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Networking Amidst Ambiguity: A Challenge for Managers

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Networking Amidst Ambiguity: A Challenge for Managers

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to uncover the relationship between different forms of workplace ambiguity and the networking behaviour of managers in public organisations. Public leaders are frequently made to handle numerous obstacles as part of their work, which can often include the emergence of ambiguity in their objectives, responsibilities or policies. Goal and role ambiguity have been known to have a significant effect on the behaviour of public workers, often increasing feelings of dissatisfaction as well as decreasing productivity. For this reason, academics have strived to closely study the influence of workplace ambiguity on the various roles that a manager performs on a day to day basis. This thesis aimed to make a contribution to this endeavour, by focusing on the networking behaviour of public managers and hypothesising whether different forms of ambiguity are positively or negatively related to its prevalence.

To accomplish this task, this thesis has drawn on academic literature on leadership behaviour, managerial networking, goal ambiguity, role ambiguity, and public organisations. Furthermore, this thesis used a quantitative approach for its research, utilising a large-N dataset collected by Leiden University and Erasmus University Rotterdam via an online survey. This data was used to test the hypotheses by conducting three regression analyses in SPSS. The results from these analyses suggested that within the social support teams in the Netherlands, the presence of goal ambiguity and role ambiguity are negatively related to the networking behaviour of team leaders.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Problem Definition:

The primary role of managers in public organisations is to ensure the successful running of their offices through effective leadership behaviour (Rainey and Steinbauer, 1999). This can become a difficult endeavour, as public institutions face numerous obstacles in their day-to-day operations that make the work of leaders increasingly difficult. One common factor that has been known to influence the work of public leaders is the presence of ambiguity within the workplace (Botti and Monda, 2019).

Ambiguity can arise in multiple forms within public organisations. For instance, it is well known that public organisations can often have multiple, vague, and even conflicting goals, and that this internal contention, known as goal ambiguity, can become a source of distress for employees (Botti and Monda, 2019). Similarly, ambiguity can also manifest around the duties and responsibilities of public workers, in a form known as role ambiguity. Role ambiguity arises due to a lack of clear information regarding the duties and responsibilities required to effectively perform in a particular position (Kahn, et. al, 1964).

Ambiguity has been studied in great detail within academic literature, and scholars have noted the significant effects it can have on the functioning of public organisations. For instance, several studies have linked the presence of goal ambiguity to occupational stress and higher turnover intention within the public sector. This results from employees feeling disconnected from their work due to its ambiguous importance, which in turn leads to lower organisational commitment and performance (Stazyk and Davis, 2020, p. 367). Additionally, various meta-analyses and studies have confirmed the detrimental consequences of role ambiguity, for both individuals and teams in the public sector (Jackson & Schuler, 1985). Negative effects are not the

only consequences of ambiguity however, as other scholars have pointed out its potential advantages, particularly for leaders. For instance, ambiguity can give managers greater leeway in interpreting contentious policies, which in turn grants them more discretion to achieve their desired results. In addition, ambiguity may help leaders to maintain cooperation among different stakeholders with conflicting interests and expand their professional networks (Eisenberg, 1984). This act of building cooperative relationships with other professionals is an activity known as networking, and is frequently cited as an important example of effective leadership behaviour by managers (Yukl, 2002, p. 53).

Despite the growing importance of networking for managers, few studies have delved deep into investigating its prevalence in the public sector. As the global economy becomes more and more interconnected and public systems become less hierarchical, managers are increasingly required to collaborate with individuals outside of their organisation. It is no longer sufficient for public leaders to only pay attention to internal operations. Instead, they often need to engage with external stakeholders in order to obtain resources, support, and information for their jobs (Hassan, et. al, 2018, p. 454). As a result, public service delivery in many countries is now accomplished by managers actively engaging in interorganizational networks, where they interact with both governmental and non-governmental actors on a consistent basis (Davis and Stazyk, 2014, p. 8).

Effective networking has already been linked to improvements in organizational performance, making its necessity in public organisations more and more evident (Hassan, et. al, 2018, p. 455). As the interdependency of governmental subunits increases, effective coordination between them becomes more essential. With that said, managerial networking is likely susceptible to the same hindrances as other leadership activities, and its prevalence among public managers may be determined by pre-existing factors, such as workplace ambiguity. Despite the literature on

goal ambiguity being widespread and varied, there hasn't been a considerable amount of attention placed on its relationship with the networking behaviour of managers. However, given the powerful influence of goal and role ambiguity on the performance of public organisations, it is easy to speculate that these forms of ambiguity may also influence the way in which leaders choose to network in their professional environments. For instance, goal ambiguity may potentially spur managers to expand their networks in order to accumulate greater environmental information, whereas role ambiguity may impede these networks from growing, by obscuring the networking responsibilities of managers.

1.2 Research Question:

This thesis aims to investigate the relationship between the different types of ambiguity found in the workplace and the networking behaviour of leaders in public organisations. As ambiguity can manifest itself in a wide variety of ways, this thesis has chosen to narrow its focus specifically to its two most prevalent forms, goal and role ambiguity. Additionally, this thesis will be drawing upon data which pertains to the networking behaviour of managers within social support teams across the Netherlands. These social support teams serve as a fitting case study for examining both workplace ambiguity and managerial networking behaviour. The interconnected nature of these teams causes networking to be an important and frequent activity of team leaders, and the greater discretionary power granted to these teams allows for a higher probability of ambiguity forming among workers.

Therefore, the research question for this thesis is:

How is the level of perceived goal ambiguity and role ambiguity within public organisations related to the networking behaviour of public managers?

1.3 Relevance:

This thesis seeks to make an academic contribution to the study of ambiguity within public organisations, as well as to the study of networking behaviour among public leaders. This subject matter is meaningful for two primary reasons - the pervasiveness of goal and role ambiguity throughout public institutions, and the growing importance of networking in the modern world.

Ambiguity appears more prominently in public rather than in private organisations, precisely because they operate in highly politicised environments and are tasked with confronting policy decisions that lack easy solutions (Stazyk and Davis, 2020, p. 365). The politicians who create the policies that govern the work of public organisations often hold competing values and preferences, and the resulting uncertainty manifests in the rules of these public organisations. Furthermore, public organisations are typically forced to deal with contentious social problems that inherently require sensitive value trade-offs, such as taxes, healthcare and housing. (Stazyk and Davis, 2020). The effects of this workplace ambiguity have been documented to be far-reaching on public institutions. Employees feeling disconnected from their work is a common symptom of this ambiguity, which in turn results in higher levels of occupational stress, higher levels of job turnover and lower individual and organisational performance (Stazyk and Davis, 2020).

Despite this significant influence from goal ambiguity on public organisations, there hasn't been many studies which have investigated its effects on the ability of leaders to build networks in their environment. This needs to be amended, as evidence has revealed that maintaining strong networks with their peers in other departments has become an integral part of the job of managers in public organisations (Meier, and O'Toole, 2001, p. 1). Furthermore, the decentralisation of the

Dutch health and welfare services since 2015 has led to the creation of interdependent social support teams throughout local municipalities. Public systems that attempt to disperse power can make networking even more imperative for service delivery. Therefore, for interdependent teams such as these, the capability to network has become more pressing, hence the importance of investigating its prevalence even further (Zijl, et. al, 2021). Uncovering the influence of ambiguity on managerial networking may allow leaders to improve their networking behaviour, which in turns helps improve the delivery of public services.

1.4 Structure:

This thesis will be comprised of five additional chapters. Chapter 2 will outline the theoretical framework by conceptualising the independent variables, goal ambiguity and role ambiguity, as well as the dependent variable, managerial networking. Additionally, this chapter will present the hypotheses to be tested in this thesis, which will outline the theoretical relationship that exists between workplace ambiguity and networking. In chapter 3, the methodology used for data collection and data analysis will be explained, along with the operationalisation of the concepts. Chapter 4 will present the results from the research design, and in chapter 5, these results will be fully analysed and discussed. Finally, chapter 6 will conclude the paper by answering the research question and by giving closing remarks regarding the limitations of the research and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This chapter seeks to conceptualise the independent and dependent variables that will be used in this thesis paper, as well as outline the hypotheses which will test the effects of goal and role ambiguity on the networking behaviour of team leaders.

2.1 Managerial Networking

A key feature of effective leaders is their ability to enlist the necessary people to accomplish a desired task. This activity is part of the process called ‘networking’, which refers to the building and maintaining of cooperative relationships by managers with peers, superiors, and people outside their work unit (Yukl, 2002, p. 53). This essential activity of managers is also listed as one of the main features of external leadership behaviour in Gary Yukl’s taxonomy of leadership.

Networking can include a wide variety of activities, such as gathering information, obtaining assistance from other organisations, negotiating agreements to coordinate activities, and promoting the interests of the unit by serving as its spokesperson (Yukl, 2002, p. 53). In general, high-level managers spend more time networking with external actors than lower level managers. Furthermore, the networks of higher-level officials can potentially consist of hundreds of people both inside and outside of their organization. These networks can potentially grow to become gigantic, as ambitious endeavours from governments often require large networks between multiple subunits in order to deliver public services (Yukl, 2002, p. 36).

Professional networks can be developed in a variety of locations and environments, which is why many managers put significant effort into attending meetings and professional conferences, joining associations and committees, doing favours for peers and socialising informally at professional associations (Yukl, 2002, p. 53). Networks not only include formal relations between colleagues but also includes a wide variety of informal coalitions between people united by a common interest. Furthermore, the types of people that become enveloped into a manager’s network can also be varied, and can include customers, clients, suppliers, subcontractors, members

of other government agencies, important community members, and even other managers (Yukl, 2002, p. 25). Public managers must actively engage with their network partners in order for them to remain strong and viable. Networking is by no means a simple endeavour and it often requires managers to make many difficult decisions on how to proceed on a daily basis. For instance, managers must constantly decide on how much time and energy they should invest into each relationship, and which actors to include in their professional circle (Meier and O'Toole, 2001, p. 4). Other strategic choices that managers need to make when engaging in networks includes knowing what resources to ask for, what positions to take on certain issues, identifying strategic opportunities, negotiating with other actors and coordinating activities (Meier and O'Toole, 2001, p. 5).

The act of networking is performed by managers for three primary reasons - to secure resources, reduce environmental turbulence and to acquire legitimacy. While managers usually have access to opportunities and resources that are not privy to subordinates, they can still find themselves in situations where they are without the necessary resources they need for performing their jobs. This is particularly true in public organisations where resource scarcity is a common problem (Stazyk and Davis, 2020, p. 370). For this reason, networking for public managers becomes a vital tool for acquiring important resources, such as information. In this way, networking can often overlap with another of Yukl's external leadership activities, called external scanning. External scanning can include scanning the external environment and collecting information regarding relevant changes, events, actors and threats to the organization (Yukl, 2002, p. 53). By engaging in their wider environment and building relationships with influential people inside and outside their organisation, managers can accumulate social capital, which in turn can be used to gain resources, such as information, technical assistance, and financial support (Yukl,

2002, p. 53). This can strengthen the managers standing within their own organisation and allow them to effectively accomplish their desired goals. Thus, networking can be a strong source of informal power by connecting leaders with people of different expertise. As managers are unable to be specialists in every field, it is important for their work that they can rely on competent people who have desirable skills.

Environmental information is often among the valuable resources obtained by leaders from networking, as it acts as a clarifying force that allows them to anticipate the future needs of their organisation (Davis and Stazyk, 2014, p. 20). Consulting with members of their network, such as clients and suppliers, helps ensure that decisions affecting managers are understood and accepted. It is also a way to learn more about their needs and preferences, improve coordination and solve mutual problems (Yukl, 2002, p. 109). In essence, networking can allow managers to accurately assess the broader environmental variables that could potentially affect their organisations performance. In addition to functioning as a clarifying force, managerial networks can also help stabilise environmental turbulence for public organisations. Rather than allow environmental changes to dictate the goals of the organisation, networking allows managers to get ahead of external shocks by collaborating with like-minded partners and influence external demands to their favour. This can be accomplished by stabilising patterns of exchange with other organisations embedded within their environment (Davis and Stazyk, 2014, p. 20).

Finally, networks also grant public organisations with greater legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Legitimacy has been defined as “a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate, within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). External legitimacy is granted to an organisation by its broader societal environment, whereas internal legitimacy emerges from the

acceptance of an organisation by its internal constituencies (Suchman, 1995). Kumar and Das have argued that the search for legitimacy serves a critical role in the formation of network alliances (Kumar and Das, 2007). Being accepted by your environment as legitimate is vital for public organisations, who frequently interact with the wider public. The belief that an organisation is competent at their services and worthy of being trusted in cooperative projects is a vital aspect that stakeholders consider when forming networks, particularly when taking financial risks (Kumar and Das, 2007). Managers understand that they need to be perceived correctly or else they will not be able to effectively influence networks to their own advantage. Public organisations may fail at providing their services, not due to a lack of resources, but rather due to their failure at building legitimacy within their environments (Low and Johnston, 2008, p. 873). This provides public leaders a strong incentive to strengthen their networks and expand it as much as possible. Legitimacy is a particularly important motivator for public organisations, as they often hold a reputation with the general public as lacking competency (Pierre and Peters, 2017).

2.2 Goal Ambiguity

Due to its pervasiveness in the academic literature, various definitions have been proposed throughout the years for goal ambiguity. With that said, most definitions of ambiguity seem to incorporate the concept of there being competing interpretations for one phenomenon. Chun and Rainey (2005) for instance, define goal ambiguity as the extent to which an organisational goal or set of goals allows leeway for interpretation. This is supported by Feldman (1989), who stated that ambiguity means “the state of having many ways of thinking about the same circumstances or phenomena.” (Jung, 2011, p. 197).

In order to expand on this concept, Chun and Rainey further developed four dimensions of goal ambiguity as a way to help identify how ambiguity affects organisational performance. These dimensions include mission comprehension ambiguity, directive goal ambiguity, evaluative goal ambiguity, and priority goal ambiguity (Chun and Rainey, 2005).

Mission comprehension ambiguity refers to the level of interpretive leeway that an organisational mission allows in comprehending, explaining, and communicating its mission. This ambiguity can diminish when the mission statements of the organisation are clear, understandable and widely communicated among employees. In contrast, directive goal ambiguity can occur when an organisation attempts to translate its mission goals into tangible directives and mission guidelines. If the goal definitions are not precise, they end up leaving room for interpretation in how they should be translated into concrete activities for the organisation (Chun and Rainey, 2005, p. 532). Evaluative goal ambiguity, on the other hand, emerges when organisations attempt to evaluate the progress they have made towards their end-goals. The goals of public services are often not able to be measured objectively, which can create ambiguity in how people interpret the success or failure of organisational activities. Finally, priority goal ambiguity refers to the degree of interpretive leeway when deciding on what goals to prioritise over others. It is inevitable in public organisations that some goals take precedence over others due to a lack of resources, but ambiguity can arise when stakeholders cannot agree on what activities should take priority for the group (Chun and Rainey, 2005, p. 535).

While many of these definitions seem to agree on the basic characteristics of goal ambiguity, they differ on its conceptual boundaries with other topics. For instance, some scholars prefer to distinguish between the term ambiguity and the more general concept of uncertainty. This is because while uncertainty is simply caused by a lack of information, ambiguity can also arise

for other reasons, such as a lack of resources or due to the multifaceted nature of many public goals (Yoon, 2020, p. 10). Similarly, it is unclear whether concepts such as goal ambiguity, goal complexity, and goal conflict should be treated as interrelated, but separate constructs, or whether goal ambiguity can serve as a general concept to incorporate all of these phenomena together (Chun and Rainey, 2005, p. 533). To make matters more complicated, two of the dimensions outlined by Chun and Rainey, directive and evaluative goal ambiguity, are arguably redundant, as the issues that they describe are already incorporated by other scholars into the concept of role ambiguity (Chun and Rainey, 2005, p. 533). Amidst this conceptual confusion therefore, this thesis has chosen to utilise Chun and Rainey's definition of goal ambiguity, specifically in regards to the ambiguity that arises around the mission statements of the organisation. In sum, goal ambiguity can be defined as the condition in which the goal or set of goals of an organisation allows leeway for interpretation by workers.

Many scholars have noted that public organisations seem to be subject to greater levels of goal ambiguity than private companies, although the origins of this ambiguity are often debated. Some academics have argued that goal ambiguity is inherent to the structure of the public sector, due to the legal requirements on public institutions often being greater than their private counterparts, and the fact that their ideals are typically more obscure and intangible than just financial profits (Stazyk and Davis, 2020, p. 367). Other scholars offer more comprehensive explanations for the emergence of goal ambiguity in the public sector. For instance, research performed by Chun and Rainey has highlighted several explanatory factors to account for the prevalence of this goal ambiguity. These factors include both political influences as well as the institutional characteristics of the organisations themselves (Chun and Rainey, 2005).

Political influences are a key cause of goal ambiguity within public organisations. The politicians who create the policies that govern the work of public organisations often hold competing values and preferences, and the resulting uncertainty manifests in the rules of these public organisations (Stazyk and Davis, 2020, p. 367). Directive goal ambiguity is particularly affected by this process, as competing demands from constituencies creates the need for managers to compromise, which in turn leads to vague mandates on organisations (Chun and Rainey, 2005, p. 7). Chun and Rainey have also highlighted how institutional characteristics can make public goals more ambiguous. For instance, the particular policy issues that a public organisation contends with as well as the degree of complexity that a policy entails can affect the amount of ambiguity found within public workspaces. Other institutional characteristics that have been identified as possible causal factors for goal ambiguity include the agency size, the age of the agency, and the organisation's financial publicness (Chun & Rainey, 2005).

As noted previously, ambiguity in the workplace is often characterised as a negative feature within public organisations. This notion is not without merit, as numerous studies have shown that goal ambiguity in organisations is often related to lower organisational performance (Chun and Rainey, 2005). This is due to how ambiguity within the work environment can cause employees to feel emotionally disconnected and less committed to their work, as well as leading to increases in the level of occupational stress and job turnover (Stazyk and Davis, 2020, p. 367). Goal setting theory therefore suggests that setting clear and specific goals will assure greater efficiency for these organisations by reducing this ambiguity.

Based on these effects on workplace performance, an understandable conclusion one could draw is that managerial networking is similarly negatively influenced by the presence of goal ambiguity. However, other scholars have noted the potential benefits of goal ambiguity within the

workplace, particularly for leaders. In contrast to goal setting theory, academic writers such as Eisenberg have argued that organisational goals which are overly specific can in fact have negative consequences for organisations and their leaders (Eisenberg, 1984). Instead, a certain amount of goal ambiguity is needed for complex and conflictual environments like the public sector. Similarly, Rainey and Jung have also acknowledged that excessive goal clarity may be counterproductive for public organisations, and instead ambiguity can be beneficial and necessary for their functioning (Rainey and Jung, 2015).

Clarity and precision can in fact place limits on the initiative of managers, as concrete mission statements can create points of contention between stakeholders that may otherwise have been ignored. Scholars such as Leitch and Davenport have argued that mission statements which hold a degree of vagueness can allow for internal and external stakeholders with different interpretations to be united under one mission statement (Jackson and Davenport, 2003, p. 130). The greater the diversity of goals within an organisation, the greater the importance of strategic ambiguity in forming bonds between groups. This strategic use of goal ambiguity is even more applicable to public organisations due to the prevalence of conflicting goals within them. With this in mind, ambiguity surrounding the goals and mission statements of an organisation can grant managers greater leeway to engage in their networking behaviour. The interpretive leeway granted by goal ambiguity may give leaders greater flexibility in choosing how to expand their own personal networks to include people they may otherwise not have considered (Leitch and Davenport, 2003, p. 130).

In addition to its strategic benefits, goal ambiguity may also promote the networking behaviour of managers by acting as an instigator for networks to emerge. Acquiring resources, such as information, serves as one of the key motivations for managers to network with external

actors. With this in mind, the presence of goal ambiguity in the workplace may actually spur managers to expand their networks in order to acquire more environmental information about what is expected of them in their roles. Acquiring more goal-relevant information can serve as a strong motivator for public leaders to broaden their networks and seek help from their peers and superiors (Davis and Stazyk, 2014). As it is natural for people to seek help from others in the midst of uncertainty, a lack of goal clarity could therefore promote the creation of informal networks within organisations.

With this in mind, it can be theorised that:

H1: The presence of goal ambiguity in public organisations is positively related to the networking behaviour of public managers.

2.3 Role Ambiguity

As mentioned previously, the concept of role ambiguity overlaps heavily with certain dimensions of goal ambiguity, yet many scholars agree that its features are distinguishable enough to merit its own category (Eys and Carron, 2001). Similar to goal ambiguity, role ambiguity has been defined numerous ways by scholars throughout the years. Kahn, et. al (1964), for instance, described it as the lack of clear, consistent information regarding the actions required to perform in a particular position. According to Kahn et al. (1964) employees require clear, consistent task-relevant information in order to prevent this ambiguity from emerging (Eys and Carron, 2001, p. 356). This information can include the duties and responsibilities of their role, as well as how their activities will fulfil their responsibilities (Levinson, 1965). When their expectations are not clear to them, subordinates will naturally attempt to meet these expectations through trial and error, and are more likely to hesitate in decision making (Rizzo et al. 1970). Similarly, Rizzo et al. (1970)

has defined role ambiguity as the lack of clarity regarding the day to day plans of an organisation, as well as the uncertainty on how to perform assigned jobs. In this context, role clarity refers to the extent to which an employee knows what is expected of them for the adequate performance of their tasks and responsibilities (Rizzo et al. 1970).

The emergence of role ambiguity can be explained by several different factors. Many academics consider this kind of ambiguity inherent to highly complex jobs, where the nature of the work is exceptionally difficult, such as roles attempting to deliver public services. This complexity can arise naturally over time, such as when the size of the organisation increases, complexity in organisational planning and the division of labour also increases with it (Chang and Goldman, 1990). Alternatively, role ambiguity can arise due to personnel changes, inadequate communication among workers, administrative inexperience and in environments that experience constant change (Chang and Goldman, 1990).

Role ambiguity can especially arise among workers in public organisations, due to the multiple work roles they are required to fulfil at the same time, including both formal and informal roles. Formal roles refer to specific, task-related behaviours which are seen as essential to the position of the worker, and which explicitly helps bolster the effectiveness of their organisation (Eys and Carron, 2001, p. 359). In contrast, informal roles are often not officially assigned to individuals, but instead arise gradually as time goes by. These roles are potentially hazardous, as their unofficial nature may mean that subordinates can be unaware of their affiliation with these roles. Informal roles emerge from continuous interactions and communication among team members, although they may not be explicitly acknowledged by anyone in the office (Eys and Carron, 2001, p. 359). Examples of such roles could include one employee being informally

charged with the responsibility of sending email reminders to other team members about future group meetings.

Furthermore, role ambiguity has been conceptualised as a multi-dimensional construct by Kahn et. al, and encompasses two additional types of ambiguity. The first type, task ambiguity, arises due to the lack of task-related information in order for employees to perform their roles (Eys and Carron, 2001, p. 357). This information can include the scope of their responsibilities, what activities they are expected to prioritise and what activities will allow them to accomplish their responsibilities. Another type of role ambiguity identified by Kahn et al. (1964) was socioemotional ambiguity. This ambiguity is formed by a lack of information concerning the psychological consequences of employees failing to carry out their expected performances (Eys and Carron, 2001, p. 357).

Various meta-analyses and studies have confirmed the detrimental consequences of role ambiguity for both individuals and teams (Jackson and Schuler, 1985). For instance, Bedeian and Armenakis found that role ambiguity was associated with only negative consequences, such as higher levels of job-induced stress, job turnover and job dissatisfaction (Bedeian and Armenakis, 1981). The emotional costs of role ambiguity may not be felt at first, but they begin to mount over time. As individuals become dissatisfied and frustrated with their job, they often begin to experience feelings of futility at their work. Additionally, as organisations grow in size, more individuals become involved in organisational planning, which inevitably exceeds the span of comprehension for individual workers (Juhan, 1993, p. 34).

This is particularly relevant to the networking behaviour of managers. Trust and cooperation suffer due to the increase in uncertainty and the loss in confidence. As a result, this

ambiguity produces emotional strain on relationships, and network connections begin to break apart (Juhan, 1993, p. 35). In order to reduce the presence of role ambiguity, clarity and predictability are needed for intricate social systems, which often suffer from organisational complexity or rapid change.

Despite their conceptual similarities, the effects of role ambiguity can differ to that of goal ambiguity, especially in how it relates to the motivations of managers. Unlike goal ambiguity, where leaders become unsure about their overall mission, role ambiguity prevents workers from knowing what the first step is to achieving their goals. Networking requires a conscious, proactive effort from leaders, which becomes difficult if they are confused about what activities they should be performing. Therefore, while goal ambiguity may persuade managers to expand their networks in order to acquire more information, role ambiguity can have a discouraging effect on managers through lowering their self-esteem and confidence in their capabilities.

This demotivating effect of role ambiguity may stop leaders from making the extra effort to put themselves out there and engage in activities where they could form personal connections. Networking can be one of the more strenuous activities that a leader performs, and the behaviour does not come naturally to everyone. It often requires leaders to perform activities that go beyond the bare minimum of their official jobs, such as attending events, and socialising with like-minded individuals (Yukl, 2002, p. 53). If leaders begin to feel demotivated in their job by the effects of role ambiguity, then their networking behaviour may be the first aspect of their work to feel these negative effects. Networking behaviour is also performed for the purposes of relieving environmental turbulence and establishing legitimacy for organisations (Kumar and Das, 2007). But in a similar fashion, role ambiguity may only negatively impede these ambitions. Managers that do not fully understand their roles within the organisation will inevitably lead to a

mismanagement of time and energy, which in turn could prevent team leaders from proactively tackling external shocks in their environment.

As a result, it can be theorised that:

H2: The presence of role ambiguity in public organisations is negatively related to the networking behaviour of public managers

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design of this thesis that will be used to investigate the hypotheses. It will begin by explaining the data collection process and the sampling strategy used within the research, and then outline the operationalisation of the chosen variables. It will finish with a description of the analysis strategy.

3.1 Research Design

To test the hypotheses, this thesis chooses to use empirical, quantitative survey data collected from social support professionals and their team leaders across the Netherlands. While both qualitative and quantitative methods can be advantageous for public administration research, quantitative research is particularly useful for studying human attitudes and behaviour. Quantitative research conforms to more traditional, scientific methods of data collection and analysis, and the results are easier to be generalised to a whole population, as they often compile data from a much wider pool of respondents than their qualitative counterparts. The use of statistical data also reduces the time and effort it takes for researchers to analyse and describe their findings. Data in the form of measurable figures can be calculated faster and easier, using computer software, such as the statistical package for social science (SPSS) (Eyisi, 2016, p. 94).

Furthermore, a precedent already exists within various scholarly articles for using quantitative data to study ambiguity and networking behaviour in public organisations. Academic writers such as Chun, Rainey, Jung, Kahn, Meier and O'Toole are all examples of scholars who have successfully measured these variables in a quantitative manner.

The particular dataset used for this thesis consists of survey results collected among municipal social support teams in the Netherlands. These teams have existed in the Netherlands since 2015, in response to new legislation that sought to decentralise the health and welfare responsibilities of the government to local municipalities. This process of decentralisation assumed that municipalities were better equipped to provide more tailor-fit social care to citizens, as well as reduce budgetary expenses through delivering social services more efficiently (Zijl, et. al, 2021). Furthermore, these teams are composed of professionals from various disciplinary backgrounds, including youth care, financial support, welfare, employment, and addiction. These workers are brought together to provide higher quality services to their clients, by reducing bureaucracy and increasing interprofessional collaboration (Zijl, et. al, 2021).

These social support teams serve as a useful setting to study the networking behaviour of leaders and the effects of ambiguity on public organisations. Since the introduction of these new reforms, concerns have been raised regarding their implementation and feasibility (Maarse and Jurissen, 2016, p. 243). The interdependence of these teams can cause uncertainty to arise regarding their specific goals and responsibilities, resulting in goal and role ambiguity among team members. Professionals are made to choose between multiple courses of action based on vague policy goals, while at the same time having limited resources at their disposal. Within these teams, the behaviours of their leaders can play a vital role in ensuring that workers maintain their

efficiency in the face of workplace uncertainty (Maarse and Jeurissen, 2016). Therefore, this case study provides a fitting opportunity to examine the central research question and study the relationship of leadership networking behaviour and goal ambiguity in the workplace.

3.2 Data Collection

The 'Teamwork in the Neighbourhood' study has collected data on the functioning and performance of social support teams every year since the beginning of the decentralisation process in 2015 (Zijl, et. al, 2021). This study collected ordinal data on over 180 variables, in order to study the respondents' perceptions on various topics. In total, 87 executive teams in five municipalities participated in the survey. These teams were located in Rotterdam, Capelle aan den IJssel, Delft, Tilburg, and Amsterdam. However, in the interest of ensuring a fair representation, only teams that had at least 30% participation rate among its members were included in the analysis. As a result, data from 70 teams, along with 69 team leaders, was used in the analysis of these survey results (Zijl, et. al, 2021).

Additionally, a 1-5-point Likert Scale was used to measure most of the items in the survey. The Likert Scale is popular in survey research due to its simplicity and ease of use. It allows participants to rank their attitudes and perceptions along a continuum, in this case from 1-5. The scale also allows researchers to combine several items together into an index to form more comprehensive, multiple-indicator measurements. The five categories used as part of this scale included "Totally disagree", "Partly disagree", "Not agree/Not disagree", "Partly agree" and "Totally agree" (Zijl, et. al, 2021).

3.3 Operationalisation

This thesis seeks to investigate the relationship between different forms of ambiguity in public organisations and the networking behaviour of leaders in social support teams. To accomplish this task, the concepts of goal ambiguity, role ambiguity and networking need to be operationalised so that their presence can be numerically measured and analysed. Additionally, in order to ensure that the selected items measure the same concepts, Cronbach's alpha will be used to test each variable for reliability. The level of agreement between the items is measured by using a 0 to 1 scale, with higher values indicating greater consistency between the response values of the participants. This ensures that our variables are reliably measuring the correct characteristics within our research.

Operationalising Managerial Networking

In previous chapters, networking as a concept has been defined as the building and maintaining of cooperative relationships by leaders with people outside their work unit (Yukl, 2002, p. 53). By using this definition as a starting point, the networking behaviour of team leaders can be operationalised as the level of activity performed by group leaders in expanding their external relationships. At first glance, this is a difficult variable to quantify due to the abstract nature of relationships. Retrieving information from leaders themselves regarding their networking behaviour may also be unproductive, as the effect of 'social desirability' means that leaders may give non-accurate answers about their own work due to social expectations and the fear of negative judgements (Botti and Monda, 2019).

Therefore, this variable is instead empirically measured by collecting data on the perceptions of employees about their leaders' networking activities. To this end, three items were chosen to measure this perceived behaviour. Team members were asked to indicate to what extent

they agreed with 3 statements, with possible answers ranging 1-5, from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”. These statements included "My team leader maintains a broad network among outsiders of the team.", “My team leader invests in external partnerships that can provide support.” and “My team leader uses his/her social networks or other external contacts to obtain information.”

Cronbach's alpha was used to find the internal consistency of this variable. The Cronbach's alpha for this variable was 0.908, indicating that the three-item scale is an internally high consistent measurement.

Operationalising Goal Ambiguity

Problems have arisen when researchers have previously tried to empirically measure goal ambiguity within public organisations. Some scholars have tried to measure goal ambiguity through subjective data, via surveys and interviews, where ambiguity is measured by the perception of respondents (Botti and Monda, 2019). The first studies that attempted to assess the level of goal ambiguity measured this perception of ambiguity among public and private managers and found no substantial difference between the two groups. This type of analysis was later criticised by other scholars, as it once again did not account for the problem of social desirability among the answers given by public managers. Additionally, the questions asked in these surveys were deemed too simplistic and did not measure goal ambiguity accurately enough (Botti and Monda, 2019). This prompted scholars to consider better strategies for measuring organisational goal ambiguity than simplistic questionnaire items (Jung, 2014, p. 206). The second group of researchers included the likes of Chun and Rainey, who have attempted to evaluate goal ambiguity through ‘objective measures’, by using secondary data provided by the organisations themselves.

Drawing upon the theoretical framework of previous research, goal ambiguity can be operationalised as the perceived level of ambiguity that team members feel regarding their

organisation's goals. In this dataset, this was measured using a five-items scale, where respondents were asked to what degree on a scale from 1-5, with 5 being "Totally agree", did they agree with statements regarding their organisation's goals. Examples of such these statements included "I know my team's mission" and " I know exactly what is expected of me." This degree of clarity measured by these answers were then recoded into a new variable that directly reflects the level of ambiguity experienced by team members. The reliability of this five-item scale is high ($\alpha = 0.876$).

Operationalising Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity has previously been examined from multiple perspectives, including objectively, using physical or environmental factors, and subjectively, by investigating the perceptions of workers. These two perspectives are usually intertwined, as the presence of objective role ambiguity is often accompanied by evidence of subjective role ambiguity (Eys and Carron, 2001). For instance, employees may receive all the information that is hypothetically needed for their roles, but they may not fully understand this information, or interpret it incorrectly due to poor instructions (Eys and Carron, 2001). This dataset chose to measure role ambiguity in a subjective manner, with particular attention given to the perceived task ambiguity found within their teams.

Role ambiguity is therefore operationalised as the perceived level of ambiguity reported by team members regarding what their responsibilities are and how to perform their tasks. Similar to goal ambiguity, this was measured using a five-items scale, where respondents were asked to what degree they agreed with statements regarding their responsibilities as part of their welfare teams. An example of such a statement includes "I know the best approach to do my job". The degree of clarity measured by these answers were then recoded into a new variable that measures the level

of ambiguity experienced by team members. The reliability of this five-item scale is also high ($\alpha = 0.892$).

Operationalising the Control Variables

A number of control variables were examined as part of this research. General demographic variables such as the age, gender and the educational background of managers were considered when conducting the analysis, in addition to potential confounding variables such as the presence of work-related stress and the managerial experience of team leaders.

Numerous studies have investigated the influence of gender on the networking behaviour of workers. While no major disparities were detected between men and women when it came to their network sizes, it has been shown that male workers display more homophily in their network behaviour than their female counterparts (Mengel, 2015). This may affect the particular types of activities that male leaders engage in when performing their network behaviour. For this reason, gender was used as a control and was recoded as a dummy variable for our analyses.

Age may also be an important variable to consider when studying the leadership behaviour of public managers, because older managers may have greater experience in practicing their networking behaviour with external actors. Likewise, managers who admitted to having prior experience in a leadership position are also more likely to have experience in networking with their peers. Time is needed to be spent building trust with relevant actors and developing strong ties with colleagues. In the formative years acting as a leader, managers may put greater effort into building a reputation and gaining legitimacy. But as their reputation becomes more well established, managers need to expend less time establishing and relying on their networks (Hansen and Villadsen, 2017, p. 8).

The type of education that a manager had can also potentially have an effect on all of their day-to-day activities, including networking. Most high-ranking managers have similar educational backgrounds, often having degrees in political science, economics or law (Hansen and Villadsen, 2017, p. 8). The managers who took part in the survey were split between those who have a higher vocational education (HBO) degree and those who completed a WO bachelor's programme. While both degrees are examples of higher-level education, managers with an HBO background hypothetically have greater education in practice-based research and practical training, rather than scientific research. For this reason, it is possible that managers with different educational backgrounds have different approaches to networking. Additionally, the educational background that managers have may help determine what social opportunities are afforded to them in order to form personal relations with other colleagues. With that said, it is also possible that managers with higher educational backgrounds may feel less of a need to cultivate professional relationships, as the knowledge and expertise they gained at university may lower their need to rely on the benefits of networking (Hansen and Villadsen, 2017, p. 8). Therefore, the educational background of managers was also recoded into a dummy variable to be used as a control in this research.

Finally, the degree of stress reported by team members may also function as a significant confounding variable for the relationship between ambiguity and networking. Work-related stress can arise for a variety of reasons and is quite prominent in public organisations due to a lack of resources as well as the contentious nature of their work (West and West, 1989). Work-related stress can result in worker confusion and a lowering of their self-esteem, which in turn allows greater ambiguity to emerge in the workplace. Work-related stress may also motivate managers to enlarge their networks as a way to acquire more resources and alleviate the stress felt within their unit. This variable was measured by combining five items to form a scale. These items asked

respondents to what degree they agreed with statements regarding the difficulty of their jobs. For instance, respondents were asked if they agreed that their work was “emotionally demanding” and “causes a lot of frustration” ($\alpha = 0.789$).

3.4 Analysis Strategy

After operationalising these variables, the next step in data research is conducting a correlation analysis for the data using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29) predictive analytics software. This analysis provides insight into the magnitude of the relationships between the chosen variables. The final step of this research involves conducting multiple linear regression analyses, which allow for the inclusion of multiple control variables. These regression analyses will reveal the predictive strength and effect size of the independent and control variables on the dependent variable.

The methodological approach outlined in this chapter helps grant acceptable levels of reliability and validity to the research of this thesis. Relying on the perception of workers as opposed to the self-reports of managers for measuring networking allows the research to bypass the issue of managers overestimating their own work, either deliberately or accidentally. Previous studies have shown that team leaders have a tendency to be poor judges of their own leadership behaviour and overrate their managerial activities (Jacobsen and Andersen, 2015). Additionally, using the perceptions of workers to measure our independent and dependent variables grants us a bigger pool of respondents to get answers from, which in turn increases the accuracy of our measurements.

All of our independent and dependent variables have been measured through the combination of multiple items in the survey, instead of relying on a single question. This is

beneficial for ensuring that the correct concept in question is being measured. The questions themselves were also carefully chosen to ensure that their wording is not too broad, as specificity helps guarantee that the variables are not unintendedly measuring something else.

The validity of this research is also supported by its similarities with previous studies on networking and ambiguity. For instance, Pandey and Rainey's 2006 study measured the perceived level of organisational ambiguity through asking managers questions such as whether the mission of the organization is clear to members, or whether the goals are simple enough to explain (Pandey and Rainey, 2006). Similarly, Van der Hoek et. al (2018) measured the perceived level of goal clarity among public teams by using survey questions to form a three-item scale (Van der Hoek et. al, 2018). Therefore, given its similarity to previous academic studies, it can be confidently accepted that this research design is sufficiently reliable and valid.

Chapter 4: Research Results

This chapter will begin with an overview of the descriptive statistics concerning the chosen variables. Following this, the relationship between the variables will be investigated using a bivariate correlation analysis. Finally, multiple linear regression analyses will be performed on the variables in order to test the hypotheses.

4.1 Correlation Analysis

Table 4.1 highlights the relevant statistical information from this dataset concerning the independent and dependent variables, as well the chosen control variables. After removing answers with incomplete or unusable data, the dataset contained 820 participants in total (N = 820). As

shown by the table, the respondents surveyed were approximately 19.3% male and 80.7% female. Additionally, the age distribution of the participants falls between 32 and 65, with an average age of 48.56 (standard deviation = 8.09). In terms of their educational status, all leaders hold either a higher vocational degree (HBO = 71.7%) or university degree (WO = 28.3%).

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics (N = 820)

		Frequency	%	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Networking				4.065	.942	1	5
Goal Ambiguity				2.051	1.00	1	6
Role Ambiguity				1.577	.688	1	5
Workplace Stress				3.858	.784	2	5
Gender					.395	0	1
	Male	158	19.3				
	Female	662	80.7				
Age				48.56	8.09	32	65
Managerial Experience					.412	0	1
	Yes	642	78.3				
	No	178	21.7				
Education Type					.451	0	1
	(HBO)	588	71.7				
	(WO)	232	28.3				

A correlation analysis was next performed, where the linear association between the variables was measured using the Pearson correlation coefficient. Table 4.2 reveals that there is a moderate negative correlation between the perceived networking behaviour of team leaders and the perceived level of goal ambiguity among team members at the 0.01 level ($\rho = -.371$; sig. = .000). This suggests that the less goal ambiguity that exists among team members, the greater the level of networking performed by managers. This could be explained by the negative effects associated with goal ambiguity, such as job turnover, forcing managers to place priority on other aspects of their work besides networking. Similarly, the perceived level of role ambiguity seemed to have a negative, but lower correlation with the networking behaviour of leaders ($\rho = -.238$; sig. = .000). Finally, the educational background of team leaders appears to have a weak, positive correlation with their networking behaviour ($\rho = .086$; sig. = .014), which suggests that managers with an HBO degree are marginally more likely to be perceived engaging in networking behaviour than managers with a WO degree. In contrast, the age, gender and managerial experience of team leaders seem to have a negligible correlation to their networking behaviour.

Table 4.2: Bivariate Correlation Analysis

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Networking Behaviour	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1							
2.Goal Ambiguity	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	-.371**	1						
3.Role Ambiguity	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	-.238**	.443**	1					
4.Work-related stress	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.031	-.079*	-0.043	1				
5.Gender	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.012	-0.010	-0.023	-0.050	1			
6.Managerial Expertise	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	-0.005	-.104**	-.076*	.095**	0.013	1		
7.Age	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.013	0.066	0.010	.086*	0.024	-.182**	1	
8.Education Type	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.086*	-0.030	-0.012	-.255**	.115**	.199**	-.164**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.2 Linear Regression Analyses

While the correlation analysis is useful in determining how strong our independent and dependent variables are linked to each other, the next step is it is to uncover the predictive impact that the different forms of ambiguity have on the networking behaviour of leaders. In order to accomplish this task and test our hypotheses, several regression analyses have been conducted on the dataset.

Hypothesis 1:

Hypothesis 1 states that the presence of goal ambiguity in public organisations is positively related to the networking behaviour of managers. Table 4.3 reveals that while the relationship between goal ambiguity and managerial networking is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (sig. = .000), the coefficient is not only weak, but contradicts the direction of the hypothesis ($B = -.353$). These findings suggest that goal ambiguity within the office is a weak negative predictor to the networking behaviour of managers. For this reason, Hypothesis 1 is not supported. Furthermore, the majority of the control variables show no statistically relevant relationship with the dependent variable, with the exception of the educational background of the leaders (sig. = .004). This relationship concurs with the bi-variate correlation analysis, and shows that holding an HBO degree has a slight positive correlation with managerial networking ($B = 0.221$).

Table 4.3: Goal ambiguity: Regression Analysis

	B	Std. Error	Sig.
Independent Variable			
Goal Ambiguity	-.353	.031	.000
Control Variables			
Age	.005	.004	.213
Gender	-.004	.078	.962
Education Type	.211	.073	.004
Managerial Experience	-.135	.078	.083
Workplace Stress	.034	.041	.403
R²	.387 ^a		
Adjusted R²	.150		

4.3 Hypothesis 2:

Hypothesis 2 argued that the presence of role ambiguity in public organisations is negatively related to the networking behaviour of managers. As shown by table 4.4, the coefficient does weakly support the direction of the hypothesis ($B = -.326$) and is statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($\text{sig.} = .000$). In addition, the educational type of the managers is the only control variable with a positive correlation to their network behaviour ($B = 0.228$, $\text{sig.} = .003$). These findings indicate that role ambiguity is indeed negatively correlated to the networking behaviour

of public managers. For this reason, it can be concluded that hypothesis 2 is supported by these findings.

Table 4.4: Role Ambiguity: Regression Analysis

	B	Std. Error	Sig.
Independent Variable			
Role Ambiguity	-.326	.047	.000
Control Variables			
Age	.002	.004	.544
Gender	-.007	.082	.931
Education Type	.228	.076	.003
Managerial Experience	-.104	.081	.201
Workplace Stress	.061	.043	.157
R²	.261 ^a		
Adjusted R²	.068		

Table 4.5 analyses the influence of goal ambiguity and role ambiguity together, in order to confirm the findings on their relationship to the networking behaviour of managers. This is performed in order to ensure that the initial research question is sufficiently answered by enhancing the validity of the correlations measured. Given how closely these two independent variables conceptually overlap, we must be extra careful to distinguish their effects in our analyses. Thus,

this third regression analysis helps establish a stronger correlational relationship between the variables of interest, by limiting their interference on each other.

According to Table 4.5, goal and role ambiguity are still statistically significant, at the 0.05 and 0.01 level. Goal ambiguity ($B = -.314$) and role ambiguity ($B = -.127$) appear to be negatively correlated to the networking behaviour of public managers, although the correlation with role ambiguity seems to be significantly reduced when the presence of goal ambiguity is considered, suggesting it is a very weak predictor of managerial networking by itself. Nevertheless, this final regression analysis confirms the previous findings in Table 4.3 and Table 4.4, that both types of ambiguity negatively correlate with the dependent variable.

Table 4.5: Goal and Role Ambiguity: Regression Analysis

	B	Std. Error	Sig.
Independent Variable			
Goal Ambiguity	-.314	.034	.000
Role Ambiguity	-. 127	.049	.010
Control Variables			
Age	.005	.004	.237
Gender	-.008	.078	.920
Education Type	.212	.073	.004
Managerial Experience	-.142	.077	.067
Workplace Stress	.034	.041	.405
R²	.396 ^a		
Adjusted R²	.156		

Chapter 5: Analysis

5.1 Discussion of Results

The bi-variate correlation analysis conducted on the dataset revealed that goal ambiguity ($\rho = -.371$; sig. = .000) and role ambiguity ($\rho = -.238$; sig. = .000) are both statistically significant to the degree of networking performed by leaders in social support teams, as well as being statistically significant to each other as well. This is not surprising, as goal and role ambiguity conceptually overlap and often appear simultaneously together in public organisations. (Chun and Rainey, 2005, p. 533). It can be theorized that the consequences of goal ambiguity and role ambiguity on the work of managers likely also overlaps and have similar results.

In addition to this, the findings indicate that work related stress seems to have a slight negative correlation to goal ambiguity ($\rho = -.079$; sig. = .023), which suggests that simply having more clarity on the scope of your organisational goals does not necessarily grant comfort to public workers. Interestingly, this work-related stress was not statistically relevant to the presence of role ambiguity (sig. = .217), suggesting that one type of ambiguity is more stressful than the other. Managerial experience also proved statistically significant to goal ambiguity ($\rho = -.104$, sig. = .003) and role ambiguity ($\rho = -.076$, sig. = .03), revealing a negative correlation with both variables. This could be explained as managers with previous experience having greater role clarity due to facing similar problems in their work already. In contrast, neither gender nor age seemed to have any statistical significance on managerial networking or workplace ambiguity.

The multiple regression analyses expanded on our understanding of the variables even further, and once again indicated that both goal and role ambiguity are both negatively correlated to managerial networking and serve as significant predictors to its presence in public organisations. These findings suggest that goal and role clarity provide a beneficial support for managers when

they network with external actors. Previous studies have already shown the negative correlation between workplace ambiguity and worker performance (Bedeian and Armenakis, 1981). As a result, it's possible to deduce that the presence of goal and role clarity makes the work of public leaders easier to perform, thereby facilitating their ability to engage in networking activities.

While these results validated the predictions made in hypothesis 2, hypothesis 1 was proven to be incorrect in its assumptions. We can therefore conclude that the potential benefits of goal ambiguity that were previously theorised did not manifest enough to offset its negative influence on managerial networking. It was hypothesised that goal ambiguity may serve as a motivator for managers to build stronger external relations, and that directive goal ambiguity could grant them interpretative leeway to take greater initiative in how they manage their networks. However, the introduction of these new teams by the decentralisation policy in 2015 already granted local municipalities greater leeway to shape their social domain than the previous system (Zijl, et. al, 2021). As a result, it is likely that directive goal ambiguity was not needed by leaders, as the policy of decentralisation already granted managers enough flexibility to effectively perform their jobs. Additionally, the potential motivating benefits of goal ambiguity may also be unnecessary and therefore did not emerge as expected. Public service workers have shown to be often highly motivated and educated individuals and are typically already united by altruistic intentions (Pierre and Peters, 2017, p. 161). As a result, public leaders likely do not need an external motivator like goal ambiguity to encourage their networking behaviour, as professional networks form organically without needing to be prompted.

Finally, it is also possible that the positive benefits associated with goal ambiguity in the academic literature are simply inapplicable to the networking of public managers. Eisenberg (1984) argued that ambiguity can help function as a unifying force between different stakeholders,

but this benefit may only be beneficial in pre-existing hierarchies or formal alliances between different actors. In these scenarios, where participating members cannot back out of collaboration easily, the interpretive leeway granted by ambiguity may serve as a useful tool to keep tensions to a minimum between groups. However, as mentioned before, much of the networking activity performed by leaders is to help build informal relations with peers that exist outside of the official corporate hierarchies (Yukl, 2002, p. 28). In situations like this, ambiguity may only serve as a hindrance, as it potentially impedes actors from finding common ground with each other.

The negative correlation indicated by the dataset between goal ambiguity and networking could be explained by the negative effects associated with goal ambiguity by other studies. For instance, goal ambiguity's correlation with occupational stress and higher job turnover in multiple studies (Stazyk and Davis, 2020, p. 367) could impede the networking activity of leaders, by hindering their overall performance at their job. Managers are more likely to neglect their networking habits if their attention and energy is obstructed by the negative emotions brought upon by goal ambiguity. Additionally, it is likely difficult to conduct networking in the midst of goal ambiguity when managers are unsure what their overall objective is in building these relationships. Goals help illuminate what leaders need to look for when navigating networks, so a lack of goal clarity could lead to leaders wasting time and effort into building the wrong connections. As a result, goal ambiguity may cause managers to becoming more dissuaded from attempting to build networks.

Role ambiguity's negative correlation with networking was expected by hypothesis 2. Role ambiguity not only shares similar causes to goal ambiguity, but studies have also shown it to have similar effects on the work performance of managers, such as increasing job-related stress and dissatisfaction (Bedeian and Armenakis, 1981). Given role ambiguity's particular tendency to

lower the confidence of managers in public organisations when performing their job, it is probable that it also disincentivizes managers to build their networks. Networking can often be an energetic endeavour and requires leaders to have the self-confidence to put themselves out there and make their presence known to their wider environment. Role ambiguity impedes this by damaging the self-esteem of managers in relation to their profession (Gregson, and Wendell, 2011). Additionally, role ambiguity can have a similar effect to priority goal ambiguity, as outlined by Chun and Rainey, where leaders become uncertain what activities they need to prioritise in their day to day work (Chun and Rainey, 2005, p. 535). While networking is becoming more and more important to public organisations in the modern globalised world, managers may not fully appreciate its importance if they are experiencing role ambiguity within their office. They may instead decide to prioritise other, more immediate concerns, at the expense of expanding their networks. As previously stated, networks require constant attention from the leaders who build them, as without frequent contact, personal relations between colleagues will begin to fall apart. For these reasons, it is easy to understand how the presence of role ambiguity is negatively correlated to managerial networking.

Out of all the control variables, the educational background of the managers appears to be the only one that is positively related to the networking behaviour of managers, and even then its correlation was not overly strong. From this, it is possible to conclude that higher education does provide leaders with opportunities and knowledge that makes networking somewhat easier to perform. Furthermore, managers who received an HBO degree likely had more practical, practice-based training, where they may already have learned the value of networking, and did not need an external force like ambiguity to motivate them.

In contrast, the theorised effects that age, gender, managerial experience and workplace stress would have on the dependent variable did not appear at all, and they therefore did not contribute to our understanding of managerial networking. It was theorised that age and experience would positively correlate with networking as managers who have spent longer in their leadership positions would understand the value of networks better and therefore place a greater emphasis on those activities. However, the data from these welfare teams did not support this theorised relationship. In a similar fashion, the gender of managers didn't appear to have any positive or negative correlation with their networking behaviour either. Despite previous studies performed in America showing that gender can influence managerial networking, it is possible that the efforts made in the Netherlands to promote gender equality have diminished the gendered differences in managerial approaches. In 2022, the Netherlands ranked 3rd in the EU on the Gender Equality Index, thanks in part to policies that aimed at creating a more balanced ratio between women and men in management positions (Gender Equality Index, 2022). Therefore, these efforts in gender equality may have reduced the impact of gender on managerial activities. Finally, the level of stress in the workplace also didn't appear to correlate positively or negatively with the networking behaviour of managers. Despite workplace stress often being a prominent feature in public organisations (West and West, 1989), it is possible that the networking behaviour of managers is simply less susceptible than other activities to the effects of this stress. This may be because networking with peers and colleagues can ease the amount of workplace stress felt by managers, thereby diminishing its potentially negative influences.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Answering the Research Question

This thesis began with the intention to uncover how the level of perceived goal ambiguity and role ambiguity within public organisations related to the networking behaviour of public managers. The emergence of ambiguity is a frequent occurrence in public organisations, and scholars have noted its significant effects on the performance and behaviour of both managers and employees alike. Ambiguity can manifest in multiple forms, such as within the goals of the organisation itself or within the responsibilities of public officials. As a result, scholars have spent considerable effort studying its influence on the performance of managers in public organisations. This thesis aimed to contribute to this endeavour, and hypothesised that goal ambiguity within public welfare teams would be positively related to managerial networking, whereas role ambiguity would be negatively related to this behaviour.

To accomplish this task, this thesis has both performed an examination of the academic literature on ambiguity and networking, as well as conducted its own empirical research on a large-N dataset that included survey results from social support teams. The results from the analyses suggested that within social support teams in the Netherlands, the presence of goal ambiguity and role ambiguity are both negatively related to the networking behaviour of team leaders. Furthermore, while the educational background of managers appeared to be statistically significant to their networking behaviour, the other control variables used in this study, such as age, gender, managerial experience and workplace stress, held no visible correlation. From these results, it can be concluded that the networking endeavours of team leaders perform best when both managers and subordinates possess clarity on the goals of the organisation and the responsibilities they each hold as part of their jobs.

6.2 Research Limitations

As with all research, this thesis inevitably faces some limitations that should be acknowledged upfront. For instance, this research paper has highlighted the effects of ambiguity on the networking activities of managers, but it is equally possible to invert the independent and dependent variables used in this research. This is because it is also possible for managerial networking to simultaneously influence the degree of ambiguity found in public organisations. Research into the networking habits of public managers have revealed that, depending on the circumstance, the networking behaviour of leaders can have either a positive or a negative influence on goal ambiguity. For example, when managers rapidly increase their networks to include more actors, it comes with the risk of also amassing a greater number of expectations and goals that the manager now feels obligated to fulfil (Davis and Stazyk, 2014, p. 8). As networks expand too quickly, the chances of goal conflicts between different actors also rises, causing the work of the manager to become more ambiguous as a result. On the other hand, managers who expand their networks in a more controlled manner can mitigate environmental turbulence and collect work-relevant information, thereby increasing goal and role clarity in their workspace (Davis and Stazyk, 2014, p. 10). Therefore, the complexities of the relationship between ambiguity and networking are not completely captured by this research paper and requires further investigation in future papers.

This thesis also faces limitations in its methodology. Despite the advantages of using a Likert scale for the research, it does run the risk of creating inaccuracies in the data collection. The Likert scale is uni-dimensional and produces ordinal data, when in reality the attitudes of respondents likely exist on a multi-dimensional continuum. Even when respondents are answering sincerely, it is inevitable that some opinions will fall outside the 5 options given, thus leading to

their answers being slightly inaccurate. Additionally, respondents who answer questions on a Likert scale will often avoid choosing the "extreme" options of "Totally agree" and "Totally disagree", even if they may be the most accurate representations of their feelings (Bishop and Herron, 2015).

6.3 Research Implications

There are several implications for future research that can be drawn from these results. In subsequent work, it may be more beneficial to utilise an alternative theoretical framework that further distinguishes between the different forms of goal ambiguity in public organisations. Goal ambiguity and role ambiguity have been shown in this thesis to have a large overlap in their relationship with managerial networking, so it may become necessary in the future to construct a more meticulous distinction between these concepts. For instance, Chun and Rainey's four dimensions of goal ambiguity could serve as a useful framework to study against the networking behaviour of leaders (Chun and Rainey, 2005, p. 533).

Additionally, future research could also distinguish between different types of networking that exist and see if they experience any differences when faced with ambiguity. Several scholars have already begun distinguishing between the internal and external networks of managers. These networks differ in how they are formed, and often require different behaviours to be performed by managers (Michael and Yukl, 1993). Therefore, it may prove fruitful to test whether workplace ambiguity affects the formation of these networks differently. Finally, as stated already, the relationship between workplace ambiguity and the networking behaviour of leaders is much more intricate than initially assumed and future studies should strive to also incorporate into their analysis how managerial networking can also affect the prevalence of workplace ambiguity.

6.4 Societal Contributions

As part of its societal contribution, this thesis makes several recommendations to team leaders in order to help them bolster the effectiveness of their networking activities. First, managers who make an extra effort in clarification may reduce workplace ambiguity, which will in turn positively affect their ability to network. For instance, team meetings can be held at the beginning of each week for the purposes of group communication and goal setting.

Other strategies can also be implemented by managers to curb the spread of workplace ambiguity. For instance, long term goals can be broken into shorter goals that are quicker to accomplish, as evidence shows that effort naturally decreases among workers the longer it is exerted on a single task. Similarly, the level of task difficulty is an important factor to take in consideration, as goals should be constructed to be both mentally stimulating, yet also still attainable for workers (Locke, and Latham, 2002, p. 707).

Public managers can also use the perceived ambiguity from workers as an informative tool to help them build more effective networks. By focusing on building stronger lines of communication with other team members and asking them for their input about where they feel ambiguity exists in the office, managers can then use this information to know where their networks are weakest.

Armed with this information, managers can avoid the pitfalls of ambiguity and build bigger and stronger networks that help contribute to the betterment of our public services.

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