; Larkin & Larkin, 1996). It is therefore important for firms to retain and train these employees as they play a key factor in maintaining and getting a loyal and profitable customer base (Karatepe & Sokmen, 2006). Even though the importance of the SFLE is widely described across academic literature (Rust, Stewart, Miller, & Pielack, 1996), many SFLEs are often experiencing high levels of stress and conflict from external sources such as customer complaints, and internal sources such as underpayment and managerial conflicts (Karatepe & Sokmen, 2006). An important source of conflict and stress is that SFLEs often experience role ambiguity as they have to find a balance between achieving sales goals and maintaining a positive but still profitable relationship with their customer base (Plouffe, Bolander, Cote, & Hochstein, 2016). Some researchers have indicated that the balancing act that these employees have to perform can be responsible for a drop in performance (Singh, 2000). For example some managers set certain sales goals without concern for the productivity capabilities of the SFLE which can be detrimental towards actual performance (Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994). However it needs to be noted that some researchers have indicated that the impact of role ambiguity on performance is negligible (Brown & Peterson, 1993).

As SFLE's have to manage a wide range of stakeholder interests they are often required to adapt their methods and behaviour to the requirements of each specific stakeholder (Plouffe et al., 2016). This notion is often referred to as stakeholder theory as employees and managers alike have to account for the interests of all the stakeholders in a firm before making decisions (Jensen, 2001). As the interests of the stakeholders can be conflicting, many employees have to resort to ambidextrous behaviour (Jasmand, Blazevic, & de Ruyter, 2012). Research has indicated that ambidexterity is often manifested at employee level because an individual is best capable of recognising and exploiting an opportunity (Raisch, Birkinshaw, Probst, & Tushman, 2009). Correct use of ambidextrous behaviour can be a great boost towards a firms performance but finding the correct balance between efficiency and flexibility can be a difficult task as resources are often limited and not all information is readily available (Jasmand et al., 2012).

1.2.Research aim and research question

The previous section displayed the need for SFLEs to use ambidextrous behaviour to minimise role ambiguity and find the correct balance between managing the different stakeholder requirements. Correctly managing the needs of all stakeholders can be a great source for competitive advantage (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Considering this, there is a need for a comprehensive framework that helps SFLEs to manage role ambiguity more clearly. The underlying research question of this paper as also mentioned in the title is: *How do SFLEs behave in an ambidextrous way to cope with role ambiguity?* In order to provide a sufficient answer to this question I have created the following sub-questions to structure the extensive literature review and help in the development of a conceptual framework to guide the research.

- *What is role ambiguity?*
- *What are the antecedents of role ambiguity?*
- *What defines a SFLE in the context of Stakeholder theory?*
- *What is Ambidextrous behaviour?*
- *What are the defining characteristics of an ambidextrous SFLE?*

These first five sub-questions will help in structuring an extensive literature review that will help in the development of a framework in guiding the further research so that the main research question can be answered.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of the literature review is to provide answers to the sub-questions. Firstly, role ambiguity will be defined. Secondly, the main antecedents of role ambiguity will be named and defined. Thirdly, a definition of an SFLE in the context of stakeholder theory will be provided with some background on how it differs from a "regular" frontline employee. Fourthly, a literary definition for ambidextrous behaviour will be discussed and finally the defining characteristics of an ambidextrous SFLE will be provided. This will investigate the underlying concepts and create the basis for an analysis of the research questions and the development of a framework.

2.1.What is role ambiguity?

Role ambiguity is often defined as the absence or inadequate amount of information available to a persons job or position at an organisation (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). It is often conceptualised as a stressful condition for employees as it causes confusion regarding job expectations from management, responsibilities, and a lack of information regarding the process of performing a task or job (Low, Cravens, Grant, & Moncrief, 2001). Role ambiguity research has its origin in role theory and classical organisational theory (Rizzo et al., 1970). Every position in an organisational structure should have clearly defined functions and responsibilities; when the task/job expected of an employee has conflicting demands, the individual will experience dissatisfaction and will perform less than when these expectations were not conflicting (Rizzo et al., 1970). According to role theory there are two types of roles for

an employee that define their responsibilities and rights within the organisation, the formal role and the informal role (Jackson & Schuler, 1985). The formal role is the official practices that employees have to perform as part of their responsibilities and function, whereas informal roles are those that develop as part of the everyday workflow and social construct of the organisation (Biddle, 1986). Role ambiguity is mostly contextualised as part of confusion regarding the formal role of an employee. It has to be noted that role ambiguity and role conflict cannot be used interchangeably (Harris & Bladen, 1994; House & Rizzo, 1972). According to Brown and Peterson (1993), the difference in role ambiguity and role conflict is that role ambiguity is a lack of clarity about expected behaviour whereas role conflicts are issues that arise when conflicting demands are placed on an employee by management.

Moreover, role ambiguity is often studied using a multidimensional approach, which argues that there are four dimensions to role ambiguity that employees can experience (Bauer & Simmons, 2000; Sawyer, 1992; Singh & Rhoads, 1991). These four dimensions are defined as:

1. **Scope ambiguity**: What is expected of an employee and what is the task assigned?
2. **Process ambiguity**: The way in which organisational goals should be achieved.
3. **Priority ambiguity:** When goals should be achieved and in what order.
4. **Behaviour ambiguity:** What behaviour is expected of an employee and what behaviour is desirable in order to achieve the organisational goals?

Similar research has shown that there are four forms of ambiguity that are critical in understanding the uncertainty in a role. Ambiguity about the scope of responsibilities, the role behaviours necessary to fulfil the responsibilities, the role senders expectations for various role behaviours, and the consequences of one's actions on the realisation of the goals (King & King, 1990). Throughout academic literature role ambiguity is often used as a key variable in business research to explore the relationship it has with variables affecting employees. Most often the effects on employee performance, the propensity to leave, the organisational commitment, and the job satisfaction are studied as part of the effects of role ambiguity (Brown & Peterson, 1993; Singh & Rhoads, 1991). However, Brown & Peterson (1993) also note that much research has inconclusive and/or negative results when it comes to the effect of role ambiguity on variables such as job satisfaction and performance.

2.2. What are the antecedents of role ambiguity?

Role ambiguity originates from the social and organisational context of the environment in which an organisation operates (Jackson & Schuler, 1985). Role ambiguity from the perspective of the organisation can refer to issues such as unclear job description, unclarity in the process, consequence uncertainty, and leadership issues.

A detailed job description is important to avoid role ambiguity as uncertainty about expectations can lead to employees working on the wrong things as they do not know exactly what is expected of them (Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981). Additionally, Jackson and Schuler (1985) note that the type and level of description of a position within a firm influences the behaviour of an employee. Moreover, a clear job description and other guiding aspects of a firm such as company policies, philosophies and stable objectives can have a positive effect on the level of role ambiguity (House & Rizzo, 1972). However, interesting to note is that some researches have pointed out that the level of job description might follow an arced line as from a certain point the job description can get in the way of achieving the goals and can therefore lead to role ambiguity (Bauer & Simmons, 2000; Singh, 1998).

Another important source of role ambiguity in employees is the lack of information about how to achieve the goals that the firm wants the employee to achieve. This is often referred to in literature as process clarity (Hu & Liden, 2011; Sawyer, 1992). For an employee a job description is only useful when it also outlines in some way and provides information as to how to achieve the goal (Sawyer, 1992). Bedeian and Armenakis (1981), argue that the level of process clarity stems from the level of autonomy of an employee and the amount of feedback they receive on the work performed and the feedback directly from it supervisors. Another important aspect of process clarity is the measurements by which the performance of an employee is evaluated: lack of information about feedback, incentives, opportunities for development, and rewards can be a significant source of role ambiguity (House & Rizzo, 1972). Sawyer (1992) refers to this aspect as consequence uncertainty.

A third antecedent of role ambiguity are leadership issues. House and Rizzo (1972) argue that leadership that is unsupportive, punishing, and inconsiderate have a dysfunctional effect on employee performance. Additionally, according to the principle of unity of command, employees should receive instructions from one superior only and that there should be only one plan for an organisational goal (Rizzo et al., 1970). Another important aspect of this is highlighted by the principle of single accountability, this means that an employee or person should only be held accountable for the performance of his tasks to one superior only (Davis, 1951; House & Rizzo, 1972).

Although there are many sources of role ambiguity from inside an organisation, it can also be experienced through sources outside of the organisation. Conflicting demands and expectations can not only originate from unclear job descriptions or goals but also from customers themselves (Singh & Rhoads, 1991). Moreover, it needs to be noted that some of the performance measurements used to measure the effects of role ambiguity (as mentioned in section 2.1) can also simultaneously be antecedents of role ambiguity (Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Van Sell et al., 1981).

2.3. What defines a SFLE in the context of Stakeholder theory?

In order to describe how an SFLE deals with role ambiguity it is important to first provide a definition of an SFLE. To define a SFLE, one first has to define a Frontline employee. Within literature there are often two different types of roles attributed to FLE's (Plouffe et al., 2016). The first defines an FLE as an unskilled or lesser skilled employee that does service work, e.g. a waiter (Ma & Dubé, 2011). The second role assigned to an FLE is as an strategic employee dedicated to achieving organisational marketing goals and has dedicated measurements of performance (Plouffe et al., 2016). The defining aspects of an SFLE on the other hand build on the research of Di Mascio (2010), Korschun, Bhattacharya and Swain (2014), and Plouffe et al. (2016). They argue that a true SFLE acts as an intermediary between an organisation and key stakeholder groups and define an SFLE as a "marketing employee who is engaged in more than basic customer service and whose success is predicated on the interaction with, and skilful influencing of, three distinct stakeholder groups: (1) Customers, (2) the Internal Business Team and (3) External Business Partners" (Plouffe et al., 2016). This goal of correctly managing all stakeholders is the underlying message of stakeholder theory, which argues that decisions within a firm should take into account the interests of all stakeholders of a firm (Jensen, 2001). An important aspect of stakeholder theory is that each and every stakeholder is seen equally as important and that no single stakeholder takes priority of another (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). However, in reality this is often not the case and a thorough analysis of which stakeholders are considered most important is often regarded as an integral part of stakeholder theory and analysis (Friedman & Miles, 2002). There is conflicting research concerning which of the three stakeholder groups is most important for the performance of the SFLE. In the past it was often argued that customer demands should be placed above all else (Kotler, 1972). However more recently it has been argued that the SFLE's ability to manage all three stakeholder groups and the Internal Business team in particular is just as important (Plouffe et al., 2016; Verbeke, Dietz, & Verwaal, 2011).

2.4. What is ambidextrous behaviour?

Ambidextrous behaviour is a concept that is found in many areas business literature, including but not limited to strategic management, organisational learning and business innovation (Jasmand et al., 2012). In this thesis the focus will be on the use of ambidextrous behaviour by SFLE in order to counteract role ambiguity. Employee and/or organisational ambidexterity is often described as the ability to both exploit and explore new opportunities, goals which are often seen as conflicting (Raisch et al., 2009). Exploitation refers to the notion of achieving efficiency and reliability, whereas exploration refers to flexibility and creating variability (Jasmand et al., 2012; Levinthal & March, 1993). Employees that are capable of achieving these seemingly conflicting goals are seen as playing a strategic role in achieving this success and SFLE's are in a

prime position for achieving these goals (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996).

Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) coined the term contextual ambidexterity, which refers to the notion that ambidexterity arises from the organisational context of a firm. It differs from the traditional notion of ambidexterity, which argues that the best way of achieving ambidexterity is to create processes and/ or systems that enable employees to decide how and when to divide their time (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004). On the other hand, Raisch et al. (2009) argue that ambidexterity originates from individuals and the employees capabilities to manage contrasting demands are the determinants of an organisations performance. However, it needs to be noted that an empirically proven understanding of employee level ambidexterity is lacking (Jasmand et al., 2012). Moreover, some researchers note that there is still an active debate about if exploration and exploitation at an individual level exclude each other and that true ambidextrous managers actually exist (Gupta, Smith, & Shalley, 2006).

2.5. What are the defining characteristics of an ambidextrous SFLE?

As mentioned earlier there is an active debate about the possibility of ambidexterity manifesting in employees. Mom, Van Den Bosch and Volberda (2009) note that the challenges faced in trying to be ambidextrous are not insurmountable and they empirically proved that managers can both engage in exploration and exploitation activities. Their definition of ambidexterity is coined at a managerial level. They define ambidexterity as a manager whose behaviour combines both exploration and exploitation activities within a period of time (Mom et al., 2009). They further expand upon managerial ambidexterity as having three related characteristics:.

1. Managers **host contradictions**, which means that a manager needs to be able to pursue, understand, and recognise conflicting opportunities while maintaining or improving existing market positions (Mom et al., 2009; Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996).
2. Ambidextrous managers need to be **multitaskers.** Managers should aim to be generalists rather than specialists and aim to fulfil multiple roles and perform multiple tasks even outside of the confines of their jobs (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Mom et al., 2009).
3. Ambidextrous managers should aim to consistently work to **improve and renew their existing knowledge, skills and expertise** by acquiring and processing available knowledge and information (Floyd & Lane, 2000). Moreover, true ambidextrous managers engage in both reliability enhancing and variety increasing learning activities and try to immerse themselves in both local and distant sources of information within their network of contacts (Mom et al., 2009).

Another important aspect about ambidextrous behaviour is highlighted by Jasmand et al. (2012), they argue that ambidextrous behaviour can only occur when the conflicting

goals share some form of common ground and are in some way compatible. Furthermore, in their article they highlight some important characteristics that make employees behave more ambidextrously. First, they illustrate locomotive-oriented employees, which prefer to start working on a task as soon as it becomes available. This results in them tackling tasks without critically evaluating possible methods (Jasmand et al., 2012). Second, they mention assessment oriented employees. These are more critical of alternative solutions, and will carefully weigh outcomes before making a decision (Higgins, Kruglanski, & Pierro, 2003; Jasmand et al., 2012). However, they illustrate that there is a positive connection between the two orientations, despite seeming divergences in their approaches. They conclude that for an employee, a higher assessment orientation actually leads to a stronger locomotion orientation effect on ambidextrous behaviour (Jasmand et al., 2012).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND FINDINGS
3.1. Proposed conceptual framework
Reviewing the literature on Role ambiguity, its antecedents and outcomes in the context of an SFLE, it seems that most researchers focus on the effects of role ambiguity. Whereas, the link between ambidextrous behaviour and its effect on role ambiguity seems to be missing or under researched. To provide a better understanding of where this link lies the conceptual framework as seen in Figure 1 is proposed.

This conceptual framework allows for the discussion of ambidextrous coping strategies without being restrictive in its scope as all major aspects of role ambiguity and ambidextrous SFLE research is included. The model uses the stakeholders of an SFLE as a starting position and draws upon the stakeholder theory analysis of SFLEs. As noted before, all stakeholders should be considered equally important when looking at SFLEs. It is from the stakeholders that most cases of role ambiguity originate. In the literature review the most discussed antecedents are: (1) unclear job description, (2) process clarity, (3) consequence uncertainty, (4) leadership issues, (5) customers. The other five are to a lesser extent antecedents,

(performance, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and propensity to leave) as they are first and foremost performance measurements and their role as an antecedent rather than a measurement is not as widely researched. These antecedents then cause the role responses in an SFLE in the form of either role conflict or role ambiguity. These often negatively impact to a certain extent an SFLEs performance, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and their propensity to leave. However, if an SFLE has a certain set of characteristics that make them more inclined to be ambidextrous they can use their ambidexterity to employ coping strategies to try and minimise the effect of negative role responses on the performance measurements. As mentioned in subsection 2.4, the most important aspects of an ambidextrous SFLE is that they host contradictions, are strong multitaskers, aim to continuously improve their skill set, and that they are simultaneously locomotion and assessment oriented.

3.2. Methodology
The research in this thesis is considered secondary research as the academic information researched by other scholars is analysed and reviewed (Stewart & Kamins, 1993). The goal of a literature is often defined as a critical and systematic analysis of academic papers for the purpose of identification, evaluation, and interpretation (Fink, 2005; Galvan & Galvan, 2017). The study was based on a qualitative basis. Results were obtained by identifying and defining the key variables. Firstly, by defining role ambiguity and its antecedents. Secondly, by defining a SFLE and defining ambidextrous behaviour. Thirdly by identifying the key characteristics of an ambidextrous SFLE.

Ambidextrous coping strategies for SFLE seem to be a relatively untouched subject in research. Therefore a thorough search for sources was conducted by using the most important keywords in academic search engines such as Google Scholar, Scopus, JSTOR, and Web of Science. The main sources were collected and scanned for relevance to the research topic and subsequently categorised by which sub-question or main question they help in answering.
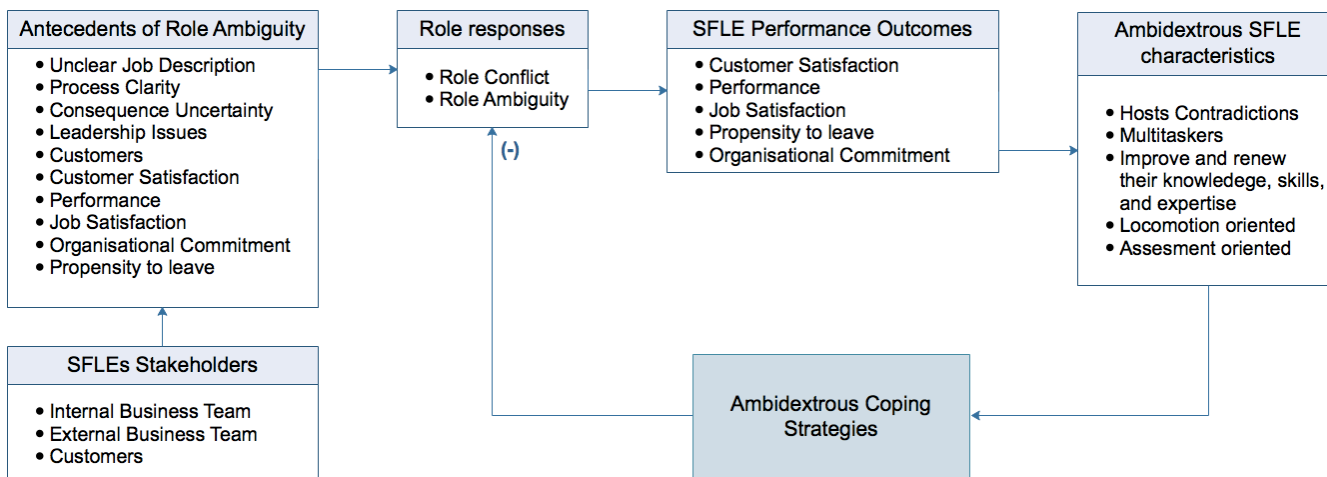

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of ambidextrous behaviour in coping with role ambiguity

3.3 Ambidextrous behaviour in coping with role ambiguity

Many firms have been developing organisational ambidexterity and individual ambidexterity as a solution and tool for achieving multiple goals (Evans, Arnold, & Grant, 1999). The ability to personally take charge in solving an ambiguity related problem may help in reducing the effectiveness of the problem (Antonioni, 1996). As role ambiguity is often seen as a form of stress for an employee, stress management strategies are methods that employees use to alter their working conditions or manage the problem in such a way that it becomes less stressful (Lazarus, 1995).

3.3.1. Conflict management as a strategy to cope with role ambiguity

One of the problem solving strategies that employees can employ is that of conflict management or conflict resolution management. Conflict management refers to the ability of an employee to know how to successfully address work related conflicts (Antonioni, 1996). Previous research on conflict resolution has identified four distinct conflict resolution strategies. Firstly, competition strategy is to firstly address one's own concerns without taking the concerns of the other party into account (Park & Antonioni, 2007). Secondly, accommodation strategy is to address the other party's conflict first while neglecting personal concerns. Thirdly, collaboration, often also referred to as integrating strategy is the attempt to solve the problem while trying to ensure that both or all parties are satisfied. Lastly, avoidance strategy is to just let the events unfold, this might result in none of the parties being satisfied with the end result.

Training SFLEs in the proper methods of conflict management allows them to better manage situations that involve role ambiguity (Antonioni, 1996). Interesting to note is that research has shown that aggressive conflict management tactics have a positive effect on role ambiguity related problems. Simons and Peterson (2000), show that when loudness in a conflict management strategy is constant it may serve as a basis on reducing the ambiguity related experience. Aggressive conflict management strategies often don't allow for differing issues to be established in the first place (Simons & Peterson, 2000). The ability of an employee to employ such a strategy could be done via assertiveness training (Antonioni, 1996). However, some researches note that such a strategy does not have to be employed in the first place if a sufficient amount of trust is built (Amason & Sapienza, 1997; Simons & Peterson, 2000). Conflict management strategies can be avoided or lessened if they are complemented by trust building initiatives and exercises between stakeholders (Simons & Peterson, 2000).

3.3.2. Clarification of expectations as a strategy to cope with role ambiguity

Another coping strategy that is often stressed in literature that SFLEs can employ is that of clarification of expectations. This strategy refers to the notion of individuals clarifying their work expectations, either verbally or in another form of

communication when they do not have the resources available to meet the expectations (Antonioni, 1996). It is important when clarifying the expectations that an employee is clear about how much workload he can process and establishing priorities when there are multiple workloads. An example of clarification is responsibility charting. A press in which an employee and its direct supervisor define the expected responsibilities by creating a diagram of roles held by management within the critical result areas of either the organisation or a specific business unit (Schaubroeck, Ganster, Sime, & Ditman, 1993). By analysing the critical result areas the procedure further employ a survey in which the employee provides the perceived role he plays in the critical result area. Similar research defines this process as a method of illustrating and analysing the organisational structure, departmental relationships, environmental assessments, strategic alternatives, job content, responsibilities and authority levels, and the decision making process (Korey, 1988). An important aspect that is often overlooked in traditional role clarification theory is the fact that the further development of this process declines rapidly after the initial introduction/socialisation into a new workplace (Schaubroeck et al., 1993). Often once the initial responsibilities and description are clarified often there are no further clarifications given. Once this state is reached, role ambiguity is inevitable without continuous refreshing of the role clarification process (Bauer & Simmons, 2000; Schaubroeck et al., 1993). In order for role clarification strategy to work it is important that within the work environment the following aspects are present and are continuously improved. Important to note is that role clarification should not only originate from the SFLE but should be performed in conjunction with the supervisors and management.

1. Goals must be clearly articulated. In order for the objectives to be clear they need to be top-down. This includes clarifying all expectations for each employee as well as defining the way as to achieve them in order to minimise process unclarity. Parameters need to include time and the performance measurements for the defined objectives (Bauer & Simmons, 2000).
2. Continuous training and improvements. The clarifications of goals need to be refreshed and efforts should be made to continuously educate employees as research has shown that training and education are excellent mitigators for role ambiguity (Van Sell et al., 1981).
3. Setting rewards. Having a reward system for employees is one of the most motivating prospects for employees as it is one of the primary sources of job satisfaction (Singh & Rhoads, 1991). Additionally, having a well structured reward system can serve as a method of goal clarification in itself (Bauer & Simmons, 2000).

3.3.3. Creativity as a coping strategy for role ambiguity

Although the role of creativity in coping with role ambiguity is relatively unexplored, it is rather often discussed as another performance measurement that role ambiguity negatively effects. However, SFLEs who experience role ambiguity could

potentially use creativity to minimise its effects. Employee creativity is often defined as the development of new ideas about practices, procedures, products and/or services that are new and of potential usefulness to an organisation (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Employees that are creative are better able to identify the needs of customers, find better ways to establish a positive and beneficial relationship and are better able to solve potential problems in a more efficient and effective way (Coelho, Augusto, & Lages, 2011; Grewal, Levy, & Kumar, 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009). The creative methods of dealing directly with customers greatly enhances customer value and are highly likely to produce significant results on customer satisfaction, quality and therefore on the organisational performance as a whole (Coelho et al., 2011).

Once organisations start recognising the value of promoting creativity in SFLEs and allowing SFLEs to come up with their own creative solutions to role ambiguity related problems, they can establish and implement methods to identify key characteristics that are associated with creativity and set up a work environment that stresses the importance of creativity.

4. DISCUSSION
4.1.Discussion of findings
The proposed conceptual model and the suggested ambidextrous coping strategies only make up a small amount of possible solutions for coping with role ambiguity. It seems that the coping strategies that SFLEs themselves employ to cope with role ambiguity is still an under-researched field. Due to this gap in research, the comparison of empirical findings that test and measure these strategies was difficult. This research tries to fill this gap by providing a conceptual framework that can serve as a guideline for further research. It builds on extensive existing literature in the field of both role ambiguity, ambidexterity and ambidexterity in the context of SFLEs.

A new conceptual model was proposed that shows where in the process of role ambiguity the coping strategies lie, which characteristics are important for an ambidextrous SFLE to have, and on which business performance measurements the effect of role ambiguity could be measured. Some coping strategies were proposed by authors, but the list did not prove to be exhaustive nor extensive. Most research focuses on using role theory in the context of leadership and leadership theories, in which the supervisors and managers of SFLEs and their strategies are considered in regard to reducing role ambiguity in employees. This seems logical as empirical evidence has shown that leader behaviour is one of the most effective methods. Especially, leader consideration and leader initiation structure are two widely researched topics. However, as it is helpful for employees to understand what is required from them and what their responsibilities and goals are, some form of role ambiguity is inevitable and if SFLEs themselves have effective coping strategies they will not hesitate to make decisions that allow them to quickly and effectively deal with it without resorting to trial and error.

4.2.Limitations and further research
This research is subjected to some limitations that can simultaneously serve as directions for further research in this field. Firstly the conceptual model is entirely based on existing literature and is not tested on SFLEs to evaluate its applicability and success. However it is assumed that since the model is an aggregation of existing models it should be applicable. Future research should test the conceptual framework on SFLEs and prove that these strategies actually help in coping with role ambiguity to ensure the applicability and validity of the framework.

Secondly the research does not focus on a specific type of SFLE as the literature was lacking in this field. It can be argued that the coping strategies might only work for some industries or certain types of SFLEs. Certain industries or certain types of SFLEs might have completely different approaches in dealing with role ambiguity.

Another important limitation is that the list of coping strategies is incomplete and does not cover all the possible strategies that SFLE can employ. A field study should be employed in which SFLEs are questioned or surveyed about which methods they employ to minimise their role ambiguity.

Fourthly the conceptual model makes no differentiation in which way the coping strategies effect which performance measurements as this has not been extensively studied. Future studies should investigate which coping strategies benefit which performance measurement and to what extent.

Additionally, the defining characteristics of an SFLE and to what extent these effect the coping strategies are also not explored. Future research could focus on which characteristics helps with which coping strategy.

5.CONCLUSION
Ambidextrous coping strategies are still an active research field, the role that these coping strategies play in role ambiguity is still not extensively researched. SFLEs are often considered to be one of the most important employees for an organisation. Their role in making or breaking an organisation cannot be understated. So it should be regarded as highly important to ensure that they do not suffer from role ambiguity as the effect of role ambiguity on business performance can be detrimental. More attention and resources should be spent on trying to find effective methods and strategies that SFLEs can employ to negate or minimise the effect of role ambiguity. Research on role ambiguities effect on business performance is extensive but the research into the entire loop as seen in the conceptual framework is lacking. Most attention is often spent on how top management can try and minimise role ambiguity but a clear understanding and methods as to how SFLEs themselves can try and cope with role ambiguity can only prove to increase business performance more.

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