

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**Leading through multiple disruptions in a printing organisation  
in Durban, South Africa**

**By**

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## DECLARATION

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## **ABSTRACT**

The past few years in South Africa has been both economically and psychologically challenging for many South Africans and organisations in the country. The country has faced multiple disruptions and many social and economic challenges. Through these disruptions, organisations were required to be consistently knowledgeable and innovative to rise above the competition as the world of business is changing and growing at a rapid pace. Operating in a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) business environment requires strong and effective leadership to guide and lead the organisation forward toward growth and success. Leading through the multiple disruptions has become increasingly challenging for many leaders and organisations, however, this study has been restricted to a printing organisation in Durban which is the InsideData Group. The study aimed to identify the multiple disruptions affecting the printing organisation in Durban, to understand the leadership response to the multiple disruptions, and to identify what leadership practices should be implemented to effectively deal with the multiple disruptions in the future. This study focused on gaining a leadership perspective on the challenges of being an effective leader while managing the multiple disruptions in the organisation. The research was conducted by applying a qualitative research approach. The data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with 10 senior-level leaders in the organisation. A non-probability sampling method was conducted to select the participants which was purposive sampling. The data analysis was conducted using the thematic data analysis approach. The findings of the study highlighted the identification of the recent multiple disruptions, their impact on the organisation, the challenges that leaders encountered during these disruptions, the leadership response to the disruptions, the different leadership styles used in the organisation, how leaders managed organisational performance, and the methods of business improvement to be implemented to manage the multiple disruptions. The study offers recommendations to leaders on leadership practices to consider when faced with future disruptions such as implementing leadership training programs, developing a network of teams, maintaining communication and transparency, and instilling effective leadership styles and traits in current leaders or new recruits. The study also provides recommendations for further research which is to gain an employee perspective on the multiple disruptions and their leadership expectations. This study can also be extended by incorporating leaders in different printing organisations.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

### **1.1. Introduction**

The focus of this research is to explore the multiple disruptions that are affecting a printing organisation in Durban and to understand how leaders navigated the multiple disruptions they were faced with. Many disruptions are affecting the South African economy and organisations are continuously challenged to remain profitable and sustainable. Leadership contributes substantially to taking an organisation to new heights in the business environment. The ability to lead during these multiple disruptions is directed toward leaders in a printing organisation and their perspective on quality leadership during challenging economic times. This chapter will highlight the background, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the aim of the study, the objective, the research questions, and the research methodology.

### **1.2. Background**

The research site chosen for this study was a printing organisation named Uniprint – A division of Insidedata Group based in Cornubia, Durban. The organisation was developed in 1926 as a family-owned business and expanded over the years through mergers and acquisitions with a current staff complement of approximately 350 people (Uniprint Global, 2023). The organisation specializes in the printing of business forms, thermal products, payslips, and security documents and networks throughout South Africa and Africa as a whole (Uniprint Global, 2023). The printing sector has undergone a substantial transition away from conventional printing techniques towards digital printing. This shift presents challenges such as the need for investments in new technologies, retraining the workforce, and adjusting to evolving customer preferences.

Digitalization and technological advancements have significantly impacted the printing industry and business growth has become increasingly difficult. The world of business is changing and progressing at a rapid pace which requires organisations to consistently perform efficiently to rise above the competition and to be sustainable in the market (Autio, Mudambi & Yoo, 2021). South Africa has experienced many economic disruptions due to the impact of the Ukraine-Russia war, the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy crisis, inflation, rising costs, and many disruptions that have impacted organisations along the supply chain (Allam, Bibri & Sharpe, 2022). The economic disruptions affected organisations along the supply chain by

impacting their ability to effectively source raw materials, control operational costs due to inflation and transportation, manage production delays, financial strain due to the challenge of retaining profit margin, and the organisations' ability to ensure customer satisfaction and retention. The concept of VUCA, incorporating Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity, is integral to understanding the industry's dynamics. As the industry adapts to digital printing and automation, leaders must navigate issues such as workforce retraining, job displacement concerns, and the integration of sustainable practices (Reizer, 2022). Additionally, macro-environmental factors, including regulatory changes and the growing emphasis on environmental sustainability, further contribute to the complexity of decision-making (Gini & Agala, 2023). Leaders, in response, need to develop strategic visions, invest in talent, promote innovation, and maintain a customer-centric approach to ensure the competitiveness and resilience of their organisations (Msomi & Olarewaju, 2021). In addition to the many disruptions that impact organisations, business leadership is one of the most significant factors that contribute to business failure (Putra & Cho, 2019). Leaders must be equipped with the required resources, knowledge, and expertise to be successful leaders during both normal and challenging economic times (Putra & Cho, 2019). Leaders play a pivotal role in addressing these disruptions and ensuring the sustainability of their organisations, fostering competitive advantages, and prioritizing the well-being of employees (Reizer, 2022).

### **1.3. Problem statement**

The printing organisation was selected due to the many changes and technological developments that have put pressure on the printing industry in Durban to remain competitive. In addition, the multiple disruptions have put severe strain on leadership and the business to succeed. These disruptions are related to financial stability and the level of productivity which leaders must effectively manage. Financial stability requires leaders to assess market volatility, economic uncertainty, cost management, and financial planning (Kumalo & Scheepers, 2021). The level of production requires leaders to ensure employee engagement and motivation, allocate resources effectively, ensure continuous improvement and innovation, and establish clear and concise performance indicators (Kumalo & Scheepers, 2021).

South Africa is currently faced with an influx of economic disruptions, including the aftereffects of the Ukraine-Russia war, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, an energy crisis, inflation, rising costs, and disruptions throughout the supply chain. These multifaceted disruptions have led to a complex economic situation, requiring a thorough understanding of

their implications on organisations operating within South Africa. The global repercussions of the Ukraine-Russia conflict have been widely documented in economic literature (Chigova, Hofisi & Tshidzumba, 2023). These events have put immense pressure on the South African economy (Chigova, Hofisi & Tshidzumba, 2023). It has been documented in literature that there will be persistent effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on economies worldwide which will manifest in South Africa (Arndt et al., 2020). Literature on the energy crisis in South Africa highlights its severe impact on industrial operations (Akpan & Olanrewaju, 2023). Research would contribute to the literature by delving into the specific challenges faced by organisations and potential strategies to alleviate the energy crisis (Akpan & Olanrewaju, 2023).

The external factors such as technological advancements, global economic conditions, supply chain disruptions, and market-related changes which are affecting the sustainability and performance of the printing organisation are consistently rising and changing and this requires constant intervention by the organisation (Msomi & Olanrewaju, 2021). Research is ongoing and newly revised contributions are being made regularly to improve the concept of leadership to ensure businesses are adapting and performing in a VUCA business environment (Pangaribuana et al., 2020). In the context of business and leadership, VUCA serves as a framework to describe an environment marked by swift and unpredictable changes, elevated levels of uncertainty, and complex interconnections (Pangaribuana et al., 2020). Leaders, acknowledging the inherent VUCA characteristics of their environment, should implement strategies that highlight adaptability, agility, and resilience to effectively navigate through uncertainties and complexities (Singhal, 2021). Leaders also need to ensure that their teams are consistently empowered, communicate effectively, and that there is a culture of learning and improvement (Singhal, 2021). Insight from leaders on overcoming these challenges and leading through the multiple disruptions affecting the organisation and economy is essential to ensure long-term business success (Msomi & Olanrewaju, 2021).

#### **1.4.Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to provide an extension to current research that will assist and guide leaders on how to efficiently lead through the multiple disruptions that are affecting the organisation. The need for undertaking this study stems from the need to fill necessary knowledge gaps about the way organisations comprehend and respond to ongoing disruptions, especially in the context of a fast-changing business environment (Raes et al., 2020). The rationale for undertaking this study is to provide valuable insights that contribute to academic

discussions, ultimately enriching the existing knowledge base and guiding strategic decision-making processes (Raes et al., 2020). This study highlights and discusses the multiple disruptions that leaders encounter in a VUCA induced environment, and the focus is on gaining insight and understanding of leadership challenges while trying to efficiently lead during these difficult times from a leader's perspective in the organisation. A great leader is defined by their ability to nurture individuals within the organisation who can positively impact business growth and performance, proficiently addressing disruptions to ensure long-term success (Georgescu, 2023).

### **1.5. Aim of the study**

The aim of the study was to identify the multiple disruptions affecting a printing organisation in Durban, South Africa. This study aims to highlight the multiple disruptions affecting the organisation, to understand the leadership response to the multiple disruptions, and to identify what leadership practices should be implemented to effectively deal with the multiple disruptions.

### **1.6. Objectives of the study**

- To explore the multiple disruptions affecting a printing organisation in Durban.
- To understand how the leadership responded to the multiple disruptions.
- To identify what leadership practices should be implemented to deal with the multiple disruptions in a printing organisation in Durban.

### **1.7. Research questions**

- What are the multiple disruptions affecting a printing organisation in Durban?
- How did the leadership respond to the multiple disruptions?
- What leadership practices should be implemented to deal with the multiple disruptions in a printing organisation in Durban?

### **1.8. Research methodology**

Research methodology consists of the tools, techniques, and methods used to carry out the research project and gather information that is relevant to the study. This portion of the study explains how the research is conducted and the steps taken to make sure that the research is carried out resourcefully. The study follows a qualitative approach which relates to obtaining information of variety and quality (Mishra & Alok, 2019). The research philosophy used in this

study was interpretivism. Interpretivism recognizes the subjective and intricate nature of reality, emphasizing that individuals interpret it through the lens of their experiences (Ugwu, Ekere & Onoh, 2021). This research philosophy is focused on understanding meanings, contexts, and the influence of social constructs (Ugwu et al., 2021).

### **1.8.1. Research design**

The research design represents the complete approach and strategy to collecting data that pertains to the research questions set out in the study. This study follows an exploratory and explanatory research design (Muzari, Shava & Shonhiwa, 2022). These types of research designs were selected as the most appropriate to achieve the objectives of the study. The objective of the study is to gain a perspective from leaders in the organisation on leading during challenging times. Exploratory research is driven by its inherent function to investigate new or less-explored areas in alignment with the objectives of this study. Through the implementation of exploratory research, the study aims to achieve a deeper comprehension of the challenges confronted by leaders amid disruptive times, providing a broader perspective on the different disruptions affecting the organisation (Muzari et al., 2022). The inclusion of explanatory research is considered essential to improve the exploratory methodology. Following the collection of initial insights during the exploratory phase, the study seeks to conduct a more thorough analysis and explanation of the identified concepts (Muzari et al., 2022).

### **1.8.2. Population**

The population of the study refers to a group of people or elements that the researcher targets to gain the required data that is pertinent to the study. The target population is an important criterion in research as it permits the researcher to have focus and alignment to reach the aims and objectives of the study (Stratton, 2021). The population targeted for this study are leaders in the printing industry in Durban, South Africa. The population was confined to one printing organisation in Durban named Uniprint – A division of Insidedata. This organisation was selected due to the type of industry where technology and digitalization is expanding and putting additional pressure on printing together with the multiple disruptions affecting the organisation. The objective was to understand how leadership responded when faced with such difficult conditions. The organisation consists of various leaders in different departments that are both in managerial and non-managerial roles. The organisation has a workforce of approximately 368 employees of which 14 have supervisory positions and 10 have managerial roles (refer to Figure 1.1). For this study, the target population are the leaders in the

organisation. However, leaders in managerial roles are tasked with responsibilities on an operational and employee basis which makes them eligible to provide data that will effectively contribute to meeting the research aim and objectives of the study.

**Figure 1.1. Target Population**



### **1.8.3. Sampling method and selection**

The sample selected can be defined as a subgroup of the target population. The sample is a representation of the target population and must be realistically selected to ensure that the data gained can be analysed to provide the required results (Stratton, 2021). The sample selection method used in this study is purposive sampling which is defined as a non-probability sampling method where the sample selection is completed by the researcher to achieve the objectives of the research topic. The researcher will use knowledge and judgement to ensure the most appropriate sample is selected (Obilor, 2023). The inclusion criteria for this study were to select leaders in high level management positions as they have the knowledge and experience to contribute valuable information that is relevant and aligned to the research objectives. The participants selected also need to share common characteristics to ensure the research questions are relevant. The exclusion criteria were to not select leaders in supervisory roles as those leaders have a more diverse set of traits and characteristics. The sample selected from the population at the printing organisation is 10 leaders in managerial positions. This study targeted

10 leaders in managerial roles in all 9 departments in the organisation to which this study is restricted to. The data collected from each leader provided a viewpoint specific to their department and experiences. Saturation was reached by the time the 10<sup>th</sup> interview was conducted; no new information was coming through (Mwita, 2022). These leaders have 7 years or more working experience which is a wealth of knowledge and expertise to be shared towards the research topic. The leaders were selected from different departments in the organisation to ensure that the researcher could collect data with a holistic understanding of the organisation and the challenges that each leader encountered in their departments, refer to Table 1.1 which outlines the different departments.

**Table 1.1. List of Departments**

<b>Department</b>
1. Commercial
2. Finance
3. Customer Service
4. Production
5. Stores
6. Fulfillment
7. Engineering
8. Finishing
9. Dispatch

#### **1.8.4. Data collection**

Data collection in research is a systematic approach to collecting and accumulating information that is pertinent to the aim and objectives of the study, and which contributes to answering the research questions set out by the researcher (Fornaro, Sterin & Struloeff, 2021). The method of data collection used in this study is semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are beneficial as they allow the researcher to engage in an in-depth conversation with the

participants and to have the flexibility of asking additional questions if a new idea or theme emerges (Mannan & Afni, 2020).

#### **1.8.5. Data analysis**

Data analysis is an essential step that follows the data collection process. The data analysis technique used in this study is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an analytical technique used in research to develop common themes from the data collected (Lochmiller, 2021). The research questions are a guide for the researcher to develop potential themes before collecting data from the participants during the interview process. As the participants respond to the interview questions, the responses can be analysed and categorized into potential themes for the study (Lochmiller, 2021). The data analysis process involves several key steps to convert raw data into information that is valuable and applicable to the research study (Lochmiller, 2021).

This study followed the following steps in the data analysis process:

- The aim and objectives were outlined to ensure the data analysis is aligned with the research study.
- The relevant data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews on Microsoft Teams with the participants under study.
- The data was sorted and cleaned after each interview to ensure any errors or irregularities were removed.
- The data was analysed to develop common themes by using the process of thematic analysis.
- Each theme was highlighted in a different colour to transform and collate the data into information that was relevant to the study.
- Data was documented in a format that was clear and concise, highlighting the common themes and findings of the study.

#### **1.9. Delimitations of the study**

Delimitations refer to limits or boundaries that are set by the researcher that will assist in making the research goals more manageable or achievable. The delimitations are what the researcher decides to include or exclude in the study (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). The first delimitation of this study is that the research is directed only toward the employees in high-

level management positions as they are believed to have the most insight, knowledge, and experience on the research topic. The reason behind this decision is to gain a deeper understanding of leaders who should be experiencing similar disruptions in the organisation when executing leadership in these challenging times. A second delimitation of this study is the focus on only one printing organisation in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.

#### **1.10. Limitations of the study**

Limitations in the research study represent the weaknesses within the design of the study that may influence the results or outcomes of the research. Limitations of the study are important to present to readers, so they are aware of the potential gaps in the study. These limitations will allow the reader to think about possible improvements or future expansions that can be made to the research literature (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). The limitation of this study is that the research is confined to one printing organisation and its ability to lead during the multiple disruptions affecting the South African economy. The study is also limited to leaders who are in high-level management positions and not employees in lower-level positions. Another limitation was that this was a qualitative study drawing only on interviews to collect data.

#### **1.11. Summary**

This chapter provides an overview of the research being conducted by identifying and discussing the background, problem statement, purpose, aim and objectives of the study, research questions, research methodology, research design, sample selection, data collection, and the data analysis process.

The next chapter outlines the literature review of the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

As globalisation is increasing, the world of business is changing continuously at a rapid pace. Organisations must be consistently reviewing their business strategies to ensure they are keeping up with the changes that impact on the organisation and the economy. Various economic disruptions impact organisations in South Africa such as inflation, the energy crisis, unemployment, rising operational costs, poor infrastructure, logistic bottlenecks, operating in a VUCA environment, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Russia-Ukraine war. These are disruptions that organisations need to efficiently manage to ensure sustainability. Leadership within current organisational landscapes, particularly amid disruptive, crisis-laden, and VUCA environments, requires a distinctive skill set and adaptive strategies (Baldwin, 2022). Researchers stress the importance for leaders to navigate VUCA disruptions by encouraging adaptability, strategic foresight, and a proactive mindset (Beyerlein, 2021). Literature on crisis leadership highlights specific competencies necessary for effective leadership during crises, including transparent communication, swift decision-making, and resilience in the face of unforeseen disruptions (Boin, 2020). Effective business leadership is a key factor in ensuring that there is growth and sustainability during challenging times. This chapter explores the concept of leadership, what is effective leadership, the different types of leadership, leadership traits and behaviours, the impact of leadership on employee performance, the multiple disruptions affecting organisations, and a leader's response to the multiple disruptions.

### **2.2. What is leadership?**

The lens through which leadership is viewed suggests that leadership is the responsibility of the masses and not an honor or privilege for a few people. Leadership is intended to help employees and the organisation deliver on shared goals and purpose (Todnem, 2021). The concept of leadership is shifting and evolving continuously to bring about change that will lead to a desirable future. Leadership involves six key elements which are influence, intention, personal responsibility and integrity, change, shared purpose, and followers which occur among people as a team or group (Daft, 2018). The need for effective leadership is a growing requirement in organisations to ensure business growth and success. The requirement involves leadership changing and transitioning from the traditional approach of autocracy to a new leadership paradigm that is guided by the organisation's vision and focuses on creating value

for both the company and the employees (Daft, 2018). One of the key factors for leadership in the corporate world is to align and build effective leader and follower relationships (Kempster & Jackson, 2021). Leaders are people with the intended purpose to lead and guide their followers, and followers have the responsibility to follow their leaders to achieve shared goals as a team (Kempster & Jackson, 2021). Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is aimed at initiating a positive influence through transformational and authentic leadership cc.

### **2.3. What is effective leadership?**

The world of business is becoming highly complex with continuous change and with an increasingly globalized economy. The need for effective leadership is a growing necessity in every organisation. In every market or economy, worldwide reports emphasize a crisis in leadership. Leadership has become progressively more complex and difficult as organisations on a global scale are faced with many new business disruptions and questions (Riggio & Newstead, 2023). With years of research, leadership is one of the concepts that are still very misunderstood and not effectively adopted in many organisations. Poor leadership impacts the people, organisation, and society and the effects can be damaging, therefore, organisations must have effective leadership.

The aims and goals of an organisation are accomplished mainly by strong team efforts which consist of both good followers and leaders. Leaders and followers in the organisation are both equally important to achieve common goals (Einola & Alvesson, 2021). Leaders are also not necessarily employees with management titles but employees who have a positive influence on their coworkers to guide and lead them in the direction of the organisation's goals. According to Gandolfi & Stone (2018:263) "A leader is one or more people who select, equips, trains, and influences one or more followers who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the followers to the organisation's mission and objectives causing the followers to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organisational mission and objectives". A good leader will also influence positive mental energy, knowledge, and wisdom onto their teams. To be an effective leader, there are various leadership styles, traits, and behaviours that a leader can adopt to efficiently lead and guide employees in the organisation (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018).

## **2.4. Types of leadership**

Every organisation requires leaders who have the required skills, knowledge, and characteristics that will help the organisation to grow and achieve its goals. There are many different leadership styles that leaders can adopt to ensure they are effectively leading employees and positively impacting the business. In times of disruption, literature often promotes transformational leadership styles, emphasizing their effectiveness in navigating uncertainties, adopting innovation, and inspiring resilience (Top, Abdullah & Faraj, 2020). In the face of disruption, employees may experience anxiety and resistance to change. Transformational leaders can alleviate these concerns by providing a compelling vision, instilling confidence, and raising a shared commitment to organisational goals (Gillespie et al., 2020). In the printing industry, leadership styles may vary based on the culture of the organisation, the industry dynamics, and the nature of disruptions (Durmaz, Hawrami & Hamasaeed, 2022). Individual printing organisations may adopt different styles of leadership. The following leadership styles will be discussed which are transactional, transformational, autocratic, democratic, participative, servant, charismatic, and ethical leadership (Demirtas & Karaca, 2020).

### **2.4.1. Transactional leadership**

The transactional leadership style is defined as a transaction that occurs between leaders and employees (Jensen et al., 2019). The transactional style is intended to create employee self-interest in achieving goals using the reward or incentive system (Jensen et al., 2019). This system is used to encourage and motivate employees to achieve goals that are in line with the goals set out in the business. When employees receive recognition or rewards, it is directly linked to the employee and organisational performance. If the transactional leadership style had no direct link to performance, then this style of leadership would be seen as ineffective in the organisation (Wahyuni, Purwandari & Syah, 2020). Transactional leadership can be categorized by three measurements which are pecuniary rewards, nonpecuniary rewards, and contingent sanctions. Pecuniary rewards are dependent on how well employees perform in their jobs, which determines the type of reward to be received (Jensen et al., 2019). Non-pecuniary rewards refer to leaders providing positive feedback, acknowledgement, or appreciation to employees who excel at their jobs (Jensen et al., 2019). Contingent sanctions can be defined as negative feedback or consequences that employees will encounter if they do not perform well

in their jobs or consistently fail to meet the requirements of the organisation (Jensen et al., 2019).

#### **2.4.2. Transformational leadership**

The business world is consistently changing and progressing concerning the economy and management structures which are becoming increasingly complex and challenging. Leadership plays a significant role in addressing these disruptions and ensuring competitiveness in the business market. There are many resources available that organisations can use to progress and one of the key resources is human capital. For an organisation to ensure growth and sustainability, there must be a strong focus on human capital (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). The transformational leadership style is adopted by a leader that understands the vision of the organisation and can encourage and motivate employees to perform and commit to achieving organisational goals (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). A transformational leader aims to transform the organisation and employees by efficiently identifying and implementing change. In comparison to the traditional autocratic leadership style, transformational leaders promote employee confidence and openly involve employees in decision-making to boost performance and commitment to achieving common goals (Top et al., 2020). A transformational leader ultimately aims to provide inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and a positive influence on employees that will ensure organisational performance (Top et al., 2020).

#### **2.4.3. Autocratic leadership**

Autocratic leaders are individuals who follow an authoritarian approach that is focused on control, and which demands obedience, punctuality, and unwavering efficiency from their subordinates (Khan, Wahab & Bhatti, 2021). Autocratic leaders hold status in high regard and tend to undermine their subordinates with decision-making as well as put employees under continuous stress and time pressure (Khan et al., 2021). The autocratic approach also results in micromanagement and limits employees from learning and growing in the organisation (Khan et al., 2021). Individuals who follow the autocratic approach are solely focused on progress and achieving the required results rather than improving their leadership behaviour and skills (Khan et al., 2021).

#### **2.4.4. Democratic leadership**

The democratic style of leadership encourages collaboration and shared decision-making. Leaders and subordinates work together to achieve common goals by sharing the responsibility

and allowing everyone to feel valued and part of the team by contributing to the decisions made in the organisation (Fakhri et al., 2021). Democratic leadership creates an environment for open communication, teamwork, and employee empowerment (Fakhri et al., 2021). This type of leadership style also contributes to an organisational culture that is conducive to employee participation, commitment, growth, and development (Fakhri et al., 2021).

#### **2.4.5. Participative leadership**

Participative leadership involves the sharing of power and allowing employees to be part of the decision-making in the organisation (Khassawneh & Elrehail, 2022). This form of leadership motivates employees to learn and progress in the business as information is openly shared and a collaborative working environment is created (Khassawneh & Elrehail, 2022). Participative leaders demonstrate delegation, defined participation, and joint decision-making (Khassawneh & Elrehail, 2022). Employees and leaders who are actively involved in the participative leadership process will be more aligned with the vision and goals of the organisation to achieve desired outcomes (Khassawneh & Elrehail, 2022). A participative leader seeks feedback and suggestions in the organisation and therefore will value the different perspectives and opinions of employees (Ali, Ali & Xue, 2022). Participative leadership also improves employee commitment and loyalty to the organisation and enhances both employee and organisational performance (Ali et al., 2022).

#### **2.4.6. Servant leadership**

The term servant derives from the concept of serving others such as in religious practices where religious leaders aim to serve and guide people (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). As the study and importance of effective leadership are growing, the concept of servant leadership has been introduced and mentioned repeatedly as guiding, leading, and serving followers are seen to be important factors for a prosperous organisation (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). A servant leader practices ethical behaviour, integrity, tolerance, gratitude, selflessness, and genuine compassion for employees in the organisation (Saleem et al., 2020). Servant leaders have some overlapping characteristics that transformational leaders have as the focus is to motivate and inspire employees. A servant leader is more focused on the employees rather than the objectives of the organisation as the aim is to serve the followers (Saleem et al., 2020). Servant leaders therefore have a strong impact on the employees of the organisation (Saleem et al., 2020).

#### **2.4.7. Charismatic leadership**

Charismatic leadership is a very influential form of leadership where leaders have strong communication skills and are persuasive (Hansen, Miller & Noack, 2020). Leaders must have an optimistic approach to the organisation and their colleagues to develop a culture and environment where employees are willing and eager to do their best and progress (Hansen et al., 2020). Charismatic leaders have characteristics that allow employees to interact and engage with them on an emotional level which creates a strong leader-follower relationship (Novitasari et al., 2021). Employees have high respect and admiration for charismatic leaders and can share in their vision of future growth and achievements (Novitasari et al., 2021). The research and study of charismatic leadership is growing in business to explore the impact of leadership on employee performance and knowledge sharing in the workplace (Novitasari et al., 2021).

#### **2.4.8. Ethical leadership**

Ethical leadership is becoming increasingly important as the unprofessional and immoral conduct of leaders affects both private and public organisations on a large scale (Shakeel, Kruyen & Thiel, 2019). According to reports, the forced turnover in the top 2500 organisations in the world increased from 3.9% in 2007-2011 to 5.3% in 2012-2016 due to ethical issues (Shakeel et al., 2019). Leaders must have good moral and ethical values in conjunction with behaving morally in the workplace (Shakeel et al., 2019). By prioritizing ethical behaviour, leaders cultivate trust and credibility within the business as well as set the tone for a positive organisational culture, where integrity and fairness are valued (Shakeel et al., 2019). In addition, it helps mitigate the risk of legal and financial consequences by ensuring compliance with laws and regulations (Bashir & Hassan, 2020). Ethical leadership should be considered as a process that is linked to all leadership styles rather than being defined as a leadership style on its own (Shakeel et al., 2019).

### **2.5. Leadership traits and behaviours**

The theory of leadership traits has evolved significantly over the years. At the beginning of the leadership era, leadership traits were guided by the Great man theory which suggests that leaders are born with characteristics that are required to make effective leaders, individual who are born leaders (Hunt & Fedynich, 2018). Over the years, trait theory has evolved and argues that leaders can be both born with the required characteristics or can be made to be effective leaders by practice, guidance, and training (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). The goal of trait theory is to determine what the correct combination of characteristics and traits is to be an effective

leader on a mental, social, and physical level. Research on trait theory is ongoing and there has been no consistency on what combination of traits makes a perfect leader (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Leading in disruptive environments requires specific traits and behaviours from a leader. Literature points out several key attributes essential for effective leadership during times of disruption which are adaptability, resilience, decisiveness, and strategic foresight (Chandler, 2022). Some of the other traits that have been mentioned by prior researchers on effective leadership are integrity, intelligence, communication, courage, empathy, respect, and competence (Hunt & Fedynich, 2018).

### **2.5.1. Adaptability**

Navigating through dynamic and unpredictable environments, leaders need to embody the crucial trait of adaptability. This quality enables leaders to respond effectively to evolving circumstances. Adaptability in leadership refers to the ability to change one's approach, strategies, and decision-making in response to changing situations, uncertainties, and emerging disruptions (Boyar, Savage & Williams, 2023). Key characteristics of adaptable leaders are flexibility, versatility, quick learner, and the ability to embrace change (Boyar, Savage & Williams, 2023).

### **2.5.2. Resilience**

Resilience is an indispensable quality that equips leaders to withstand disruption, rebound from setbacks, and inspire perseverance within their teams (Ayoko, 2021). Rooted in the ability to maintain composure under pressure, resilience significantly helps leaders with navigating uncertainties and driving organisational success (Ayoko, 2021). Resilient leaders possess a positive outlook, focusing on solutions and opportunities rather than dwelling on problems (Ayoko, 2021). Resilient leaders display determination and persistence, encouraging the team to persevere through difficulties. Resilience is also particularly crucial in disruptive environments as it allows leaders to learn from disruptions and use setbacks as catalysts for growth and improvement (Ayoko, 2021).

### **2.5.3. Decisiveness**

The leadership trait of decisiveness is a critical quality that empowers leaders to make timely and effective decisions, particularly in the face of ambiguity and rapidly changing situations (Bernheim & Bodoh-Creed, 2020). Decisive leaders exhibit the ability to navigate

complexities, provide clear direction, and guide their teams with confidence (Bernheim & Bodoh-Creed, 2020). Decisive leaders can assess situations swiftly and make timely choices, avoiding delays that could hinder progress, can assess, and manage risks effectively, consider potential outcomes before making decisions, provide a clear sense of purpose and direction through their decisions, excel in communicating decisions transparently and with a focus on clarity, and take responsibility for their decisions, whether they lead to success or setbacks (Bernheim & Bodoh-Creed, 2020).

#### **2.5.4. Strategic foresight**

Strategic foresight is an essential quality that enables leaders to anticipate trends, foresee potential disruptions, and develop proactive strategies to navigate uncertainties (Chandler, 2022). Leaders with strategic foresight demonstrate the ability to envision the future, align organisational goals with emerging opportunities, and guide their teams with a long-term perspective. Leaders with strategic foresight actively monitor the external environment, staying informed about industry trends, technological advancements, and socio-economic changes (Chandler, 2022). Strategic foresight involves thinking creatively and innovatively about future possibilities, assessing and managing risks associated with future scenarios, and using scenario planning to envision various potential futures and develop strategies that can adapt to different situations (Chandler, 2022).

#### **2.5.5. Integrity**

The concept of integrity involves leaders being transparent and professional in their words and actions (Shuck et al., 2019). Leaders must knowingly practice integrity in the workplace and show employees that they are keeping their word even if the situation becomes difficult (Shuck et al., 2019). The act of integrity reassures employees that they can trust their leader and they will openly follow the guidance and direction provided by leadership (Shuck et al., 2019). Employees will have confidence in their leaders and will know that there are no hidden agendas. Trust in the workplace is a key factor in building collaborative working relationships among leaders and employees (Shuck et al., 2019).

#### **2.5.6. Intelligence**

Intelligence refers to a leader's ability to reason, understand, comprehend, and problem-solve on an intellectual level (Ntalakos, Rossidis & Belias, 2022). Leaders need to have the ability to think strategically and grasp new concepts and ideas easily to be able to lead others in the

team (Ntalakos et al., 2022). Apart from intellectual work abilities, one of the key concepts of intelligence in leadership is emotional intelligence. Emotional Intelligence (IE) is a growing requirement and need for effective leadership, it involves leaders having the ability to emotionally connect and understand employees and to relate to these employees on a personal level (Ntalakos et al., 2022). As the business world is changing, the working environment is becoming increasingly stressful with the many disruptions affecting organisations. Leaders need to have self-awareness, high self-esteem, impulse control, and self-motivation and must be able to manage stress to be effective leaders to employees (Yadav & Lata, 2019). Some of the related traits to emotional intelligence are happiness, empathy, and optimism (Yadav & Lata, 2019).

### **2.5.7. Communication**

Every aspect of life requires communication as a foundation for collaboration and understanding in both personal and professional settings. This is especially true for workplace situations as the work environment has a diverse group of people working together. Open communication and team collaboration are essential for growth and performance in the organisation (Schlamp, Gerpott & Voelpel, 2021). Leaders who have open lines of communication that a two-way with their subordinates create cooperative working relationships within their teams (Schlamp et al., 2021). Apart from having open lines of communication among team members, the approach of communication from leaders is important to have a positive outcome. Leaders need to communicate in a manner that is supportive and empowering to motivate and encourage employees to perform and grow in their roles (Malinga, Stander & Nell, 2019). Building positive relationships through effective communication will also allow leaders to constructively provide negative feedback to employees and get the required results (Malinga et al., 2019).

### **2.5.8. Courage**

Courage can be defined as a driving force that allows us to face our fears and take chances knowing the possible risks (Lowery, 2019). In business, many decisions are made, and actions taken with the awareness of possible risks. It takes strong leaders who dare to make these decisions and accept the risks or shortcomings that may occur (Lowery, 2019). A courageous leader will make decisions and take actions that can be based on a personal, professional, or political level (Lowery, 2019). The three dimensions of courage are purpose, action, and

confronting fear (Lowery, 2019). It takes courage for leaders to act with value and purpose despite their fears or concerns (Lowery, 2019).

#### **2.5.9. Empathy**

Empathy can be defined as having the ability to understand another individual's thoughts or feelings and then acting based on that understanding (Zivkovic, 2022). Empathy is a key concept in servant leadership where leaders act to serve their teams (Zivkovic, 2022). Employees who are treated with compassion and empathy feel valued in the organisation, which impacts their performance (Zivkovic, 2022). Leaders who are empathetic and compassionate can view situations from another's perspective and this affects the decision-making and actions in the organisation to ensure employees are happy and progressing. Empathetic leaders have abilities to listen intently, understand, and relate to employees in their leadership (Zivkovic, 2022).

#### **2.5.10. Respect**

Research and previous studies indicate that employees perform better if there is respect and recognition in the workplace (Shuck et al., 2019). It is important to accept that every individual in the organisation has value and is worthy irrespective of their title or career level they are in, respect should be a mutual exchange. The level of employee turnover would significantly decrease if employees felt respected, valued, and believed they were in an environment that is beneficial to their growth (Shuck et al., 2019). Effective leaders must take intentional actions to create an environment that promotes respect and dignity in their teams and organisation (Shuck et al., 2019). Respect in the workplace is a continuous process that both leaders and employees must administer to prevent misunderstandings or the creation of hostile environments (Shuck et al., 2019).

#### **2.5.11. Competence**

Competency can be viewed as a summarized version of the leadership skills and behaviours that are required to be an effective leader (Dirani et al., 2020). A competent leader will display these characteristics and rise above disruptions as and when required (Dirani et al., 2020). During the recent disruptions that impacted the printing organisation which were the COVID-19 pandemic, load-shedding, KZN riots, Ukraine-Russia war, global inflation, and the rate of exchange, the success of the business was greatly dependent on the competence of leadership to support, motivate, and lead employees in the new direction that supported the vision and

goals of the organisation (Dirani et al., 2020). In times of crisis, employees respond differently with a build of emotions that can be disadvantageous to their performance (Dirani et al., 2020). It is the responsibility of competent leaders to connect with employees to act and make extraordinary changes. Competence is a key leadership trait to support effective leadership (Dirani et al., 2020).

## **2.6. Multiple disruptions affecting leadership and organisations in Durban**

In the past three years leading up to 2023 in South Africa, there have been many disruptions that have impacted the printing industry and their ability to perform efficiently. The supply chains throughout the world have been impacted causing strain for many for local industries such as the printing industry and industries across the world that are contested to operate in a VUCA environment (Kolga, 2021). Through these disruptions, the printing industry had to adapt and adjust to ensure sustainability and growth of the business, many organisations were forced to shut down due to these disruptions which had a severe economic impact.

One of the changes that was crucial to ensure business sustainability is effective leadership (Kerrissey & Edmondson, 2020). Leaders who were flexible and could effectively adapt to the changes were able to rise above the competition and keep the business afloat during these disruptions. Striving for business growth and sustainability while attempting to successfully lead a team of people towards the same goals during challenging times is one of the most difficult responsibilities a leader is confronted with (Kerrissey & Edmondson, 2020). In the past three years, some of the multiple disruptions that impacted the printing organisation and a leader's ability to effectively lead were economic and macro-environmental disruptions such as inflation, the energy crisis, unemployment, rising costs of operations, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war, the KZN Floods and riots, and the need to operate in a VUCA environment.

### **2.6.1. Inflation**

Inflation is defined as the increase in the price of goods and services in the economy over a period. Several contributing factors cause a high spike in inflation such as excessive monetary funding being pushed into the market by the government through bond purchases which are issued to the public in the form of loans or when there is excessive monetary growth in comparison to economic growth (Moyo & Tursoy, 2020). Inflation in the economy creates fear and pressure for organisations and consumers as this will affect their purchasing power in the

future. The printing industry has been directly impacted by the increased cost of raw materials and consumables, which has put additional pressure on the business to retain profit margins (Bustamam et al., 2021). The industry also faces increased operational costs such as labour and transportation therefore pricing strategies need to be consistently reviewed to accommodate inflation and the increased costs (Bustamam et al., 2021). In South Africa, inflation has been an ongoing concern for many which creates stress or concern for people both in their personal and professional lives (Moyo & Tursoy, 2020). Inflation has a direct link to economic activity in the country and has been creating financial instability in businesses for many years (Dladla & Malikane, 2022). Within the printing industry, high inflation rates influence investment decisions, and the organisation needs to cautiously manage investments and any plans of expansion (Bustamam et al., 2021). Inflation is government and policy-driven which is a factor that cannot be controlled by organisations; however, it needs to be efficiently managed by leaders to avoid severe short- and long-term effects (Dladla & Malikane, 2022).

### **2.6.2. The energy crisis**

The energy crisis in South Africa has left many organisations and households in distress with the continuous blackouts that are occurring on an average of 12 hours a day (Berahab, 2022). The ongoing energy crisis has put many organisations in tough financial positions with escalating downtime and loss of productivity (Berahab, 2022). Businesses cannot timeously and financially keep up with the increase in demand for goods and services which leads to an increase in many businesses liquidating resulting in a higher rate of unemployment. Apart from the impact on businesses, people are greatly affected in their personal lives as after a long tough day at work, many go home to darkness, and this causes stress and difficulty as people are not receiving a basic need and service that they are paying for (Berahab, 2022).

The accumulated disruptions in both work and home lives have affected many on a psychological level which has created a need for leaders to fully understand these situations and to seriously consider how to be an effective leader in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Berahab, 2022). There has been no confirmed progress to elevate the energy crisis in South Africa which forces organisations to develop methods and ways of managing the disruption that will still allow the organisation to be profitable and competitive in the business environment (Africa et al., 2023). The printing industry has been greatly impacted by the energy crisis, resulting in excessive machine downtime, production delays, and increased operational costs (De Beer, 2023). These delays and inefficiencies ultimately lead to a disruptive supply chain affecting the overall

production process. This has put the business under additional pressure to ensure operational efficiency and maintain profitability (De Beer, 2023).

### **2.6.3. Unemployment**

Unemployment in South Africa has risen every year in the past few years to a high of 32.9% in the first quarter of 2023. Unemployment remains a huge concern across the world, however, in the three months to March in the first quarter, South Africa had the highest rate of unemployment in the world which the many economic disruptions have contributed to (Dludla, 2023). One of the major concerns in every country regarding unemployment apart from the negative impact on the individual is youth employment as this negatively impacts the development prospects of all nations. The printing industry includes mainly small and medium businesses that recently closed doors due to various economic and macro-environmental factors such as inflation, the exchange rate, the energy crisis, and the increased cost of operations (De Beer, 2023). These business closures have significantly contributed to the unemployment rate. There are many contributing factors to the rate of unemployment in South Africa such as the above-mentioned energy crisis leading to the liquidation of organisations, the mismatch theory of unemployment which causes a gap between the skills available and the skills in demand in the market, and poor education systems that do not equip students with the relevant knowledge and skills to be of significant value in the labour market. Studies show that unemployment is greatly associated with an individual's psychological well-being, and life satisfaction, and has been linked to an increase in suicide attempts (Mseleku, 2022). Employees who experience pay cuts are put under financial stress as they must find alternative means of meeting their monthly expenses. This creates a lot of tension and animosity in organisations as these employees become frustrated and demotivated (Mseleku, 2022). The statistic of unemployment has individuals in constant fear of losing their jobs due to the many disruptions impacting the South African economy. Employees are silently accepting poor working conditions to remain employed but are being psychologically drained. This can lead to withdrawal in the workplace and affect employee work performance. Leaders are expected to be aware of such situations and align their leadership skills and abilities to support employees during these challenging times (Mseleku, 2022).

### **2.6.4. Rising cost of operations**

Due to the many disruptions such as inflation, the energy crisis, operational costs, currency fluctuations, and market pressures experienced in South Africa, many organisations are

experiencing a rising cost of operations which is rapidly increasing the business failure rate, especially for small and medium organisations (Msomi & Olarewaju, 2021). Small and medium organisations contribute significantly to growth in the economy through job creation, innovation, income distribution, and relieving some of the poverty in the country. The success of these organisations, together with the larger organisations is essential to ensure continuous economic growth in South Africa (Msomi & Olarewaju, 2021). The rising cost of operations together with the many other disruptions impacting organisations is a major financial stress for business owners and employees as it creates a lot of change and uncertainty. As the cost of operations increases, the price of products or services produced needs to increase for the organisation to be profitable which heightens the risk of competition in the market (Shih, 2020). Some of the rising cost of operations in the printing industry can be attributed to the increased cost of raw materials, which is caused by the fluctuation in prices, this directly affects production costs and reduces the profit margin (Khan & Luiz, 2023). The printing industry requires heavy-duty machinery which consumes a lot of energy, the energy crisis leads to an increase in operational costs as the start-up process uses additional raw materials and energy (Khan & Luiz, 2023). The recent economic and macro-environmental events have contributed to a disruptive supply chain in the printing industry. For an organisation to stay competitive in the market, they need to be innovative, skilled, and resourceful, and these changes must be guided by effective leadership. In times of doubt and uncertainty, the organisation and its employees depend on leaders in the business to successfully provide direction and guidance towards constructive change that will ensure the organisation remains in a sustainable and profitable position.

#### **2.6.5. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**

The COVID-19 outbreak that began in December 2019 was one of the most damaging and disruptive viruses that affected countries across the world and was declared by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a global pandemic (Ikwegbue et al., 2021). The virus created a severe health and economic burden that put many countries and individuals in a state of crisis (Ikwegbue et al., 2021). The South African government together with other governments in different countries announced a national lockdown which severely impacted local and global supply chains (Ikwegbue et al., 2021). Many small organisations in South Africa were forced to shut down due to financial issues which negatively impacted the gross domestic product (GDP) contributions in local markets. Large organisations that were in a good financial position

and were viewed as essential services during the pandemic were fortunate enough to survive this disruption and maintain sustainability (Naidu, 2020).

Currently, in South Africa, many organisations are still facing great financial difficulties and are struggling to recover from the effects of the pandemic. Apart from the impact that COVID-19 had on organisations, people were severely affected and traumatized both on a financial and emotional level by the loss of jobs and loved ones (Naidu, 2020). The psychological effect has been devastating for many people and it is the responsibility of the organisation and the leaders in the business to be mindful and aware of the impact that the pandemic imposed on their employees. Through difficult and challenging periods, it is leaders who are effective who can turn an unpleasant situation into a positive (Ikwegbue et al., 2021).

#### **2.6.6. Impact of the Russia-Ukraine war**

The Ukraine-Russia war that began in 2014 and escalated to the point of Russia invading Ukraine in February 2022 created a substantial global disruption that impacted many countries economically after a short road of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (Nweke, Obi & Igweike, 2022). For South Africans, the Ukraine-Russia war had a major effect on the price of food and fuel, and inflation in the country (Nweke et al., 2022). The printing industry imports a high percentage of raw materials, which puts immense pressure on printing organisations due to increased costs and currency fluctuations (Safonov, Gutkevych & Shenderivska, 2022). The war had created a lot of economic uncertainty which impacted market demand in the printing industry (Safonov et al., 2022). These economic disruptions lowered the South African GDP rate in 2021 and 2022. South Africa imported a significant portion of mineral fuels, chemicals, wheat, and sunflower oil from Russia and Ukraine (Hatab, 2022). The shortage of these commodities entering the country created severe food insecurity and in addition to the rising food prices, the logistical costs of transportation also increased significantly (Hatab, 2022). The financial burden created by the war left many organisations and individuals in distress as recovery from the recent disruptions seemed impossible to recover from. Most people impacted by the Russia-Ukraine disruption were lower-income households who spent most of their money earned on food and transportation (Nweke et al., 2022). These disruptions such as the war are unforeseen disruptions that organisations and leaders need to be prepared for, which emphasizes the importance of leaders being skilled and equipped to efficiently operate in a VUCA environment (Nweke et al., 2022).

### **2.6.7. KZN floods and riots**

The KZN floods and riots were unforeseen disruptions that impacted many lives and organisations. The floods caused severe damage to many homes and businesses as well as resulted in the loss of over 500 lives (Bond & Galvin, 2023). The floods created a lot of building and infrastructure damage that prevented employees from resuming work as normal. The floods also severely impacted the organisational supply chain as the logistics and manufacturing components were impacted. The KZN riots that occurred consisted of burning buildings, looting, and violence that were confirmed to be both politically motivated and a part of criminality (Makonye, 2022). The riots created a significant amount of fear and distress for people and organisations. Some organisations were burnt down which resulted in the business closing and many employees losing their jobs. The KZN floods and riots were a severe disruption that caused a significant amount of stress for Durban organisations and employees. The printing organisation under study was situated at the epicenter of the KZN floods and riots.

### **2.6.8. Operating in a VUCA environment**

Globally, many organisations experience changes that are either caused by choice or by external pressures that are negatively impacting the business environment. A VUCA environment that is Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous can be characterized as an environment that has constant change and disruption, demanding adaptive strategies (Kolga, 2021). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, organisations are expected to be swift in meeting new demands and taking on disruptions innovatively and creatively which will support the organisation to move forward in a highly competitive business environment (Kolga, 2021). The printing industry is a dynamic industry that operates in a VUCA environment. The unpredictable change in customer preferences, technological advancements, and fluctuating raw material prices contribute to a volatile environment. Due to digitalization, the industry faces a lot of uncertainty as traditional printing is transitioning very quickly which makes it difficult to have long-term plans (Mert, Akkaya & Andreea, 2023). The process of printing has many complexities as there are various stages in the process of manufacturing the product, the designs are consistently changing, and innovation is constantly demanded to ensure market share (Mert et al., 2023). As the printing industry evolves, ambiguity arises as customer expectations evolve and expectations of print in the future are uncertain (Mert et al., 2023). The organisation needs to be open to continuous learning and must adapt to embracing change. The complexity of the business environment continuously requires organisations to evaluate and revise their processes and strategies that

will help the business to remain sustainable and profitable. The VUCA environment requires organisations to focus on upskilling employees and retaining talent in the business (Jayamaha, 2020). Traditionally many organisations were profit driven and the value of human capital was overlooked which could have previously worked in a stable business environment, however, the VUCA environment drives organisations to ensure employee development and upskilling as a key focus (Kolga, 2021).

To navigate these disruptions and for leaders to succeed in a VUCA environment, organisations can leverage strategic planning tools like the SCAILES framework. This framework encompasses several key components: strategic, complex, adaptive, innovative, learning, emergence, and system (Moore, 2015). By adhering to this structured approach, organisations can effectively pursue their strategic objectives. In a VUCA environment, organisations must conduct thorough situation analyses, considering factors such as volatile market conditions. Clear, flexible objectives are essential, and capable of adapting to change as circumstances evolve. Organisations must also explore various scenarios and contingency plans to manage risks and capitalize on opportunities (Moore, 2015). Flexible implementation plans are crucial, enabling swift adaptation to changing conditions. Leadership plays a vital role in navigating uncertainty. Leaders must demonstrate resilience, agility, and strategic vision to inspire confidence and guide their teams effectively (Moore, 2015). Continuous evaluation and monitoring are essential to track progress and identify emerging disruptions. Additionally, providing adequate support systems and resources is critical for employee success in a VUCA environment. This may involve fostering innovative cultures and investing in training to ensure employees have the skills and tools necessary to thrive amidst uncertainty (Moore, 2015).

Apart from the organisation having to adapt to continuous change, employees also need to be willing to accept change and adapt to the organisation. Operating in a VUCA environment also requires leaders and human resource professionals to ensure that employees are suitably fitted for the position and environment, especially when nurturing and developing young professionals (Jayamaha, 2020). The youth of today seek employment that has both psychological and monetary gains (Jayamaha, 2020). Change is consistent and organisations need to create a culture that embraces change where employees can be adaptable and fully support the business in their proposals to move the organisation forward. One of the most important criteria that is linked to effective leadership is having good followers who will support leaders in their decision-making and efforts to keep the business sustainable. For

businesses to grow and succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, learning to efficiently operate in a VUCA environment is a necessity (Kolga, 2021).

## **2.7. Summary**

In summary, this chapter has discussed leadership and what effective leadership should be, especially during challenging times. In many industries and areas of life, there are different types of leaders. These leadership styles were discussed to identify the different approaches that leaders can practice depending on the situation and the type of leadership required. The theoretical framework is primarily informed by transformational leadership, given that literature suggests this style of leadership to be suitable during disruptive times (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). It can be ascertained that no specific leadership style can be defined as the best or right style as leaders need to practice leadership depending on their current situation. Leaders can use various leadership styles to ensure effectiveness in their position as a leader. In addition to the different leadership styles, leadership traits, and behaviours were discussed. Leaders can display different leadership traits and behaviours which are attributed to the type of leader that a person aspires to be. In many organisations, effective leadership is an increasingly important requirement as studies suggest that leadership has a direct influence on employee performance. Leadership is becoming increasingly challenging due to the multiple disruptions that are affecting the economy, organisations, and employees. This chapter has highlighted the recent disruptions in South Africa, which are inflation, the energy crisis, unemployment, the rising cost of business operations, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war, KZN Floods and riots, and operating in a VUCA environment. These disruptions have created a severe negative impact on the economy and many organisations, and the recovery is becoming increasingly challenging. Leaders are facing great challenges in response to the multiple disruptions as business success and sustainability puts pressure on leaders to ensure they are being efficient in keeping the business profitable and promoting employee well-being.

The next chapter discusses the research methodology for the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Introduction**

Research is a powerful and fundamental tool used to expand already researched knowledge by discovering new truths, ideas, and concepts that will lead to greater ways of doing things or the development of better products. Without consistent research, progress will be limited in many areas or fields. The approach utilized by the researcher will be dependent on the required outcome of the study based on the aim and objectives of the research. Research can also be defined as both a creative and systemic process to gather information to create knowledge or to contribute to existing knowledge. For research to be conducted efficiently, the researcher must select the appropriate design and research process to execute the study (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021).

The previous chapter discussed the theory of leadership and the multiple disruptions affecting organisations in Durban. This chapter underlines the process and tools used to conduct the study which includes the research paradigm, design, methodology, sampling method, method of data collection, analysis of the data, ethical consideration, delimitations, and limitations of the study.

### **3.2. Research paradigm**

Research often begins with the intention of solving a known problem or as a tool undertaken by researchers to find answers systematically. The process of research involves a series of steps and actions to be taken to effectively conduct the study. The three most common research paradigms mentioned in the literature are positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory (Ugwu et al., 2021). These paradigms are defined as follows:

- Positivism is defined as a philosophy that depends on reason and observation whereby the researcher understands human behaviour and can use them as variables that can be researched scientifically. The positivism paradigm separates the researcher from the participants to attain objective knowledge that is independent, quantifiable, and measurable. This research paradigm is used for a cause-and-effect scenario to allow the researcher to make predictions on outcomes that can be measured using analytical approaches. Positivism therefore supports the quantitative research approach which is

conducted by developing hypotheses and following scientific methods of research (Ugwu et al., 2021).

- Interpretivism is focused on the subjective views of individuals and their understanding of the world surrounding them. This holds for both the researcher and participants based on their thinking and interactions on a personal and social basis. This paradigm allows for multiple interpretations and viewpoints based on individual beliefs. Based on the above, interpretivism supports qualitative research as the understanding of individuals is required in this research rather than objective knowledge (Ugwu et al., 2021).
- Critical theory was introduced by philosophers who believed that positivism and interpretivism alone were not enough to understand the truth of the real world. This theory by philosophers introduced a new paradigm known as the mixed methods approach which was a pragmatic way to comprehend human behaviour. The theory supporting the choice of research is solely dependent on the research questions and the purpose of the study. The researcher should follow the approach that is best suited to the study which could be the mixed methods approach that is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Ugwu et al., 2021).

The research paradigm used in this study was interpretivism as the aim was to identify the multiple disruptions affecting the organisation, and to explore how leadership responded to the multiple disruptions. The researcher sought active engagement and subjective responses from participants to assess how leaders navigated the disruptions and to highlight the potential leadership practices that could be effectively implemented to manage the disruptions.

### **3.3. Research methodology**

The methodology of a research study can be defined as the rules and methods followed to carry out the research. The research methodology helps to distinguish the type of research being conducted and guides the researcher on the process to follow as each method has specific characteristics and tools to be used. Three methods can be used in a research study which are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research. These methods are discussed below (Firdaus, Zufadilla & Caniago, 2021).

#### **3.3.1. Quantitative research**

Quantitative research is focused on collecting and analyzing numerical data to determine the relationship between two measurable variables, an independent and dependent variable

(Kandel, 2020). The data collected in quantitative research is under a controlled setting which presents results that are quantifiable and objective. Numerical data allows researchers to identify patterns or relationships between variables with the use of mathematical or statistical techniques. Some of the common tools used in quantitative research are questionnaires, experiments, or controlled observations. Quantitative research also requires a larger population to conduct the study as data is represented in numbers which are then statistically analysed to determine the outcome (Kandel, 2020).

### **3.3.2. Qualitative research**

Qualitative research is based on understanding social occurrences from the views and opinions of participants. Qualitative research is exploratory where the researcher can observe and interpret data based on the responses or actions of participants. The data collected provides subjective results, which need to be organised, analysed, and interpreted to develop common themes or patterns that are aligned with research questions and objectives. The most common tools used in qualitative research are interviews with open-ended questions, observations, or focus groups. Qualitative research can also be conducted using a smaller population as data is non-numerical and the emphasis is on gathering quality information that has meaning and insight to the research study (Nassaji, 2020).

### **3.3.3. Mixed methods research**

The mixed method in research steps away from the traditional approach of conducting either a quantitative or qualitative research study. The mixed method is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research which was introduced by philosophers to cater to modern researchers that have more complex needs or expectations from their research. The mixed methods approach provides the researcher with flexibility and a more open view to answering and understanding the aim, objectives, and questions set out in the study (Dawadi, Shrestha & Giri, 2021).

The method used in this study is qualitative research. The key step in the qualitative research process is determining the method and tool to use for data collection and analysis. The researcher selects the method of collecting data to achieve the desired result. In both qualitative and quantitative research, the researcher must have a well-developed plan to execute the project (Tumen-Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021). This study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with high-level management in the organisation. Amidst these many disruptions, leadership

plays a key role in ensuring that the employees are motivated and aligned with the vision and goals of the organisation.

The researcher selected the qualitative research method as this approach was identified as the most appropriate to achieve the desired results that are aligned with the aim and objectives of the study. This study focused on exploring and understanding the subjective perspectives and experiences of leaders in the organisation. The study also requires social interaction and an in-depth understanding of the research topic from the viewpoint of the selected participants (Nassaji, 2020). To fully engage with participants and explore the research topic, the researcher conducted the study using semi-structured interviews which allows for flexibility and open discussions (Nassaji, 2020).

### **3.4. Research design**

The research design is proposed to offer an appropriate and constructive framework for the study. The main purpose of the research design is to determine how the relevant information will be obtained which needs to be done in the most cost-effective, timeous, and optimal manner. The research design involves many interlinked decisions to ensure that information is gathered efficiently. If carried out efficiently, the research design will assist in providing a clearer understanding of the objectives with results that are valid and reliable (Abu-Taieh, Mouatasim & Al-Hadid, 2020). This study adopts a qualitative research approach using both exploratory and explanatory methods, to gain a greater understanding of how leaders lead through multiple disruptions. The primary goal is to enhance our comprehension of leadership concepts and practices, while also contributing to existing theories of effective leadership (Wipulanusat et al., 2020). Exploratory research will allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the research study by exploring new ideas that are aligned with the research study (Muzari et al., 2022). Explanatory research aims to obtain additional information and description in support of exploratory research about a specific observed occurrence that can be used to explain theory against the real-life occurrences in the organisation (Wipulanusat et al., 2020). The research questions focus on uncovering the various disruptions affecting the organisation, examining leadership responses to these disruptions, and identifying recommended leadership practices to address these multiple disruptions within a printing organisation in Durban. To ensure a targeted approach, purposive sampling was employed to select participants for the study. Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews conducted via an online platform known as Microsoft Teams, with each interview lasting

between 45 to 60 minutes. Following data collection, a thematic analysis method was utilized to analyze the gathered data, identifying recurring patterns and themes that provide insights into leadership amidst multiple disruptions within the organisation. This study focused on leaders' abilities to lead during the multiple disruptions in the organisation and as current theory regarding leadership suggests, leaders need to have the right leadership skills, capabilities, styles, and behaviours to overcome these disruptions and achieve the desired outcomes.

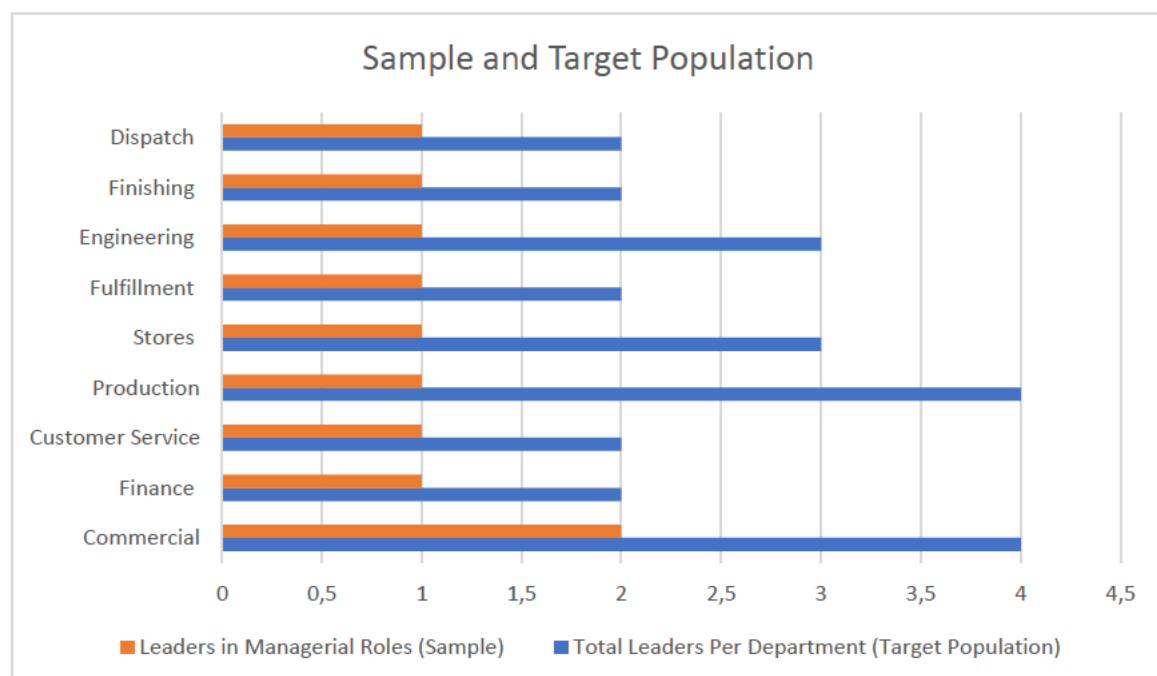
### **3.5. Sampling method**

Every study requires the researcher to select a sample from the target population to obtain data to make decisions that will assist in developing theories and literature on the research topic. Selecting the target population is one of the most important and difficult tasks for the researcher as the choice will significantly impact the results of the study (Lohr, 2022). The target population selected must have a link to the study that will provide the answers to the research questions that are predetermined. Once the target population is identified, the sample from which data will be obtained can be selected. A sample can be defined as a subgroup of the target population (Lohr, 2022).

The target population used in this study are leaders at a printing organisation called the Insidedata Group based in Durban, refer to Figure 3.1. In an organisation of 368 employees, there are 9 departments, 24 leaders of which 10 are in managerial roles. This research study used purposive sampling as the sampling method. Purposive sampling is a type of technique that uses non-probability sampling where participants have characteristics that are required for the research study and are selected on purpose (Lohr, 2022). The researcher followed the purposive sampling method as the aim was to involve participants with specific characteristics and experiences that are pertinent to the research questions (Lohr, 2022). This approach enables a deliberate and focused selection of participants, ensuring that the chosen sample is suitably fitted to meet the research objectives (Lohr, 2022). The study included leaders in high-level management positions as participants, chosen based on their knowledge and experience deemed valuable for contributing information relevant to the research objectives. It was crucial for the selected participants to share common characteristics to maintain relevance to the research questions. Conversely, leaders in supervisory roles were excluded from consideration due to their possession of a more diverse set of traits and characteristics, which did not align with the specific focus of the research. The sample was selected from the target population of 24 leaders in the organisation, the sample chosen was 10 leaders who are in high-level

management positions in the organisation, refer to Figure 3.1. The participants are categorized by their leadership position, gender, and years of experience in the organisation. Leaders in high-level management positions were selected as they have the knowledge and experience to provide high-level information that is relevant to this study. The leaders in managerial roles will be able to understand the multiple disruptions on a higher level and will also be equipped to provide information on sound leadership practices that they have implemented or could implement to manage these disruptions. This study focused on interviewing 10 leaders holding managerial positions across all 9 departments within the organisation under study. The data obtained from each leader offered insights specific to their department and personal experiences. By the time the 10th interview was completed, the saturation point was reached, with no new information emerging (Mwita, 2022). These leaders were managers in the following departments which are general, commercial, finance, customer service, production, stores, fulfillment, engineering, finishing, and dispatch. This study focused on gathering information on the multiple disruptions affecting the printing organisation and how leaders are coping with leading their teams in the organisation through these disruptions.

**Figure 3.1. Sample and Target Population**



**Table 3.1: List of participants**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Leadership Position</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years of Experience</b>
P1	General Manager	Male	10
P2	Commercial Manager	Male	35
P3	Finance Manager	Female	26
P4	Customer Service Manager	Male	18
P5	Production Manager	Male	8
P6	Store Manager	Male	12
P7	Fulfillment Manager	Female	7
P8	Engineering Manager	Male	14
P9	Finishing Manager	Male	37
P10	Dispatch Manager	Male	12

### **3.6. Collection of research data**

In literature and research, data collection is one of the most crucial components to ensuring that quality information is obtained to meet the aims and objectives of the study (Mitra et al., 2021). In qualitative research, there are two sources of data collection which are primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources of data refer to firsthand information collected by the researcher through interviews, observation, or focus groups. Secondary sources of data refer to data that has been previously collected and published such as journal articles or reports (Mitra et al., 2021). Three types of interviews can be used in qualitative research which are structured, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews.

#### **3.6.1. Structured interviews**

A structured interview consists of an interview schedule that is standardized and entirely planned before the interview takes place. Structured interviews can be defined as an organised conversation that is guided and led by predetermined questions which are directed to all participants (McGrath, Palmgren & Liljedahl, 2019). The interview is conducted in the same format and order with every participant to ensure consistency. Structured interviews entail closed-ended questions which allow the researcher to easily compile and analyze information (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022).

### **3.6.2. Unstructured interviews**

Unstructured interviews consist of interviews that are informal, and which are unplanned. Researchers who conduct unstructured interviews expect respondents to be honest and open so conversations are natural and flowing. In this interview, researchers are required to lead the discussions to ensure that the required data is collected to fulfill the research questions (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022).

### **3.6.3. Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are a combination of both structured and unstructured interviews which are created using both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews are pre-planned and designed to collect data that is aligned with the research questions and objectives. This interview type allows the researcher the flexibility to have an interview schedule that is focused and planned, and which provides the opportunity to fully engage with the participant to achieve the required information (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022).

The instrument used for data collection in this study was semi-structured interviews as it is feasible and allows the researcher to collect information that is focused and informative. The interview process was conducted online in the month of June, in the year 2023 using the Microsoft Teams platform and each interview was recorded on the online platform and saved for data analysis later in the study. The interviews were scheduled based on the availability of participants and the online process allowed for flexibility with time for both the participant and the researcher. When the interviews were conducted, each interview session was between 45-60 minutes, and open communication and engagement were encouraged during the process. Participants were first contacted via telephone where the aim and purpose of the study were explained and thereafter the participants were invited to participate in the interview process. Consent forms were sent to each participant and based on the acceptance and availability of the participants; the interview was conducted online. Due to increased technological advancements post the COVID-19 pandemic, online communication has developed and been openly accepted by many individuals and organisations therefore making the process of online data collection easier and convenient (Lobe, Morgan & Hoffman, 2020).

The interview schedule was developed in alignment with the aim and objectives of the study. Both open-ended and closed-ended questions were used to draw up the schedule through engagement and reference to current literature, refer to Appendix 2. The researcher also ensured

questions were clear and concise, so participants would easily understand the questions and engage with the researcher during the interview process.

### **3.7. Data analysis**

The collection of information is the first step to gathering what researchers call data. Once this data is collected, it needs to be organised and sorted. Before the process of filtering and sorting data begins, the researcher must have an understanding and familiarity with the variety or range of information that is gathered. The researcher will go over the interview recordings and concentrate on the information gathered to become familiar with the key issues and develop themes within the context of the study. Qualitative data analysis involves the interpretation of non-numeric theoretical information to develop patterns and themes in feedback received from participants (Mezmir, 2020). This qualitative study followed the process of thematic analysis which is a method used for interpreting and analyzing data by reading through the data and searching for meanings and patterns. This method also includes the process of reflexivity in which the researcher uses personal experiences to understand and add meaning to the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The researcher minimized bias in the process of reflexivity by maintaining awareness of the researchers' beliefs and observations on the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2022). During the data analysis process, the researcher focused on the responses received and the data collected to make a concerted effort to gain understanding from the viewpoints of the participants.

The data collected was analyzed and interpreted using coding to find common themes in the data collected which is the process of thematic analysis (Dawadi, 2021). The steps taken during the data analysis process using thematic analysis is discussed below:

#### **Step 1 – Familiarization of Data**

Familiarisation of data refers to the researcher becoming familiar with the data and developing an understanding of the themes that may emerge that are aligned to the research study (Dawadi, 2021). The transcripts were read through twice to grasp the key ideas and concepts that were emerging. It was important to become fully engaged with the data to link this information to the research questions.

#### **Step 2 – Generating Codes**

Thematic analysis involves the process of generating codes to sort data based on common concepts or ideas that stand out to the researcher (Dawadi, 2021). The data from each interview

was highlighted and coded in different colors to differentiate the ideas and themes that were emerging during this analysis.

### Step 3 – Developing Themes

During the coding process, the researcher would develop patterns and relationships between data collected from each participant. This stage in the process is the most challenging as the themes need to be developed (Dawadi, 2021). This information is then sorted and categorised in alignment with the research questions, aim, and objectives to develop common themes.

### Step 4 – Identifying and Naming Themes

The last step in the thematic analysis process is to identify and name the themes that emerged during the analysis. These themes can be split into main themes and Sub-themes (Dawadi, 2021). Once the themes were identified and collated under main themes and sub-themes, the themes were reviewed to ensure it was aligned with the data collected and the aim and objectives of the study were being met. The themes were then presented in a clear and concise format.

## **3.8. Ethical considerations**

Ethics in research is one of the most important aspects that a researcher needs to take into consideration before beginning the research process. Ethics set out in research highlights the guidelines for researchers to conduct professional research. In every research, ethical standards need to be maintained from the beginning to the end of the study without any violations. Academic researchers are headed by research ethics when conducting their research. Ethical standards are fundamental to protect the rights and dignity of individuals participating in the study. It is important that participants feel comfortable participating, and their trust is not violated during the process. Some of the other ethical standards are in place to protect human dignity, legal submissions, animal rights, and corporate responsibility. The researcher must ensure that he/she is always honest and authentic to all individuals who are involved in the research along the process (Hasan et al., 2021).

This study began with the completion of an ethical clearance document and gatekeeper's letter to the University of KwaZulu-Natal that confirmed this study could commence, refer to Appendix 3 and 4. The ethical clearance document was completed based on the requirements set out by the University which was in line with the ethical standards for research. The gatekeeper's letter was received by the commercial manager who approved that this study can

be conducted at this organisation. This study has not put participants in a position that will make them feel victimized, embarrassed, or ashamed in any way. This study did not violate any human rights or create an unpleasant environment for any participant. This study is guided by research ethics and standards. A participant consent form: refer to Appendix 1, was handed to every participant to complete before the interview process took place. The consent form provides an overview of the aim and purpose of the research study, informs participants that the information shared is only for research purposes and this information will remain confidential, the interview process is explained as well as the security measures set out to protect this information, participants were also made aware that they can withdraw from the research project at any time should they feel uncomfortable participating. The interview process commenced only once participants read, signed, and accepted the consent form to participate.

Five important elements support the concept of ethical considerations which are credibility, trustworthiness, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **3.8.1. Credibility**

The credibility of a study refers to the truth and accuracy of the information gathered during the research. The data collected and analysed must represent a true reflection of the participant's responses that aligns with the aim and objectives of the research. The information reported in this study could impact future research if this study is expanded by a different researcher therefore the overall study must be considered credible and reliable (Shufutinsky, 2020). In qualitative research, credibility can be ensured by the method of triangulation. To improve the validity of the research data and findings, the researcher can employ multiple data collection methods, including interviews, observations, and notes as relying solely on one method may introduce bias and weaken the findings. However, utilizing diverse sources and techniques can strengthen the validity of the results (Dobakhti, 2020).

### **3.8.2. Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in research which is in line with credibility is to ensure that the researcher conducts the study in an ethical and transparent approach that will provide readers with confidence that the study is true and dependable. The researcher must ensure that the necessary procedures and protocols are followed before researching so that the study is considered worthy and accurate (Shufutinsky, 2020). The researcher in this study ensured all ethical protocols

were followed before the participants were invited to participate in the interview process. Trustworthiness was further enhanced in this study by the methods of reflexivity which involved the researcher critically reflecting on their perspectives throughout the research process to mitigate potential biases and improve the neutrality of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The researcher also used an audit trail to further enhance the trustworthiness of the study which involved meticulously documenting, tracking, and recording each step undertaken throughout the research process. By maintaining this audit trail, the researcher aimed to enhance transparency and traceability, thereby enabling the validation of the research steps (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

### **3.8.3. Transferability**

Transferability in research represents the extent to which the findings and conclusion can be transferred to other similar settings or situations. The information from the research study must be of high quality and detail so that transferability can be achieved. Transferability with qualitative research is more difficult in comparison to quantitative research. With qualitative research, the researcher is subjective throughout the study, and with quantitative research, the researcher has the benefit of objectivity and the number of participants (Nassaji, 2020). This study provided a detailed literature review in chapter two regarding leadership and the multiple disruptions in Durban and the environment in which the study took place is detailed in chapter one of the study. This study also provided a comprehensive methodology with clear details regarding purposive sampling in chapter three which will enhance the transferability of the research.

### **3.8.4. Dependability**

The principle of dependability in qualitative research stresses the need to present the study in a manner that enables others to draw similar conclusions when examining the data. Achieving this involves carefully documenting all research activities, including any adjustments made throughout the study's progression (Nassaji, 2020). By maintaining detailed records, external researchers can evaluate the accuracy of the findings and assess how well the conclusions align with the data. This practice promotes transparency and accuracy, thereby strengthening the credibility and reliability of the research findings (Nassaji, 2020). Throughout this study the researcher documented and provided rationale for all decisions and actions made during the research procedure.

### **3.8.5. Confirmability**

Confirmability is a key aspect of qualitative research, highlighting the effective involvement of the researcher throughout the study. While like replicability, which focuses on the potential to replicate a study's findings, confirmability in qualitative research is about communicating the data and results in a manner that allows others to verify their accuracy (Nassaji, 2020). To ensure confirmability in this study, the researcher meticulously documented and justified all steps taken during data coding and analysis in chapter three. These detailed records were then available for further examination and validation, enhancing the overall credibility and reliability of the research study.

### **3.9. Summary**

The research methodology is an essential part of the research as it provides a detailed guideline on the process of the study. The components of the research methodology assisted the researcher in performing the research project and for the reader to grasp key themes and ideas. This chapter highlighted and explained the research process and the various concepts that form part of the research process.

The next chapter will present the results of the study.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **4.1. Introduction**

The study aimed to identify the multiple disruptions affecting the printing organisation and to understand the leadership response to the multiple disruptions. Chapter three provided a detailed explanation of the research methodology undertaken in this study. This study used the purposive sampling method where 10 senior level leaders were selected to be interviewed. The interview process was conducted using semi-structured interviews and was administered through an online platform called Microsoft Teams where the interview sessions were recorded for further analysis. The selected leaders in the organisation were much aligned with the study as the topic touched on the challenges that these leaders have been facing. Once the interviews were conducted, the method of data analysis used was thematic analysis which highlights the results and findings in this chapter.

### **4.2. Data analysis**

The data collected through the interviews were transcribed on Microsoft Teams. The transcriptions were thereafter analyzed by the researcher using the process of thematic analysis to find common emerging themes within the data. A summary of the themes and sub-themes are listed in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1: Summary of themes and sub-themes**

<b>Themes</b>		<b>Sub-Themes</b>	
Theme 1	Types of recent disruptions	Sub-theme 1	COVID-19 Pandemic
		Sub-theme 2	Load-shedding
		Sub-theme 3	KZN Riots
		Sub-theme 4	Ukraine-Russia War
		Sub-theme 5	Global Inflation and rate of exchange
Theme 2	Impact on the Organisation	Sub-theme 1	Supply chain disruptions
		Sub-theme 2	Working capital pressure
		Sub-theme 3	Loss of productivity
		Sub-theme 4	Increase in operational and material costs.
Theme 3	Leadership challenges	Sub-theme 1	Level of Uncertainty
		Sub-theme 2	Employee commitment and Job security
		Sub-theme 3	Customer retention
		Sub-theme 4	Retaining business profitability and managing working capital.
Theme 4	Leadership response	Sub-theme 1	Reactive vs Proactive leadership
		Sub-theme 2	Taking the lead
		Sub-theme 3	Being empathetic and understanding
		Sub-theme 4	Being quick decision-makers
Theme 5	Leadership Styles	Sub-theme 1	Autocratic vs Democratic leadership
		Sub-theme 2	Collaborative leadership
		Sub-theme 3	Situational leadership
Theme 6	Organisational Performance	Sub-theme 1	Leaders are the drivers of organisational performance
		Sub-theme 2	Defining business strategy
		Sub-theme 3	Developing a culture of growth and performance
Theme 7	Business management and improvement	Sub-theme 1	Crisis management and contingency planning
		Sub-theme 2	Recognizing opportunities
		Sub-theme 3	Constant Evolution

#### **4.2.1. Theme 1 - Types of recent disruptions**

The recent disruptions in South Africa have impacted both the organisation and the employees to a great extent. There were multiple disruptions highlighted by the participants that were addressed both on a personal and professional basis. These disruptions went beyond the impact on the business on an operational level but the impact on the participants as leaders in the

business who were responsible for leading a group of employees who were distraught and consumed with fear and uncertainty. Seven sub-themes followed which are discussed below:

#### **4.2.1.1. Sub-theme 1 - COVID-19 pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the major disruptions that impacted organisations and employees both on a personal and professional front. The general feedback received from participants indicated that people and organisations are still experiencing great pressure and difficulty in the effort to overcome the damage and trauma that resulted from the pandemic.

*I would say COVID-19 has been one of our biggest disruptions as the loss was significant both for the business and for my staff on a personal level. (P4).*

*You would be able to extrapolate what I say, I recall very clearly the first discussion we had with people on the floor was to say, well guys, you need to go home and that was before the hard lockdown that posed many more challenges. (P1).*

*We were lucky to have been recognized as an essential service provider, however, we still lost at least 50 percent of our business activity. (P6).*

Many of the participants mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their relationships with their staff as people were consumed with fear and doubt and were unsure of how to react or respond to this severe disruption that was impacting so many lives and businesses.

*COVID forced us into a situation where we had to put the factory on short-time and that was met with a huge amount of distrust. So, you did not only have a disruption to your business by not knowing what was going to happen, but you also had a disruption and uncertainty in terms of relationships with your employees. (P1).*

*Although we were classified as essential services, one of my biggest issues was convincing staff to come to work and to reassure them that we have put solid procedures in place to prevent the virus from spreading and that they will be safe at work. (P9).*

#### **4.2.1.2. Sub-theme 2 - Load-shedding**

The general response is that load-shedding in South Africa has been one of the disruptions that have severely impacted many organisations and continue to be an ongoing struggle for businesses and households in the present and future. It was mentioned that many organisations such as the InsideData Group have strategized ways that will allow the business to remain

sustainable and profitable throughout the effects of load-shedding however this remains a challenge due to the high-cost factors involved and the uncertainty around the situation improving.

*Load-shedding from a production perspective, you get approximately two to three times a day and if you are operating a 24-hour shift, you are losing almost six hours a day and the process of starting up the machines again takes another 45 minutes or more. (P2).*

*The business was in a position where the Opex costs started to push up and you could not recover from it, but from an Opex point of view, you saw a massive increase in waste because of load-shedding. So, load-shedding added to it as it increased over the last six months, and you started to see more waste being generated and less efficiency. (P5).*

*As an engineer, I started to arrange and accelerate the process of getting in key components and critical parts for our machines as we started to see breakdowns that were electronically related as opposed to the traditional mechanical issues. (P8).*

#### **4.2.1.3 Sub-theme 3 - KZN riots**

The KZN Riots have been an additional unforeseen disruption that compounded the challenges that organisations faced after the COVID-19 outbreak. As organisations began to overcome the effects of the pandemic, the KZN riots put many more organisations in additional distress as it caused significant loss to businesses due to the looting and destruction of buildings and equipment. It was noted that people in the organisation were consumed with fear and doubt about their safety and job security. The organisation is based in Cornubia, Durban where the looting and rioting occurred at large, however, it was mentioned that InsideData was fortunate for being a printing organisation, the looters did not go as far to their building which saved the organisation from severe loss, and destruction, however, the damage to surrounding areas greatly impacted the supply chain aspect.

*I think our factory was in one of the epicenters of where the riots, looting, burning, and destruction were happening and that is just not nice to see. Thankfully, they did not get as far as our building, which saved our business. (P1).*

*I remember coming into work and seeing armed guards outside the building just after the looting occurred, I did not feel completely safe or comfortable, but I had to lead by example so my staff would feel more comfortable to come to work without fear and to get back to normal after all that transpired. (P10).*

#### **4.2.1.4. Sub-theme 4 - Ukraine-Russia war**

The Ukraine-Russia war was a disruption that created a global impact affecting economies around the world. The common feedback received was that the most significant impact of the Ukraine war was the disruption to local and global supply chains. The organisation imported a significant value of raw materials which created a great number of challenges for the business to secure raw materials and meet customer demands. It was noted that the organisation had to find alternate measures to secure raw materials at a higher cost, which contributed to further inefficiencies.

*One of the most recent disruptions that affected the macro environment I would say is related to the war between Ukraine and Russia which certainly had massive implications in terms of supply chain challenges to the rest of the world and this was a major disruption to our business. (P3).*

*The war between Ukraine and Russia created so much volatility globally over the last six months and this has been a great challenge in our industry as we import a lot of our raw materials. (P5).*

*So, because our business imports some of our key items like materials, inks, and consumables, the war between Ukraine and Russia put a damper on our production capabilities because we could not produce certain goods which means we had to find alternative means of meeting client demands. (P8).*

#### **4.2.1.5. Sub-theme 5 - Global inflation and the rate of exchange**

Many contributing factors impacted global inflation and the rate of exchange. The disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine-Russia war were examples of disruptions that impacted local and global economies. Global inflation and the rate of exchange impacted business profitability and sustainability and the organisation could not keep up with the rising costs and increased pressure to survive in the business market. Most participants felt there was pressure from both a demand and supply level as suppliers and customers were experiencing many challenges due to the rising costs and increases in demand.

*On a macro level, I would say it is global inflation that had a fundamental impact on businesses far and wide across the world. We have seen unprecedented levels of inflation in Europe as well as the US and that is now being fought within the borders of South Africa which ultimately impacts our local economy. (P3).*

*We also had a rate of exchange that prevented us from purchasing, which impacted on our availability of raw materials. We sometimes were forced to purchase at a higher rate just to meet our customer demands, which meant us selling jobs at almost cost price with no margin. (P9).*

*So, one was the rate of exchange when the rand was weakening against the dollar and the euro, it was inconsistent which affected our paper prices as it was staggering all the time, so you do not have a real sense of margin on jobs and the inconsistency in the rate of exchange is affecting our business. (P2).*

#### **4.2.2. Theme 2 - Impact on the organisation**

The multiple disruptions that occurred over recent years have impacted many organisations on different levels. The effects of the disruptions were greatly determined by the financial position of the business. The main challenges that organisations faced were centered around business sustainability and finding the means of survival under tough and uncertain circumstances. Some of the challenges that the printing organisation faced due to the multiple disruptions were increasing costs, loss of productivity, and disruptive supply chains. These disruptions impact on the organisation's ability to efficiently meet customer demands, which subsequently impacts business profitability and sustainability.

##### **4.2.2.1. Sub-theme 1 - Supply chain disruptions**

Participants concurred that the supply chain disruptions impacted the organisation from both the supply and demand sides. The global effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine-Russia war created many international barriers that affected the organisation's ability to secure raw materials that were imported which is approximately 80 percent of the raw material used in the business. Apart from securing material internationally, the rising cost factors created an additional supply chain barrier as these costs had to be passed on to customers to keep the business profitable. It was noted that customers were also experiencing many challenges due to these disruptions which resulted in an endless loop of negotiations and decisions to find the most efficient solution for all key players in the supply chain network.

*I think in every business, the main goal is to efficiently provide a product or service to the customer, and with the many disruptions, we have experienced many supply chain challenges such as securing raw materials to manufacture and working with minimal staff to meet customer demands. (P9).*

*We've had to manage through these situations, for example, the supply chain challenges we had to get ahead of it, being able to look at alternatives, markets, alternative suppliers, alternative vendors, be able to test new products, you need to have a level of agility to be able to test and approve products and be able to take your customers and suppliers on the journey with you. (P3).*

*The disruptions impacted on our supply chain and our customers as we were unable to achieve our targets for the day. (P7).*

#### **4.2.2.2. Sub-theme 2 - Working capital pressure**

Good working capital in the organisation allows the business to be flexible and efficient by ensuring there is a smooth cash flow that allows the organisation to settle short-term debts with short-term assets. With efficient working capital, the organisation is not investing in assets that will be idle for a period longer than it needs to and capital is used in a manner that financially benefits the business. The multiple disruptions that have impacted local and global economies have put significant pressure on the working capital in the printing organisation. It was highlighted that due to the challenges of securing raw materials and the productivity disruptions during load-shedding, a high amount of capital was invested into raw materials to be held as inventory to ensure customer demands could be met. Additionally, the financial department had to review and negotiate credit terms with both suppliers and customers to effectively manage the working capital pressure due to funds tied up in inventory.

*We also have the rate of exchange that prevented us from purchasing during the disruptions. Right now, I would say it is a big learning curve for us, especially when it comes to raw materials as we are buying additional stock to secure the material at a good rate to meet our customer demands. (P9).*

*So, your accounts receivable and your multinational accounts tend to push you out in terms of your credit terms, and they require longer terms to pay you which requires capital investment for a cash investment from your side. Over and above that you are sitting with a challenge where your vendors also require payment from you, and it is very difficult to push them out if you have already negotiated decent terms where you are getting an attractive settlement discount. (P3).*

*Pricing increasing and the devaluation of the rand means that our stock levels were increased, and we had a double whammy in line with raw materials increasing because most industries also put wage negotiations on the table. (P5).*

#### **4.2.2.3. Sub-theme 3 - Loss of productivity**

Through the many disruptions, there was consensus among participants that productivity has been impacted the most severely. During the COVID-19 pandemic and the KZN Riots, there was a significant amount of lost time as staff could not come to work and this has been one the greatest challenges to recover from, which is lost time and lost sales. It was noted that during the lockdown period, the printing organisation was recognized as an essential service which allowed for a portion of production to continue however the impact has been so severe that the business is still on a rocky road to recovery. In addition, the load-shedding has put extra pressure on the organisation as productivity is still being greatly impacted.

*In early March, when the country went into full lockdown, we remained as essential services because we were supplying the hospitals and the banks with paper however we could not run full shifts which impacted our productivity, and a large portion of staff were put on short time. (P1).*

*During load-shedding, you lose almost 3 hours of productivity and with the time lost, you cannot get jobs out on time, so that is creating customer frustration and there is a continuous backlog being created in production. (P2).*

*When the protest took place, we had to stop production to some of our key retailers, in addition, the load-shedding hampered our production abilities and the loss of productivity led to a loss of revenue, and once your turnover drops, it also starts hitting your bottom line. (P8).*

*From an admin perspective, during the lockdown and protest action, we could not operate for the entire period as not everyone had access to laptops to work remotely, we lost a lot of hours, and we are still recovering from that lost time. (P6).*

#### **4.2.2.4. Sub-theme 4 - Increase in operational and material cost**

The general response from participants highlighted that there was a significant increase in operational and material costs. The pressure of rising costs was felt by every member of the organisation from senior management to the lower-level employees. The staff were put on a lot of short time as the business tried managing the available resources during the pandemic and

protest action. The business was forced to take the initiative to control its costs. The trading barriers and rate of exchange were significant contributors to increasing costs as 80 percent of the raw materials are imported by the organisation. Due to load-shedding, the labor inefficiencies contributed to additional operational costs. It was mentioned that the additional costs they incurred to install generators to keep the machines running and the additional ongoing cost that is paid towards diesel to keep the generators running. Additionally, it was noted that the paper prices have increased significantly over the past 18 months.

*So, although many organisations in different ways sustain the business, certainly you know some are unable to sustain the cost pressures that exist within the marketplace and as a result, they shut down operations or sell off operations, but most especially within the business, it erodes margins. You have major drops in EBITDA and EBIT as well as profits and sales or the top line is adversely affected. (P3).*

*If you look at the income statement that consists of inks, consumables, labour costs, and the management of sick leave and absenteeism, we went and put in additional generation capacity to help stabilize the hours because if one did the numbers, the number of hours we lose and you exacerbate that by overtime, the costs become very excessive. (P5).*

*The other impact that is in terms of load-shedding is the ability to produce on only certain technologies because of the cost implications to run that equipment based on the capacity of the generators that we have installed. (P8).*

*In the global paper supply industry, the cost of paper against the various grades and for different commercial reasons has gone up between, I would say 30 to 60 percent over the last 18 months. (P1).*

#### **4.2.3. Theme 3 - Leadership challenges**

The multiple disruptions have created many challenges for leaders and the organisation. The world of business is changing at a rapid pace which puts constant pressure on organisations to be innovative and to strategically make decisions that will keep the business competitive in the market. The recent disruptions have put additional pressure on leadership to manage the disruptions in terms of cost factors, production constraints, employee commitment, customer retention, high levels of uncertainty as well as rise above the competition and be profitable.

#### **4.2.3.1 Sub-theme 1 - Level of uncertainty**

Throughout the many disruptions that have impacted on the organisation, there is agreement amongst participants that there is still a high level of uncertainty within the organisation regarding all aspects of the business. The organisation has been on the road to recovery for the past few months, however, the organisation still faces many challenges in the market. It was highlighted that there are concerns about uncertainties in businesses due to several factors. One issue is the impact of importing materials and the recent Transnet strike, leading to uncertainty regarding recovery plans, particularly with locally purchased materials being overpriced. Additionally, there are concerns about high financial losses and strained relationships with employees due to disruptions. This highlights the ongoing challenge for organisational leaders to navigate and mitigate risks effectively, necessitating strategic planning and management to ensure business resilience.

*When we had the Transnet strike, we had issues bringing in stock which created a lot of uncertainty in our business as we had to source alternate local supplies that were overpriced, and which would impact on our sales and profitability. (P4).*

*So, you did not only have a disruption to your business by not knowing what was going to happen, but you also had a disruption and uncertainty in terms of relationships with your employees. (P1).*

*Based on the different scenarios, we as leaders must continuously have plans in place to manage the risk and mitigate risks to avoid loss of sales. (P6).*

#### **4.2.3.2. Sub-theme 2 - Employee commitment and job security**

The effects that the multiple disruptions had on every organisation differed depending on the financial situation or the industry the organisation operated in. Some organisations were severely affected to the point of shutting down or barely making it to survive. Many people lost their jobs during this period which created a lot of uncertainty and fear in people in their current place of employment. All participants felt a lot of uncertainty regarding their job security and received the same doubts from their subordinates. It was a period of immense volatility where leaders in the organisation had to strategize and think quickly to make decisions that would sustain the business. In discussions, it was noted that some suppliers closed due to cost pressures, prompting the business to seek alternative options for securing materials. Additionally, there was a significant emphasis on the pressure felt by the leadership to uphold

trust and commitment among employees during this challenging period, marked by difficult decisions and operational changes. Furthermore, severe disruptions such as the pandemic and KZN riots instilled fear among employees about their safety when attending work, presenting a dilemma between loyalty to the organisation and familial obligations.

*I remember during the hard lockdown period; we were lucky to be in an industry that was recognized as an essential service provider however we struggled to manufacture due to the unavailability of materials as some of our suppliers were still closed or had shut down due to the financial burden. (P3).*

*I mean one of the toughest situations I faced as a leader was standing in front of a factory full of people who had so much doubt and mistrust and trying to convince them that we were doing the best we could for the business and to plead with them to continue coming into work and staying committed to the organisation during this tough period. (P1).*

*Through the many disruptions, one of my greatest challenges was achieving my daily targets as I was continuously short-staffed, or I had to work with a team that was highly demotivated. (P10).*

#### **4.2.3.3. Sub-theme 3 - Customer retention**

An organisation builds a customer base over many years and one of the greatest challenges during uncertain and turbulent times is retaining these customers. The general response from participants who were more aligned to production focused on ensuring that they achieved their daily targets to make sure customer demands were met. Participants who were aligned to costing or pricing were focused on ensuring customer satisfaction in terms of affordability and feasibility. With the many disruptions, the production department faced great challenges to keep up with manufacturing and customer deliveries. The commercial department faced challenges with maintaining profit margins as raw material price increases were eroding all margins on jobs, and to maintain some profitability, a percentage of costs had to be passed onto customers.

*Speaking from a customer service perspective, I remember getting calls daily from customers who were frustrated as we could not keep up with their demand which was in turn impacting their customers. It was tough for me because there were certain aspects that I could not control such as production outputs and deadlines, I just had to try my best to console the customers and reassure them we were working on ways to better the situation. (P4).*

*The material we purchased I think was more than a premium price and that really impacted us because all over the world there were constraints, we also basically lost a few customers in the process. (P9).*

*So, what is happening now due to the rate of exchange, we are doing margin analysis. We are looking at customers, what prices we are charging them and how we can recover our margin based on the increase in input costs and the exchange rate fluctuating. (P2).*

#### **4.2.3.4. Sub-theme 4 - Retaining business profitability and managing working capital**

One of the significant challenges for both leadership and the organisation was retaining profitability and managing working capital. It was highlighted that the business was disrupted by two major factors as outlined in the discussion: supply chain challenges and exchange rate fluctuations. Given that 80 percent of raw materials were imported, the resulting cost implications were significant, making it challenging to maintain profitability while passing costs onto customers. Moreover, in efforts to manage costs passed onto customers, the business decided to purchase extra stock during periods of lower exchange rates, thus extending inventory holding periods. However, this approach affected working capital and the ability to meet suppliers' credit terms.

*The two major drivers that have disrupted our business were supply chain challenges and the rate of exchange from a forex perspective. (P3).*

*We also have the rate of exchange that prevented us from purchasing during the disruptions. Right now, I would say it is a big learning curve for us, especially when it comes to raw materials as we are buying additional stock to secure the material at a good rate to meet our customer demands. (P9).*

*Currently, due to the rate of exchange continuously fluctuating, we have purchased additional paper at a lower price to retain some of our margin on jobs printed. (P2).*

*Within the local market coupled with low GDP growth and the fact that we now probably have a recessionary environment which makes it a bit difficult to trade and grow the business during this time. (P5).*

#### **4.2.4. Theme 4 - Leadership response**

The leaders in the organisation were responsible for guiding and leading the business forward. The response from leadership was crucial to the outcome of all situations. With the multiple

disruptions that occurred over the past few months, the leaders in the organisation were put under pressure to respond in the right way as their response impacted the business and the employees. From the feedback received, the common sub-themes that developed were reactive and proactive leadership, leaders taking the lead in the business, leaders being empathetic and understanding when required, and leaders being quick decision-makers in an environment that is consistently changing.

#### **4.2.4.1. Sub-theme 1 - Reactive versus proactive leadership**

Throughout the multiple disruptions, many of the participants found themselves being reactive to situations that were inefficient for the business, and which also created an environment of uncertainty and distrust with employees. It was important that leadership did not sit back and react only when required but were proactive and pre-planning. It was highlighted that the disruptions began with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which proved to be the most disruptive to the organisation. This period served as a valuable learning experience, as both leaders and the organisation found themselves unprepared and reactive in response to the disruptions posed by the pandemic. Additionally, it was noted that many organisations did not survive the disruptions due to a lack of proactive behaviour or effective planning to manage the situation.

*The COVID-19 pandemic was an unforeseen circumstance that hit us suddenly and we were caught off guard, but this helped me to better manage situations and as a leader to better manage future situations if they had to occur again. (P7).*

*The disruptions impacted a lot of organisations, and many did not survive, one thing we learned is that you cannot sit back and be reactive to this, you got to be proactive, and you need to plan strategically and be prepared for these challenges. (P3)*

*After the first disruption, we are much better in terms of planning and organizing, we learned how to be agile and we knew how to work in situations where you had to kind of plan, prepare, and have backup plans. (P4).*

#### **4.2.4.2. Sub-theme 2 - Taking the lead**

The general feedback received from participants showed that there was a lot of uncertainty between management to employees. Everyone seemed to be consumed with fear and doubt and were afraid to make decisions that could negatively impact themselves and the business. Eventually, it was up to the leadership to put their fear aside and lead by example. The leaders

in the organisation needed to take the first steps to guide employees to come back to work and trust that the organisation will have their best interest in mind while doing what is best for the organisation to survive. Most of the participants shared the same sentiment of taking the lead and showing true leadership, especially in times of crisis.

*Everyone has a set of problems in the work environment, and it is not being brought together in a structured manner that allows for decision-making, so then it becomes the role of a leader in these crises to take the lead and bring clarity, structure, and calmness so people can start to see the wood for the trees. (P1).*

*When it comes to crises or disruptions as such, leadership should step in and say this is what we need to do, it is about taking charge, being calm, and showing that the situation is under control, so others do not worry or panic. (P2).*

*As a leader, you are going to take the lead, you have got to get ahead, you have got to have engagement with customers, and be at the forefront of leading the change. (P5).*

#### **4.2.4.3. Sub-theme 3 - Being empathetic and understanding**

The multiple disruptions have affected many people on both a psychological and financial level. All participants agreed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, people were hit with harsh situations where loved ones were lost, and jobs were lost. People had to emotionally deal with the loss of family and friends and manage their financial situation to meet their basic needs. After the pandemic, there were many other disruptions such as the protest action, the Ukraine-Russia war, load-shedding, and inflation that put additional pressure on people. From a leadership perspective, there was consensus among participants that it was a necessity to be understanding and empathetic during such circumstances. The responses showed that the needs and feelings of people during such times are essential to keep the workforce productive and motivated.

*Sometimes being a leader puts you in a tough position because as much as you have targets and deadlines to meet, you also have people who look up to you and expect you to be compassionate and understanding during tough situations and I always believed that a machine is nothing without people running it. (P9).*

*Communication in my team was key, it was important to communicate and support each other, to constantly check how they were doing and how it could be affecting their work and to find solutions with them to any issue they may have. (P7).*

*So when the disruptions began, the first thing we had to do was demonstrate empathy towards that, because every person that came into the office made an extra effort because everyone has been impacted in the country and the first element was saying thank you to them for being there, being present, understand not only the responsibilities at home but also the responsibility that I had to the organisation and that the sense of appreciation by leadership, because all too often leaders or managers and executives dissociate themselves to some extent from staff and their staff's problems. (P5).*

#### **4.2.4.4. Sub-theme 4 - Being quick decision-makers**

A common sub-theme that developed from the discussion with participants is that it was important to be quick decision-makers. During the many disruptions, it was key that decisions were made quickly and were well thought out. The business environment is fast-paced, and it is important to be on top of the changes and to think ahead to ensure the organisation does not fall behind. Many of the participants felt that their ability to think quickly and make informed decisions helped in ensuring that the business was moving forward even in times of crisis and amid the many disruptions.

*When dealing with staff or if you are short-staffed due to these disruptions and your planning goes off, you must be quick thinking on your feet to make decisions. (P7).*

*Speaking from the financial side, we experienced a lot of sudden cost pressures and we had to think quickly to find solutions to recover and to keep our working capital at least stable during this time. (P3).*

*As a leader, I wanted to be quick thinking and to think out of the box and apply logical knowledge but in a very business acumen methodology. (P5).*

*I faced significant challenges in trying to get shareholders to understand the situation of the business and its risk and to believe that it is not just pure trading but there are real supply-side impacts and that you cannot just pass on more price increases, we had to think strategically and come up with quick solutions to convince shareholders that the business needed additional support. (P1).*

#### **4.2.5. Theme 5 - Leadership styles**

The discussion around leadership and leadership styles presented a lot of uncertainty from participants on the right leadership style or approach that will provide the best outcome. From

the responses, it showed that participants felt that they are continuously learning when it comes to leading people and the organisation. It was difficult for participants to confirm that there was one right way of leadership because every situation required a different approach. In the discussion of effective leadership, it was noted that finding the right leadership style is the answer to the universe and everything. The most common sub-themes developed were autocratic versus democratic leadership, collaborative leadership, and situational leadership.

*Finding the right leadership style, I think is the answer to the universe and everything. (P1).*

#### **4.2.5.1. Sub-theme 1 - Autocratic versus democratic leadership**

Some of the participants who have been in the organisation for many years used life experiences to explain the leadership changes they have witnessed. These participants confirmed that years back, management followed the autocratic style of leadership where decisions and power were controlled by top-level management in the business. Over the years they have seen changes not only in leaders but in people who expect to be more involved and to be a part of the decision-making. Four of the participants said that effective leadership occurred by following the democratic style of leadership.

*I think leaders must be able to empower people enough so that they can make their own decisions and manage customer expectations on their own. People need to feel confident to contribute to team discussions where managers do not have to get involved all the time. (P2).*

*The biggest thing about a leader is being able to lead and not manage, so there is a big difference between a leader and a manager. Leading means that you are there to guide, support, and empower your people. You must be able to create a safe space for them to do their jobs and guide them from a developmental point of view. (P4).*

*I would say an effective leader would follow a more democratic style, it is about considering what the employee has to say and not just dictating because you find a lot of times, they are doing the actual work and as a leader, we are overseeing what they are doing and assisting them with any challenges they may face. (P6).*

*The number one factor for me when it comes to leadership is respect. Respect is a two-way street. The autocratic style of leadership is a no, you cannot rule by finger-like back in the day. You need to be able to listen to your staff and allow them to share ideas, we as leaders are also learning every day and we can learn something new from our staff. (P9).*

#### **4.2.5.2. Sub-theme 2 - Collaborative leadership**

During the discussions on the multiple disruptions, one of the common themes that developed was the need to have collaboration. Collaboration among suppliers, employees, colleagues, and customers. It was the basic need to have collaboration among all these key players in the supply chain network, especially during a time of crisis or disruption. From a leadership perspective in the organisation, 3 of the participants mentioned that an effective leader should follow a collaborative approach to achieve the desired results with their teams.

*An effective leader is always surrounded by people. Many people from different walks and spaces have different strengths and weaknesses, and wisdom in different spheres of business. It is good to build collaborative relationships with these people who are in tune with the global landscape and can understand the next-level changes that are coming through. (P3).*

*As leaders, we need to have the ability to separate our personal views from that of the organisation and recognize that we do not only lead our home, but we lead an organisation of approximately 300 people with who we need to work together and understand each other. (P5)*

*Being an effective leader requires excellent communication, as previously mentioned, we need to be humble, and approachable and have close working relationships with our staff so we can help them do their jobs better. (P7).*

#### **4.2.5.3. Sub-theme 3 - Situational leadership**

The overall responses confirmed that there are no right leadership styles that a leader can have that will always achieve the desired outcomes. The leadership approach is more than often dependent on the situation. Leaders behave and approach situations differently depending on the outcome they require. Certain situations such as the pandemic and protest action required a more understanding and empathetic approach, however, some situations required a sterner approach such as when staff refused to be productive. The situational leadership style was mentioned by 3 participants.

*For me, I think situational leadership because every situation requires a different approach. All your subordinates or experts in certain fields or areas take the lead in certain situations so that is why I strongly believe situational leadership is effective. (P1).*

*With regards to being an effective leader, books tend to dictate profits, and then on the flip side, it can be people before profits, so I believe that you analyze the situation first and then decide on the approach. (P8).*

*To be honest, I think there are so many ways to be an effective leader, you need to understand the business, understand the situation, understand the people you are working with, and given the knowledge that you have around these factors, you can decide on the best way to lead. (P10).*

#### **4.2.6. Theme 6 - Organisational performance**

The multiple disruptions that impacted on the organisation brought about unexpected changes and challenges that disrupted the normal regime of business. Based on the discussions with participants, the business environment is constantly changing and requires constant intervention to ensure the business remains competitive in the market. Apart from the multiple disruptions that have put severe strain on the organisation, there have been many new market developments and technological innovations that have also put pressure on the organisation. From the feedback obtained, the approach has always been to create a culture of growth and development with the guidance of leadership. The leaders in the organisation were responsible for developing and implementing business strategies that would drive the performance of the organisation.

##### **4.2.6.1. Sub-theme 1 - Leaders are the drivers of organisational performance**

The response received from many of the participants indicated that leadership is a strong driving force toward organisational performance. Many of the participants confirmed that without good leadership, the organisation can easily lose focus and will begin to fall apart, especially considering the many disruptions affecting the industry. The importance of leaders in driving organisational performance was underlined, with an emphasis on their understanding of the business's vision and goals, enabling them to align teams accordingly. Additionally, leaders were noted to play a key role in guiding and supporting employees to steer the business in the right direction. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that clear objectives set by leaders are essential for organisational performance and the achievement of expected results.

*Leaders are drivers in the business as they are aligned with the organisation rules, and goals, whether they are short or long-term or just the vision. Leadership is about the alignment of objectives for the sole purpose of growth. (P1).*

*The whole idea of being a good leader is to steer the company in the right direction by providing guidance and support as needed. (P2).*

*I believe as leaders we have clear objectives and targets to meet which we need to use to drive performance within our teams and deliver results. (P10).*

#### **4.2.6.2. Sub-theme 2 - Defining and implementing business strategy**

One of the key themes that were highlighted by participants was defining and executing business strategy. Every disruption that occurred required leaders in the organisation to come together, think and plan strategically, and execute this strategy among their team members. The importance of developing a strong strategic plan was noted, with an emphasis on its role in ensuring long-term sustainability for the business. Additionally, it was highlighted that effective strategy implementation hinges on the alignment and commitment of all team members, as drawn from past experiences. Furthermore, strategic alignment was emphasized as crucial for business sustainability and the mitigation of disruptions.

*I have been in the business for many years and having a vision together with a good strategic plan is the way to ensure there is long-term sustainability in the business. (P8).*

*Speaking from experience, defining, and understanding your business strategy is important. However, making sure that the strategy is cascaded effectively to the team is key as the team will ultimately execute the strategy. (P4).*

*Management and staff alignment to the organisation's strategy is the key to business sustainability and ensuring minimal disruption to the business. (P3).*

#### **4.2.6.3. Sub-theme 3 - Developing a culture of growth and development**

Many of the participants confirmed that the culture in the organisation is very important to ensure the growth and development of people and business. The leaders in the organisation continuously work towards creating a harmonious, productive, and growing environment for their teams. The general response was aligned with employees being the greatest asset in the business and the environment needs to support employees to grow and develop. Some of the responses are mentioned below.

*Leaders play a big role in driving the culture of the business. A culture that supports what the organisation stands for. (P4).*

*We as leaders need to ensure that the culture is positive and improves business. (P6)*

*I believe for business to prosper and grow; we need to have a good culture where people feel motivated and happy to be at work. (P9)*

*One of the things I always believed and followed is respect for each other; we need to always work towards building a culture of respect and understanding. (P7).*

#### **4.2.7. Theme 7 - Business management and improvement**

The multiple disruptions together with the many challenges that organisations encountered daily required efficient business management and strategic planning that would have improved the organisation. According to participants the many disruptions that the organisation faced over the recent months provided numerous learning opportunities on ways and methods to improve the business. Disruption is unforeseen and can occur at any time which is why leadership needs to focus on continuous improvement. Some of the sub-themes that were developed to manage the multiple disruptions were crisis management, contingency planning, recognizing opportunities where possible, and working towards constant evolution.

##### **4.2.7.1. Sub-theme 1 - Crisis management and contingency planning**

Many of the participants confirmed that this was the first time in many years that the organisation was impacted so severely by these disruptions. It was a period of consistent disruptions that had ripple effects on the business whereby recovery kept being pushed further away. Some of the participants who were more involved in the action and response to these disruptions stated that the plans filed away in the event of a crisis were only good on paper as the procedures in place were not acceptable to effectively handle these disruptions. It was noted that existing procedures did not unfold as intended, prompting a thorough review and subsequent adjustments for future operations. Additionally, the importance of daily crisis management to address potential business issues was emphasized. Participants also discussed the significance of implementing contingency planning effectively in the organisation moving forward. Concern was expressed by some about the lack of foresight in many organisations that shut down, highlighting the absence of contingency plans to sustain operations during disruptions. In summary, there was a consensus on the crucial role of crisis management and contingency planning in ensuring business continuity, stressing the need for their effective implementation and management.

*I looked at our management team, and I asked myself if they were available at the time of crisis and the answer was no. The theory looked great if you read it but to enable it was a different issue. So, I have now created a crisis management team with emergency contact information and processes where decisions can be made very quickly in the event of a crisis. (P5).*

*Crisis management was an important need in business during the disruptions and it was a good learning curve for us as this is something we should be using daily to deal with complex issues that are disrupting our business. (P1).*

*I believe production is the core of our business and with the ongoing load-shedding, it is becoming even more difficult. There must be contingency plans in place to combat the effects of load-shedding, I mean many other printing organisations have already closed doors as they could not sustain the business. (P2).*

*Many reputable companies shut their businesses down because they just never foresaw these things happening and without proper budget plans or contingency plans in place, it is very difficult to rise above the disruptions. (P8).*

#### **4.2.7.2. Sub-theme 2 - Recognizing opportunities**

In the business world there is always competition in the market, the impact that the multiple disruptions had on the organisations was dependent on their financial performance, where only the toughest survived. Some of the responses received from participants focused on recognizing opportunities amid the disruptions. From a financial standpoint, it was noted that possessing a strong balance sheet and a loyal customer base can lead to opportunities for growth through acquisitions. Additionally, the importance of customer-supplier relationships from a sales perspective was emphasized. In the event of business distress, there may be opportunities to acquire equipment or machinery. Despite disruptions, it was highlighted by participants that the organisation should remain alert to identify and seize valuable opportunities.

*If a business is strong, it has strong management and a strong set of financials, it can take advantage of great opportunities. It is great for vertical or horizontal integration or acquisitive growth which will help the business to thrive. (P3).*

*Speaking from a sales perspective, I had very good relationships with both our customers and suppliers, and unfortunately, the pandemic and the other disruptions that occurred after really impacted those businesses, however sad for them, it was an opportunity for us as we could*

*purchase their equipment and machinery at a good price which benefited us as a business. (P4).*

#### **4.2.7.3. Sub-theme 3 - Constant evolution**

One of the practices that participants mentioned most in the discussions was technological development in industry and ensuring that there is constant evolution in the business. The printing industry is currently a starving industry therefore leaders need to be consistent in innovation and digitalization. As the business world is constantly evolving, the organisation also needs to be constantly evolving. It was emphasized that the business must undergo constant evolution and embrace new technologies. In line with this, new technological enhancements were implemented by installing cooling systems on machines. Furthermore, an online platform was introduced to facilitate faster order placement and delivery. All participants acknowledged the challenges associated with digitalization and shared a common focus on strategizing ways to enhance the business's technological expertise.

*I think you need to have constant evolution; you need to know your products and understand your customers. There needs to be a high level of automation. It needs to be very much digitally centric and most importantly now, I think organisations should be embracing new technologies such as AI, generative AI, machine learning, and others. (P1).*

*One of our recent projects was installing a water tank system that feeds all the cooling units, as our portable water was very small so we could not sustain the portable water coming through. (P5).*

*We recently went into full swing with our online platform where customers have easy access to ordering and tracking their delivery over a shorter lead time. (P2).*

#### **4.3. Summary**

This chapter highlighted the multiple disruptions that impacted the printing organisation with feedback from leaders and their ability to lead during these disruptions. The views from participants focused on the challenges faced during the disruptions, the leadership response to these disruptions, and the impact on the organisation. This chapter also highlights plans and procedures that participants have implemented or are working towards implementing to improve the business. The next chapter provides a discussion of these results in comparison to the literature on the subject.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

### **5.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the findings of the study from the data collected which is now discussed in greater detail in this chapter concerning literature from previous studies. The general feedback received from participants confirmed that many disruptions have impacted the organisation which created a lot of uncertainty in leadership and decision making however there was consensus from participants that every day presented new learning experiences to better manage the disruptions encountered. To put the findings into perspective, the objectives of the study are reiterated below.

- To explore the multiple disruptions affecting a printing organisation in Durban.
- To understand how the leadership responded to the multiple disruptions.
- To identify what leadership practices should be implemented to deal with the multiple disruptions in a printing organisation in Durban.

The key findings of the study are discussed below:

### **5.2. Types of recent disruptions and the impact on the organisation**

The findings on this theme confirmed that various disruptions impacted the organisation. The common themes mentioned by participants were the COVID-19 pandemic, load-shedding, the KZN riots, the Ukraine-Russia war, global inflation, and the rate of exchange. The responses received from participants presented the view that these disruptions had a rippling effect on the organisation. The major disruption that created the start of the many challenges in the organisation as per the responses received was the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to participants, this disruption impacted people both on a personal and professional level and thereon, many additional disruptions took the business further away from recovery. The disruption that is secondly severely affecting the organisation is load-shedding. Load-shedding is an ongoing disruption in South Africa that is negatively affecting organisations on a large scale in terms of productivity and profitability (Nkosi & Govender, 2022). Participants mentioned that load-shedding remains a great challenge as there are high-cost implications and there is no certainty that the situation will improve in the future.

In addition, the many other disruptions have added increased pressure on the organisation, which has created great difficulty for the business to improve. Some of the challenges that participants mentioned that impacted on the organisation were supply chain disruptions, working capital pressure in the business, loss of productivity, and the increase in operational and material costs. The global effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine-Russia war have created many barriers to international trade as well as increased costs of raw materials and transportation (Allam, Bibri & Sharpe, 2022). Participants agreed that these disruptions are affecting their customers and suppliers, which impacts the overall supply chain network in the organisation.

Fernandes (2020) argued that the COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the world economy which impacted various industries, and countries across the world. Fernandes (2020) also mentioned that the GDP growth in several countries has been negatively affected due to the crisis.

The impact on supply chains was supported by Pujawan & Bah (2021) who described supply chain disruptions as events that occur suddenly and have a significant impact on society and prevent normal daily operations from continuing, with the sudden loss to economies, life, and the environment. These disruptions create a major break in the supply chain of productivity that can occur at any stage in the process, and which impacts the end user (Pujawan & Bah, 2021).

The load-shedding crisis in South Africa is an ongoing issue that is affecting the South African economy at great lengths. All participants confirmed that load-shedding is severely impacting the organisation's productivity and operational costs. Du Venage (2020) stated that Eskom has once again brought South Africa to a halt with the ongoing electricity blackouts and that organisations need to include load-shedding into their daily plans of productivity.

### **5.3. Leadership challenges**

The general feedback received from participants confirmed that the leaders in the organisation experienced many challenges that were related to operational efficiency and employee satisfaction. The disruptions that the organisation encountered over the past few years have put a lot of pressure on the leadership to ensure that the organisation overcomes the challenges and is continuously improving. Some of the challenges that leaders in the printing organisation faced were customer retention, employee commitment, and job satisfaction, retaining business

profitability, managing working capital, and the most common from the responses was the level of uncertainty.

Throughout the disruptions and the changes, leaders were confronted with great uncertainty in addressing the leadership challenges, overcoming inefficiencies in productivity, managing financial strains, and keeping employees motivated and committed to the organisation during unprecedented times (Kouzes & Posner, 2023). The responses received presented the view that every leader in the printing organisation was aware of the various challenges. However, every department also faced a challenge that was related specifically to their job or area of expertise.

These challenges can be broken down per department such as the commercial department procuring materials at a cost-effective rate while still trying to keep a good margin on the job, the financial department managing working capital to ensure short-term debts can be paid with short assets, the sales department to retain customers by ensuring excellent service delivery and at the right price, and the production department to efficiently work through challenges such as load-shedding, material shortages and still meet production targets. Every participant encountered their challenges, however, all participants also confirmed that every day was a new learning experience to be better.

Kouzes & Posner (2023) indicated that leaders are faced with many challenges, especially during times of disaster or crisis. However, it is important to seek opportunities where there are challenges. Leaders owe it to themselves to be the best leaders they can be but also to note that they are even more responsible to others who look up to them as leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2023).

In crisis, leaders are faced with problems that are unusual and poorly understood. D'Auria & De Smet (2020) affirm that in these times management at the highest levels is required to make decisions quickly and respond in a manner that is effective for the business. This is a challenge that leaders are faced with daily, however, a leader's mindset must be set on moving forward instead of focusing on yesterday's happenings (D'Auria & De Smet, 2020).

#### **5.4. Leadership styles and responses to the multiple disruptions**

During the multiple disruptions, participants confirmed that they had to reevaluate their leadership style and response to employees and the organisation. The disruptions affected a lot of people, from low-level employees to high-level management but on a different scale. It was a new learning experience for leadership in the organisation as leaders needed to act with

understanding and compassion with the changes that were taking place (Haney, Pope & Arden, 2020). Some of the responses confirmed that leaders were initially reactive when the disruptions started instead of being proactive as there was so much uncertainty.

As the disruptions continued, leaders started to plan better and were more proactive to the challenges they faced. Participants mentioned that employees were filled with fear and doubt and therefore it was important that leadership took the lead when required and were able to make decisions quickly. There was consensus among participants that during these unsettling times, leadership needed to show a lot of empathy and understanding when managing people (Haney et al., 2020).

In addition to the leadership responses, participants also spoke about the leadership styles that they believed would be effective. It was noted that previously the autocratic approach to leadership was a norm, however, all participants agree that the autocratic style is now ineffective in today's business world, and leaders need to follow the democratic style of leadership to achieve desired outcomes. Literature supports the democratic style as an effective leadership style which encourages collaboration, employee empowerment, teamwork, shared decision-making, and open communication in the business environment (Fakhri et al., 2021).

Bwalya (2023) states that autocratic leadership is where the leader has full control and power over decision-making and expects employees to be compliant. This style of leadership is inefficient as there is limited involvement from employees, and this leads to a very uncollaborative workforce (Bwalya, 2023). The democratic style of leadership is focused on empowerment and actively involving employees to be innovative and part of the decision-making that is aligned with the organisation's goals, strategies, and objectives (Bwalya, 2023).

The other leadership styles that participants spoke about were collaborative leadership and situational leadership. Most of the participants believed that collaboration among all players in the supply chain is key to improving and moving the organisation forward during times of disruption. Situational leadership was also mentioned by a few participants who believed that there is more than one efficient leadership style, and the impact is fully dependent on the situation as every situation requires a different leadership approach.

Bwalya (2023) supports the response to situational leadership by stating that situational leadership takes a flexible approach that allows the leader to adapt and respond based on the specific needs and requirements of individual followers or teams. This style of leadership is also highly dependent on a leader's ability to assess the situation and respond appropriately

(Bwalya, 2023). Existing literature suggests that situational leadership can be particularly effective during disruptive periods, allowing leaders to flexibly adjust their strategies to address disruptions (Nursetialloh, 2023). In addition to situational leadership, literature suggests that transformational leadership is an effective style of leadership during times of disruption as transformational leaders focus on inspiring and motivating employees towards a shared goal or vision (Nursetialloh, 2023). Drawing from both literature and the gathered data, it becomes evident that situational leadership emerges as the prevailing style that matches the study's findings with existing literature (Nursetialloh, 2023).

In connection with the leadership response, Lawton-Misra & Pretorius (2021) confirm that leadership had to evolve during the time of disruption as the leadership role became more complex and there was greater expectation from leadership in general. Participants from the printing organisation emphasized the importance for leaders to demonstrate increased understanding, compassion, empathy, and strategic thinking when guiding employees. Additionally, leaders were expected to exhibit focus and confidence in assuming leadership roles and making business decisions. These were the qualities that leaders within the printing organisation strived to embody. Existing literature suggests that some of the traits that leaders need to represent to successfully lead during times of disruption are adaptability, resilience, empathy, strategic thinking, and effective communication skills (Nursetialloh, 2023). Both scholarly literature and the data obtained from the study indicate that effective leadership demands a delicate balance of compassion and understanding alongside resilience and strong determination (Nursetialloh, 2023).

## **5.5. Organisational performance**

The discussions with participants presented the view that leaders are the drivers of organisational performance, especially amid crises and various disruptions. In recent years there have been multiple disruptions, technological innovations, and new market developments that have put pressure on many organisations to perform above normal to ensure they remain competitive in the market (Dana et al., 2022). The general feedback received from participants confirmed that there are many internal and external challenges and pressures that prevent the business from reaching its targets.

One of the key elements that participants agreed on to ensure organisational performance during times of crisis or disruption was ensuring that leaders successfully defined and executed business strategies. Literature suggests that building strategic partnerships and adopting

collaboration with key stakeholders enhances resilience and troubleshooting capabilities as well as fosters some of the best practices to effectively navigate through disruptions in the organisation (Netz, Svensson & Brundin, 2020). It was important for leaders to think and plan strategically and to ensure that their teams were aligned with the business strategy to drive organisational performance during times of disruption (Weston, 2020). Participants also mentioned that during times of disruption it was essential to develop a culture of growth and development as employees need to feel motivated and empowered. Literature indicates that organisations adopting a culture of growth and development are better equipped to manage disruptions (Peri, 2020). Such organisations benefit from heightened levels of innovation and creativity among employees, who feel empowered to contribute solutions to emerging challenges (Peri, 2020). The leaders in the organisation were responsible for creating an environment that was harmonious, productive, and conducive to growth (Haney et al. 2020). Participants agreed that without good leadership driving performance, culture, and growth during the times of disruption, the business could easily lose focus and begin to deteriorate.

Research by Alsayyed et al. (2020) supports the statement that leaders are the drivers of organisational performance. The attitude and behaviour of leaders contribute to the organisation achieving its aims and objectives. The goal of effective leadership is to empower employees to continuously grow and improve to add value to the business (Alsayyed et al., 2020). In addition to leaders driving performance, Pereira et al. (2021) confirm organisational culture is key to achieving -sustainable development. Leaders need to create a culture of learning and knowledge sharing that promotes innovation and growth in business (Pereira et al., 2021).

Rajest, Regin & Shynu (2022) stated that global competition exhibits many challenges and opportunities and organisations need to be in an environment that is driven by innovation and development. Rajest et al. (2022) also confirmed that strategic leadership and strategic alignment are essential to driving success in the organisation when managing economic and macro-environmental issues. Leaders who plan strategically and have strategic alignment in their teams will be able to perform in a volatile environment. In the printing organisation, it was observed that strategic leadership and strategic alignment plays a pivotal role in driving success during times of disruption. Participants mentioned that leaders who ensured strategic alignment within their teams exhibit enhanced performance, particularly in dynamic and uncertain environments.

## **5.6. Business management and improvements**

Participants confirmed that the multiple disruptions presented many challenges which are currently affecting the organisation while on the road to recovery however there have been a lot of learning and growth opportunities for leadership to improve themselves as leaders and to better manage situations in times of crisis. The disruptions that occurred were unforeseen and participants agreed that everyone was in a mode of crisis and the first response was to react to the situation.

The responses confirmed that leaders have been on a journey of learning through these disruptions and there were some points stated by participants that helped them better manage the disruptions and improve the organisation. Some participants mentioned that crisis management and contingency planning are crucial to making improvements. It was noted that the plans the organisation had in place to manage such disruptions only looked good on paper as it was inefficient when put into practice. VUCA environments, especially heightened by unprecedented events such as the pandemic, call for unique contingency plans. These occurrences have revealed the shortcomings of existing plans, rendering them ineffective and inadequate which highlights the importance for organisations to reevaluate and modify their contingency planning approaches to successfully navigate through unpredictable and disruptive situations (Aimar & Smith, 2021). Contingency planning under disruptive times requires leaders to understand the complexity of their disruptions, and the volatility of the business environment and recognize many unknowns may occur (Aimar & Smith, 2021). This was a learning curve for leadership as these plans were reviewed and amended accordingly to a plan that could effectively be put into practice with the help of a crisis management team.

Participants in the financial and production department said that even in times of crisis, it was important to look for opportunities that would benefit the business such as taking advantage of integrations and acquisitions where possible or purchasing equipment at a cheaper rate if another organisation decided to close. In literature, the concept of seizing opportunities amid crises resonates strongly (Gkeredakis, Lifshitz-Assaf & Barrett, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, has sparked a discourse suggesting that crises can serve as a catalyst for positive transformation (Gkeredakis, Lifshitz-Assaf & Barrett, 2021). They are perceived not merely as challenges but as agents that propel advancement, prompting a re-evaluation of established norms and practices (Gkeredakis et al., 2021). Crises disrupt conventional problem-solving patterns, fostering an environment conducive to experimentation and innovation. Organisations, compelled by crisis-induced urgency, have expedited their innovation efforts,

especially in fields like digital technologies and healthcare solutions (Gkeredakis et al., 2021). Additionally, there's been a notable surge in collaborative knowledge sharing and creation across diverse platforms and among different organisations (Gkeredakis et al., 2021). The business world is changing and progressing at a rapid pace, and organisations that want to improve and remain competitive must keep up with the change and progression (Kurznack, Schoemaker & Schramade, 2021). One of the key points that participants mentioned was that the organisation needs to be constantly evolving with the fast-changing business environment to ensure growth and sustainability.

Purnomo, Supriyanto & Dami (2021) support the theory that leaders are fundamental to crisis management and contingency planning. Leaders must work collaboratively internally and externally to discuss crisis management. Leadership success during a crisis is based on how well the leader plans and their quick decision-making skills (Purnomo et al., 2021). Based on discussions with participants, leadership responses to disruptions prioritized proactive approaches over reactive ones. Effective leaders demonstrate initiative by taking charge in challenging situations, and exhibiting empathy, and understanding amidst crises and uncertainties. Moreover, they're characterized by their swift decision-making abilities, essential for navigating through unstable times. These traits were embodied by the leaders within the printing organisation.

The disruptions posed many leadership challenges. However, amid these disruptions, participants also focused on learning from these challenges and looking ahead towards the opportunities that could arise. Research by Gigliotti (2020) confirms that by looking ahead, organisations will certainly find valuable opportunities to reinvent, reimage and reintroduce the business in the market. Additionally, looking ahead also requires the organisation to be constantly evolving which Tshabalala (2022) agrees with by stating that evolution will allow the business to thrive, and people are key to ensuring the business is constantly evolving.

## **5.7. Summary**

This chapter presented the discussion of the findings which highlighted the multiple disruptions affecting the organisation, the challenges faced by leaders, the leadership response to the multiple disruptions, and the leadership practices implemented to improve the organisation. The findings in the study were also compared and discussed concerning previous theoretical literature in support of our contradiction.

The next chapter will conclude the study by providing recommendations for this study and for further research.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1. Introduction**

The business world is changing at a rapid pace which requires organisations to be evolving and improving consistently. In addition to the complex and competitive business environment, South Africa has been experiencing many disruptions which has impacted the country's economy. It is essential for organisations to perform efficiently and to consistently improve to ensure they remain sustainable and competitive in the market. The recent disruptions created additional pressure for organisations and leadership to operate efficiently. Effective leadership is a key factor in ensuring the organisation improves and is sustainable in the present and future. The multiple disruptions that occurred were unforeseen and it created a lot of uncertainty for leaders and the business, and it was important to identify how leadership responded to the crises to help move the organisation forward. The study aimed to identify the multiple disruptions affecting the printing organisation in Durban and to understand the leadership response to these disruptions. The study further aimed to identify what leadership practices should be implemented to effectively manage the disruptions and improve the organisation. The motivation of the study was to understand the challenges that leaders face during crises and to identify what leadership practices should be implemented to improve the situation from a leadership perspective. The research was conducted at the InsideData group among ten senior-level leaders in the printing organisation. The study followed a qualitative approach where the 10 participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews.

The results and discussion indicated that many disruptions impacted the unforeseen organisation, and leaders did not expect to encounter disruptions to such an extent. The severity of the disruptions created a lot of uncertainty for leaders as the organisation was not prepared for these disruptions. However, the results showed that the recent disruptions were a learning curve for all leaders and the organisation to focus on crisis management and contingency planning for the future. This chapter concludes the study by addressing the research objectives, by providing recommendations for this study and recommendations for future research that will be a beneficial extension to this study.

## **6.2. Addressing the research objectives**

The key findings that are aligned with the objectives of the study will be discussed regarding the themes that were developed during the data analysis process.

### **6.2.1. To explore the multiple disruptions affecting a printing organisation in Durban**

The study showed that multiple disruptions took place in Durban which impacted the printing organisation and many other organisations such as suppliers and customers that are part of the supply chain process in the organisation. Some of the recent disruptions that were mentioned in the study that impacted the organisation were the COVID-19 pandemic, load-shedding, KZN riots, the Ukraine-Russia war, global inflation, and the rate of exchange. Based on the key findings and themes developed in the study, these disruptions impacted the organisation by affecting the working capital in the business, loss of productivity, increase in operational and material costs, and disrupting the organisation's supply chain.

The information gathered during the study met the objective of determining what the multiple disruptions were and the impact they had on the printing organisation. It can be confirmed that the many disruptions had a compounding effect on the business as these disruptions followed each other in quick succession. Some of the disruptions such as load-shedding and global inflation are ongoing disruptions that the organisation needs to manage while endeavoring to recover and improve the business. Mbandlwa's study also indicated that many disruptions have led to a struggling South African economy and this struggle can be expected to continue for the next 10 years as disruptions such as load-shedding and global inflation are ongoing issues with no certainty of improvement (Mbandlwa, 2023).

It can be determined from the responses that the disruptions have impacted local and global economies, and this has created a ripple effect that has impacted the printing organisation. The organisation imports 80 percent of raw materials, which has affected costs, stock availability, lead times, and productivity. The supply chain has been impacted as suppliers have also been affected by the disruptions leading to service delays and increased costs which ultimately must be passed on to customers, creating a disruptive supply chain.

### **6.2.2. To understand how the leadership responded to the multiple disruptions**

The multiple disruptions that occurred were unforeseen and the organisation and leaders were not prepared for the severity of the impact that these disruptions had on the business. The leaders in the organisation were presented with many challenges such as keeping employees committed at work, retaining customers, retaining, and maintaining business profitability, and managing the working capital. These were challenges that required focus and attention from leadership as they were the key factors in ensuring that the organisation recovered and improved. The responses received from participants confirmed that the challenges brought upon by these disruptions were addressed with a lot of uncertainty as leaders were not prepared to manage disruptions to this extent. Leadership was challenged and required to respond more efficiently during the multiple disruptions which provided a good learning platform for leaders to strategize and plan more effectively.

Some of the key leadership responses were for leaders to be more proactive and prepared rather than being reactive to situations. Participants also mentioned that it was important for leaders to take the lead in these situations to provide guidance and direction as employees were also faced with a lot of doubt and uncertainty and required strong leadership to portray a brave front. Leaders were also required to be quick decision-makers as the quick succession of disruptions required an immediate response and action. The many disruptions not only impacted on the organisation but also the employees who were filled with fear and doubt. The psychological impact on people was a concerning factor and leaders were aware that their responses required a lot of empathy and understanding during these disruptive times. D'Auria & De Smet (2020) confirm that the recent disruptions have put increased pressure on leadership to act beyond ordinary demands and respond to situations that are unusual and poorly understood. Leaders can respond quickly and more effectively by setting clear objectives and priorities that will best support the organisation during times of crisis (D'Auria & De Smet, 2020).

Leadership also responded by recognizing the different styles of leadership that they felt were effective in managing these challenges and disruptions. The key leadership styles that participants mentioned were democratic, collaborative, and situational leadership. A conclusion drawn from the participant's responses is that there are no perfect leadership styles or behaviours, but the approach is greatly dependent on the forum or situation.

Leading through multiple disruptions to ensure organisational performance has been a significant challenge for leadership. The response from participants acknowledged that leaders

are the drivers of organisational performance, and it is important for leadership to be aligned with the vision and goals of the organisation to help steer the business in the right direction. Participants also confirmed that leaders are responsible for defining business strategy and aligning their teams to this strategy. Together leaders and their teams can build a culture of growth and performance in the organisation. The responses from participants satisfied the objective of determining how leadership responded to the multiple disruptions.

### **6.2.3. To identify what leadership practices should be implemented to deal with the multiple disruptions in a printing organisation in Durban**

Participants recognized that the multiple disruptions raised a lot of reactive responses from leadership. The challenges that the organisation encountered were unexpected and there were no adequate plans in place to effectively manage these disruptions. The leaders in the printing organisation felt that they approached these disruptions with a lot of uncertainty as they were unfamiliar with managing disruptions to this extent. The plans the organisation had in place were only good on paper as they were ineffective when put into practice. Leadership was expected to react on the spot with a solution that would best suit the organisation and the situation when it occurred.

The feedback received from participants identified some of the leadership practices that should be implemented to effectively manage disruptions in the organisation. The leadership practices mentioned were crisis management and contingency planning. These were the two key practices that participants recognized were inadequate when dealing with multiple disruptions affecting the printing organisation. Some of the participants mentioned that the organisation has now created a crisis management team that will be assigned to manage any future disruption that should occur. Leadership has also highlighted contingency planning as an important tool that needs to be consistently reviewed to effectively manage the business.

The multiple disruptions imposed many challenges on the organisation which leaders had to effectively manage and through management of these challenges, some of the participants specified that it was important to recognize and seek opportunities that would benefit the business. Leaders are encouraged to be creative, innovative, and optimistic when dealing with disruption as there could be opportunities for future growth in these situations such as vertical or horizontal integration or acquisitive growth. Participants also mentioned that leadership needs to practice and ensure constant evolution as the business world is changing and

progressing at a rapid pace which requires the organisation to be progressive and evolving to maintain growth and sustainability.

Drawing from both participant feedback and literature findings in the study, several effective practices emerge for managing multiple disruptions. These include proactive crisis management and contingency planning, the identification of opportunities amidst disruption, and a commitment to ongoing evolution and adaptation. The responses provided by participants met the objective of identifying the leadership practices that should be implemented to deal with the multiple disruptions in the printing organisation in Durban.

### **6.3. Recommendations**

Leading through multiple disruptions has been a challenging requirement for many leaders and organisations as they were faced with unfamiliar situations and were required to act out of the norm. This study proposes that the following interventions should be implemented to help the organisation and employees manage crises more effectively.

#### **6.3.1. Leadership training programs**

Based on the discussions with participants, it was derived that all leaders varied greatly in their leadership capabilities, skills, approaches, and understanding of leadership. The responses received from participants could vary from low to high levels based on their position and involvement in the organisation. It is recommended that leaders are consistently evolving and being trained in how to be effective leaders. All leaders should be trained at the same level to be able to successfully guide and lead employees in the direction of the organisation's vision and goals. During challenging times, organisations usually look at reshaping or evolving the leadership structure, organisations need to invest in leadership training and development to unlock a leader's potential. Leaders are the glue that holds the organisation together when disruptions occur, and this requires strong leadership with the right skills and mindset (Day et al., 2021).

#### **6.3.2. Developing a network of teams**

During the multiple disruptions, leadership was put under pressure to respond efficiently and meet organisational demands. The decision-making process was put onto leaders which required quick thinking, and this led to reactive responses. Based on the responses, this study suggests that the organisation develops a network of teams that is outside leadership who can be equipped to manage situations and make decisions as required. The crises created a division

between leaders and employees as both were overwhelmed but on different levels. The responsibilities varied and the expectation from leadership was greater due to the fear and uncertainty. It is essential that all employees, including leadership, are aligned with the position and objectives of the organisation. Build teams that will face current disruptions and strategic priorities in the organisation. The network of teams should be built to learn, using the information that is available and leaders need to understand that mistakes will occur, and it is not about perfection but about learning to correct quickly and make decisions when required, especially in times of crisis (Alexander et al., 2020).

### **6.3.3. Maintaining communication and transparency**

The many disruptions created a lot of uncertainty and fear in employees which impacted their commitment and motivation to work and progress. The leaders in the organisation were also faced with a lot of uncertainty about how to effectively manage the disruptions and therefore collaborated with high-level management on decision-making. Many employees became anxious during this period as decision-making, and changes had to be made without their knowledge. Leaders must communicate with employees, provide frequent updates, and always be transparent to ensure that there is trust and commitment from employees. The employees are the pillar of every organisation, and leaders must provide a sense of confidence and assurance to employees by communicating and being transparent. This creates a culture of trust and responsibility among members of the organisation (Hadziahmetovic & Salihovic, 2022).

### **6.3.4. Implementing the pause-assess-anticipate-act cycle**

During the multiple disruptions, leaders found themselves being reactive to situations that were unfamiliar and making decisions without completely assessing the situation or the outcome of the action taken. It is key for leaders to be patient and acknowledge all factors before deciding on a solution during a crisis. The pause-assess-anticipate-act cycle will allow leaders to be patient, assess the situation and review from multiple angles, continuously collect information anticipate what will happen next based on the decision made, and then act (Glotzbecker, 2022). If leaders follow this process, they can avoid overreacting and make clearer and informative decisions. Even if decisions need to be made immediately, if leaders are aware of this process, they will eventually stop, think, and reflect before taking further steps. This process will also allow leaders to make decisions with more confidence as the situation would have been well assessed and the outcome predicted (Glotzbecker, 2022).

### **6.3.5. Leadership styles and traits to adopt during times of crisis**

Navigating crises has proven to be a crucial learning curve for leaders within the printing organisation. Among the different leadership styles, they have aspired to embrace situational and collaborative leadership which stands out as pivotal in crisis management. This aligns with insights from the literature, which also underlines the relevance of transformational leadership during turbulent times (Nursetialloh, 2023). Drawing from both participant input and literature, several key leadership traits have emerged as particularly effective in crisis scenarios: adaptability, resilience, empathy, communication, and strategic insight (Nursetialloh, 2023). It is imperative for leaders to adopt these styles and traits, recognizing their significance in effectively guiding teams through periods of crisis and disruption.

### **6.3.6. Instilling leadership styles and traits in current leaders and new recruits**

To nurture the desired styles and traits in both existing leaders and new recruits, organisations can adopt a variety of strategic approaches. These include implementing training programs and coaching sessions to enhance leadership skills. Additionally, leaders within the organisation should lead by example, embodying the desired styles and traits in their own conduct and decision-making processes. Establishing a healthy mentorship system can also prove invaluable, pairing aspiring leaders with seasoned mentors who exemplify the desired qualities (Scott & Klein, 2022). Instilling leadership styles and traits in new recruits requires a holistic approach that integrates training, mentorship, and experiential learning opportunities (Alheet et al., 2021). By investing in the development of emerging leaders, they will possess the skills and mindset necessary to excel in leadership roles. Furthermore, organisations should establish systems for recognizing and rewarding leaders who demonstrate these traits and styles, thereby reinforcing their importance within the organisational framework (Scott & Klein, 2022). Lastly, cultivating a culture that resonates with the core values of the organisation is key, as it facilitates the adoption of styles and traits conducive to effective leadership during times of crisis and disruption.

## **6.4. Limitations of the study**

The current research study focused on leaders and the challenges they faced being a leader during the multiple disruptions. The disruptions in the organisation were highlighted from a leadership perspective only. The study was conducted by interviewing 10 senior-level leaders as the aim was to gain a leadership view on the impact the disruptions had on the organisation. Another limitation was that this was a qualitative study drawing only on interviews to collect

data. The multiple disruptions have had a global effect and impacted many organisations. This study was limited to one printing organisation in Durban and its leadership challenges. The researcher also required insight into the leadership practices that were implemented to improve the organisation during the disruptions. However, these practices were limited to the printing organisation and the responses from leadership.

### **6.5. Recommendations for further research**

The multiple disruptions had a severe impact on the lives of many people, and this affected employees and their commitment to the organisation. A recommendation for this study would be to gain an employee perspective on how the multiple disruptions impacted their ability to perform and to understand their expectations from leadership. Researchers can expand and challenge this theory by gaining perspective from lower-level employees in the organisation. The multiple disruptions created immense uncertainty for leaders and employees and to further expand on this study and achieve a holistic view of the impact on the organisation, the target population can be increased.

A second recommendation would be to expand the study to other printing organisations in the industry and to gain a perspective from senior leaders in those organisations and compare the results. This research study can also be expanded to multiple organisations in different industries to gain a deeper knowledge or understanding of the subject. Thirdly, the many disruptions have put pressure on organisations to make changes and implement practices that will improve the business. These leadership practices can differ per organisation or industry and therefore it is recommended to gain insight from different organisations or industries on the leadership practices that can be implemented to improve the organisation.

### **6.6. Summary**

This study aimed to identify the multiple disruptions affecting the printing organisation and to understand leadership's response to these disruptions. The multiple disruptions posed many challenges for leaders in the organisation as leaders were expected to effectively lead during times of uncertainty. The disruptions that occurred were unforeseen and unfamiliar, which the organisation was not prepared for. These disruptions impacted all members of the organisation on different levels as well as all key players in the supply chain. The study has also identified leadership practices that can be implemented to effectively deal with multiple disruptions in the organisation. The study has provided recommendations for leadership to implement to help manage the disruptions better and to lead more efficiently during times of crisis and uncertainty.

Recommendations for further research have also been provided to explore the study on a wider scale.

*“What leaders need during a crisis is not a predefined response plan but behaviours and mindsets that will prevent them from overreacting to yesterday’s developments and help them look ahead” (D’Auria & De Smet, 2020: 2).*

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## **APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

Dear Colleague

My name is Cadene Mooninthan. I am a Master's candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Westville) Campus. My contact information is:

Email: [211502786@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:211502786@stu.ukzn.ac.za)

Cell: 081 724 9351

You are being invited to consider participating in a study titled: *Leading through multiple disruptions in a printing organisation in Durban, South Africa*. The aim and purpose of this research are to examine the multiple disruptions affecting the organisation, to determine the leadership response to the multiple disruptions, and to identify what leadership practices should be implemented to effectively deal with the multiple disruptions. The study is expected to enroll 10 participants from InsideData Group (Pty) Ltd, a printing organisation in Durban. The duration of your participation if you choose to enrol and remain in the study is expected to be between 30 to 45 minutes. The information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only. The study will provide no direct benefits to participants.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: HSSREC/00005447/2023).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at (provide contact details) or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details are as follows:

### **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

#### **Research Office, Westville Campus**

Govan Mbeki Building  
Private Bag X 54001  
Durban  
4000  
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate, or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.

The record as well as other items associated with the interview will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. After 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed of by shredding.

-----

## CONSENT

I \_\_\_\_\_ have been informed about the study entitled: *Leading through multiple disruptions in a printing organisation in Durban, South Africa* by Cadene Mooninthan.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher at [211502786@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:211502786@stu.ukzn.ac.za)/ 081 724 9351.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

## HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview:

YES / NO

---

**Signature of Participant**

---

**Date**

---

**Signature of Witness**  
**(Where applicable)**

---

**Date**

---

**Signature of Translator**  
**(Where applicable)**

---

**Date**

## **APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

Participant:

Date:

### **1. What are the multiple disruptions affecting a printing organisation in Durban?**

- 1.1 What are the most recent major events that disrupted the organisation?
- 1.2 Can you elaborate on the extent to which these events impacted the organisation?
- 1.3 Where is the organisation at now concerning these multiple disruptions?

### **2. How did leadership respond to the multiple disruptions?**

- 2.1 What challenges did you personally face as a leader in the organisation due to these multiple disruptions?
- 2.2 How have these disruptions impacted your ability to lead in the organisation?
- 2.3 How did leadership in general respond?
- 2.4 What could have been done differently?
- 2.5 How should leadership ideally respond to the multiple disruptions?

### **3. What leadership practices should be implemented to deal with the multiple disruptions in a printing organisation in Durban?**

- 3.1 Describe from a personal view what the different leadership styles, traits, or behaviours are that an effective leader should possess?
- 3.2 What role does leadership play in contributing to organisational performance? Please elaborate, especially in light of the multiple disruptions.
- 3.3 How do the multiple disruptions impact the future prosperity or growth of the organisation?
- 3.4 What leadership practices should be implemented to manage the impact of the multiple disruptions in the organisation?

### **4. Is there anything you would like to add?**

## APPENDIX 3: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



11 April 2023

Cadene Mooninthan (211502786)  
Grad School of Bus & Leadership  
Westville Campus

Dear C Mooninthan,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005447/2023

Project title: Leading through multiple disruptions in a printing organisation in Durban, South Africa

Degree: Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 27 March 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 11 April 2024.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

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## APPENDIX 5: TURNITIN REPORT

211502786 - Cadene Mooninthan - Final Dissertation			
ORIGINALITY REPORT			
8%	7%	1%	1%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS
PRIMARY SOURCES			
1	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	1%	
2	digitalcommons.liberty.edu Internet Source	<1%	
3	vital.seals.ac.za:8080 Internet Source	<1%	
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