

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**A Strategic Leadership Framework for Sustainability in hotels; A case study of 5-star
hotels within KwaZulu-Natal**

by

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DECLARATION

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DEDICATION

To God my Father, I dedicate this work, for it is by His grace that I have done and completed this DBA research study.

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I would like to first acknowledge my family; my husband Joshua, my son Reitumetse and my daughter Keabetswe Motsamai for the love, understanding and support they have shown me through-out this doctorate journey.

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ABSTRACT

As the global hospitality industry faces increasing pressure to address environmental and social sustainability concerns, this research explores the development of a Strategic Leadership Framework tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. This study employed a comprehensive case study approach, drawing insights from a selection of ten (10) luxury hotels in the region. The primary objective of this research was to offer a holistic understanding of the sustainability practices and challenges encountered by high-end hotels within the context of KwaZulu-Natal province. It also sought to identify the strategic leadership attributes and practices that contribute to successful sustainability initiatives within these establishments. The study encompassed various dimensions of sustainability, including environmental conservation, social responsibility, and economic viability, acknowledging the intricate interplay between these factors. Methodologically, this study employed a qualitative approach for data collection and analysis utilised purposive sampling to select 20 participants with in-depth exposure and experience in the hotel industry. Interviews were used for data collection, generating rich and contextually embedded data. Thematic analysis was employed for data analysis, identifying recurring patterns, concepts, and insights related to hotel industry within KwaZulu-Natal province. The research findings highlight the multifaceted nature of sustainability in 5-star hotels, underlining the importance of strategic leadership in navigating complex sustainability challenges. This framework identifies key leadership attributes such as vision, innovation, stakeholder engagement, and strategic planning, which are essential for fostering sustainability-oriented organisational cultures. The implications of this research extend beyond the borders of KwaZulu-Natal, serving as a valuable reference for luxury hotels worldwide aiming to enhance their sustainability performance. The study ultimately contributes to the ongoing discourse on sustainable practices within the hospitality industry, offering a roadmap for strategic leadership that can help hotels balance environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and profitability in an increasingly conscious and competitive market.

Key Words: Sustainable Hospitality; Strategic Leadership; 5-Star Hotels; KwaZulu-Natal; Sustainability Framework

Table of Contents	
DECLARATION	i
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF TABLES	xii
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	xiii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of the study	2
1.2.1 South Africa as a nation	5
1.2.2 Study location	7
1.3 Statement of the problem	9
1.4 Research aim	11
1.5 Research objectives	11
1.6 Research questions	12
1.7 Significance to the study	12
1.8 Theoretical Framework	13
1.9 Brief Research Methodology	14
1.10 Definitions of key terms	14
1.11 Delimitation of the study	15
1.12 Overview of the thesis	15
1.13 Chapter summary	16
CHAPTER TWO: STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR	18
2.1 Introduction	18
2.2 Strategic management Overview	19
2.2.1 Strategy	19
2.2.2 Defining Strategic management process	21
2.2.3 Origin of Strategy	29
2.3 The Elements of Strategy	32
2.3.2 Strategy formulation	34
2.3.3 Implementation	39

2.3.4 Strategy Evaluation and Control.....	41
2.4 Complexity and Uncertainty in the Changing Business Environment.....	43
2.5 Leadership	46
2.5.1 Leadership: A traditional overview.....	46
2.6 Diverse Views Culminating in the Key First Principles of Strategy.....	57
2.7 Summary.....	62
CHAPTER THREE: SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY	64
3.1 Introduction.....	64
3.2 Theoretical Background.....	64
3.3 Agency Theory	65
3.5 Stewardship Theory/Management Theory.....	71
3.6 The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals Theory.....	74
3.7 Triple Bottom Line (TBL).....	75
3.8 Institutional Theory.....	76
3.9 Transformational Leadership Theory	77
3.10 Complexity Governance (CG) Theory	79
3.11 Conceptual Framework.....	79
3.12 Defining Sustainability and associated Problems	81
3.13 The Nature of Tourism Accommodation and its Role in the Tourism Industry	86
3.14 Classification of Accommodation Facilities.....	88
3.15 Diversity within tourist market	93
3.16 Chapter summary.....	94
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	95
4.1 Introduction.....	95
4.2 Research philosophies.....	95
4.2.1 Positivism	95
4.2.2 Realism.....	96
4.2.3 Interpretivism.....	97
4.2.3.1 Phenomenological research.....	98
4.2.4 Pragmatism.....	98
4.2.5 Research philosophy suitable for the study	99
4.3 Research design.....	100

4.3.1 Experimental research	101
4.3.2 Case study	102
4.3.3 Narrative research	103
4.3.4 Descriptive study	103
4.3.5 Explanatory studies	103
4.3.6 Exploratory as an adopted research design	104
4.4 Research approaches	105
4.4.1 Deductive approaches	106
4.4.2 Inductive approaches	107
4.4.3 Abductive research process	108
4.4.4 Combination of inductive and deductive methods	109
4.4.5 The approach used for the study	109
4.5 Research strategies	110
4.5.1 Qualitative research approach	110
4.6 Research choices	112
4.6.1 Mono method	112
4.6.2 Multiple methods	113
4.7. Target population	113
4.8.1. Sampling strategy	114
4.8.2. Probability sampling	114
4.8.2.1 Simple random sampling	114
4.8.2.2 Systematic sampling	115
4.8.2.3 Stratified sampling	115
4.8.2.4 Cluster sampling or multi-stage sampling	115
4.8.2.5 Multi-stage sampling	116
4.8.3. Non-probability sampling	116
4.8.3.1 Quota sampling	116
4.8.3.2 Self-selection sampling	117
4.8.3.3 Snowball sampling	117
4.8.3.4 Purposive sampling as a technique	117
4.9 Sample size	118
4.9.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria for interviews	119

4.9.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria for focus group interviews	120
4.10. Data collection procedures	120
4.10.1 Interviews.....	122
4.10.1.1 Justification for using interviews.....	124
4.10.2 Focus Group Interviews	124
4.10.3 Secondary sources of data collection.....	125
4.10.4 Primary sources of data collection	125
4.10.5 Grounded theory.....	125
4.10.6 Ethnography.....	126
4.10.7 Archival research.....	126
4.11. Data quality control.....	127
4.12.1 A six-phase approach to thematic analysis.....	130
4.13. Elimination of bias	132
4.14. Ethical considerations.....	132
4.15. Chapter summary	133
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION FROM INTERVIEWS	135
5.1 Introduction.....	135
5.2 Themes of the study	136
5.2.1 Theme 1: Sustainable leadership practices for operations	136
5.2.1.1 Sustainable leadership practices for operations	138
5.2.1.2 Specific leadership initiatives implemented to promote sustainability.....	140
5.2.1.3 Information and communication of sustainable leadership practices	142
5.2.2 Factors Influencing Sustainable Leadership.....	144
5.2.2.1 Internal organisational factors influencing sustainable leadership in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.....	144
5.2.3 Challenges and Opportunities for implementing sustainable leadership.....	149
5.2.2.1 Challenges in the current sustainable leadership framework	150
5.2.2.3 Opportunities for implementing sustainable leadership.....	152
5.2.2.2 Specific key performance indicators for business sustainability.....	155
5.2.3 Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration	157
5.2.3.1 Engagement with various stakeholders to promote sustainability.....	158
5.2.3.2 Strategies for building partnerships and collaborations to enhance sustainable initiatives.....	161

5.2.3.3 Impact of stakeholder involvement on the effectiveness of sustainability programs	163
5.2.4 Integration of Sustainable Practices in Business Operations	166
5.2.4.1 Sustainability embedded in the day-to-day operations of 5-star hotels.....	167
5.3 Chapter summary	172
CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS	173
6.1 Introduction.....	173
6.2 Target participants	173
6.3 Findings from the focus group.....	174
6.4 Findings from focus group discussions	174
6.4.1 Environmental Stewardship and Conservation	175
6.4.2 Community Engagement and Social Responsibility.....	177
6.4.3 Employee Involvement and Sustainability Culture	179
6.4.4 Guest Experience and Sustainable Tourism.....	182
6.4.5 Regulatory Compliance and Industry Standards	184
6.5 Proposed framework of resilience for the hospitality and tourism industry	186
6.7 Chapter summary	195
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	196
7.1 Introduction.....	196
7.2 Summary of the key findings	198
7.2.1 Objective One	198
7.2.2 Objective Two.....	199
7.2.3 Objective Three.....	199
7.2.4 Objective Four.....	200
7.2.2 Objective Five.....	201
7.3 Contributions to the body of knowledge.....	202
7.6 Recommendations for implementation of the study model	205
7.7 Limitations of the study.....	207
7.8 Recommendations for future research.....	208
7.9 Final concluding remarks.....	209
REFERENCES	211
Appendices	242

Annexure A: Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research	242
Annexure C: Focus Group Interview Guide	247
Annexure E: Ethical Clearance	249

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Location of South Africa on the African Continent.....	4
Figure 1.2: KwaZulu Natal Province map.....	5
Figure 2.1 Strategic Management model.....	29
Figure 2.2: Strategy audit environment.....	32
Figure 2.3 Adapted strategy audit environment.....	33
Figure 5.1: Emerging Themes.....	108
Figure 5.2: Sub-themes for main theme 1.....	109
Figure 5.3: Sub-themes for main theme 2.....	122
Figure 5.4: Sub-themes for main theme 3.....	130
Figure 5.5: Sub-themes for main theme 4.....	139
Figure 5.6: Sub-themes for main theme 5.....	145

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Interviews sample size.....89

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABBREVIATION	DEFINITION
AFTCOR	African task force for coronavirus preparedness and response
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CAGR	Compound Annual Growth Rate
CARC	Compound Annual Rate of Change
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COVID 19	Corona virus
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRM	Human Resource Management
KZN	KwaZulu Natal
NDP	National Development Plan
OTAs	Social media and Online Travel Agencies
PWC	PriceWaterhouse and Coopers
PMS	Performance Measurement System
SASTA	Southern Africa Tourism Services Association
SATW	South African Tourism at Work
SD	Sustainable Development
SDG's	Sustainable Development Goals
SL	Sustainable Leadership
SMP	Social Media Platform
TBCSA	Tourism Business Council of South Africa
TBL	Triple Bottom Line
TGCSA	Tourism Grading Council of South Africa
UNWTO	United Nation World Trade Organization
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nation Development Plan
US	United States
WEF	World Economic Forum

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of the hospitality industry, the pursuit of sustainability has emerged as a critical imperative, “particularly for prestigious establishments like 5-star hotels. This study examines the complex domain of strategic leadership, specifically tailored to address the unique challenges and opportunities associated with fostering sustainability in the opulent hospitality sector of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. As environmental concerns increase and societal expectations change, the need for a robust framework becomes paramount, guiding 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal towards a harmonious integration of strategic leadership principles and sustainable practices. This study purposes to reveal the nuanced interplay between strategic leadership and sustainability within the context of these high-end hotels, offering a comprehensive framework that not only navigates the complex socio-environmental landscape but also fosters a paradigm shift towards responsible and resilient business practices. Through this exploration, the study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable management in the hospitality industry, offering practical insights and actionable strategies for 5-star hotels to thrive in an era where sustainability is not merely a choice but an imperative for long-term success and societal contribution.

Hotels, as a subset within the hospitality industry, play a crucial role in bolstering global economies through various means such as fostering economic growth, creating employment opportunities, generating foreign currency, and enhancing national branding (Mohammad & Khassawneh, 2022). To achieve these objectives, effective leadership with a clear vision and strategic planning is essential to ensure the sustainability of the business. It is noteworthy that hotels fall under the hospitality subsector, which stands out as one of the rapidly advancing segments in the South African economy (Goh & Okumus, 2020).

Strategic leaders play a pivotal role in determining the success or failure of the organisations they lead, providing a clear roadmap (Chon & Zoltan, 2019). Effective organisational leadership and the consistent reinforcement of a strong organisational culture are identified as crucial elements for the successful execution of a firm’s strategies and objectives. This study purposes to formulate a strategic leadership framework for sustainability in KwaZulu-Natal province hotels, with a focus

on 5-star hotels as a case study. The study explores critical factors influencing strategic leadership in businesses, assessing their impact on business sustainability. Additionally, the study examines sustainability in the hotel industry, encompassing sustainable business development and practices, alongside examining leadership and conceptual frameworks. This chapter outlines the study's context, background, research problem, and provides a summary of its aim, purpose, and significance. Research objectives and questions are also presented, and the chapter concludes with a brief overview of the research strategy, conceptual foundation, study limitations, thesis structure, and summary.

1.2 Background of the study

In the global arena of 5-star hospitality, strategic leadership for sustainability has been a focal point for renowned international hotel chains. According to Vij (2019), establishments like the Ritz-Carlton, Marriott, and Hilton have demonstrated significant strides in integrating sustainability practices into their operations. These initiatives encompass various aspects, including energy efficiency, waste management, and community engagement. For instance, the Ritz-Carlton has implemented comprehensive recycling programs and energy-saving measures across its properties, significantly reducing its environmental footprint. Similarly, Marriott has made substantial investments in renewable energy sources, demonstrating a commitment to reducing carbon emissions.

Zooming into regional contexts, the challenges and successes of strategic leadership for sustainability in 5-star hotels become more nuanced (Dwesini, 2019). In South Africa, where the hospitality industry grapples with fluctuating economic conditions and socio-political challenges, the situation is no different. Despite the allure of the country's diverse attractions, 5-star hotels in regions like KwaZulu-Natal face persistent hurdles in maintaining profitability amidst escalating operational costs and competitive pressures. Factors such as guests' capacity, overall operations efficiency, and economic fluctuations deeply influence the sustainability endeavours of these establishments. According to Busulwa, Pickering and Mao (2022), the depreciation of the South African Rand has had a positive impact on hotels by boosting both international and domestic demand. Stats SA (2023), presents that despite the increase in both international and domestic tourists, hotels have struggled to remain profitable with most hotels struggling to survive.

According to Vij (2019), the failure rate for hotels in South Africa is considered to be higher than the failure rate for small businesses. Statistics South Africa (2022), also alludes that it is estimated that fifty-six percent of hotels fail during their first year of operation and eighty-one percent fail within five years of operation. Chiwawa and Wissink (2023), indicate that the reason for the aforementioned struggle for hotels to survive is due to Hotels' inability to identify factors impacting its business operation.

This study therefore intends to explore critical factors that affect the Strategic Leadership in hotels, using 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal as a case study. This study also looked at to what extent these factors impact on the hotels' business sustainability and then propose the new strategies that can be used to improve business sustainability using 5-star hotels as a case study. In discussions surrounding the sustainability of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, critical issues emerge concerning guests' capacity and overall operations. With an increasing influx of tourists, these hotels must strike a delicate balance between providing luxurious accommodations and minimizing environmental impact (Dwesini, 2019). Challenges arise in managing the high volume of guests while ensuring responsible resource usage and waste management. The necessity for a strategic leadership framework becomes evident in addressing these concerns, requiring innovative approaches to enhance sustainability practices without compromising service quality. From energy-efficient infrastructure to waste reduction initiatives, the implementation of sustainable measures becomes imperative to ensure the long-term viability of the hospitality industry in the region. As stakeholders delve deeper into these discussions, the complexities of achieving sustainability goals in 5-star hotels become apparent, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies guided by visionary leadership.

Strategic leadership can be defined as the ability to influence a group or members of a team towards goals achievement hence successful strategy implementation will highly depend upon the leadership skills of organising, culture building and working through others, establishing strategic controls, motivating, creating strong fits between strategy and how the organisation performs to eventually achieve its goals (Stats SA, 2023)). According to Dwesini (2019), Strategic leadership is about promoting the sustainable competitive advantage and influencing or turning a strategy of organisation into actions. A key challenge faced by companies in today's rapidly changing environment is to design and implement management practices that capture mounting institutional

pressures for Sustainability from multiple stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, regulators, nongovernmental organisations, and others (Stats SA, 2022). Sustainability challenges are highly complex in nature, with deep interdependencies among ecological, social and economic factors. To confront such complexity, research movements in sustainability science are increasingly moving toward identifying and addressing challenges of integration.

South Africa's market share in tourism arrivals declined in 2015 which could be due to significant restrictions in visa regulations, political and social unrest as well as overall weak global economy (Vij, 2019). South African economy has been struggling to achieve high growth rates and has been in a technical recession from the fourth quarter of 2016 to the first quarter of 2017, only escaping it in the second quarter of 2017 (Stats SA, 2023). This could be the result of various socioeconomic challenges faced by South African citizens, including poverty, unemployment and inequality (Ojogiwa, 2021). In South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, the country's tourism sector in 2020 has been devastated by the novel coronavirus pandemic, COVID 19. The ramifications for tourism were evidenced immediately following the declaration of a National State of Disaster and the President's announcement made on 15 March 2020. The announcement of the introduction of a national lockdown beginning on 26 March once more radically changed the business horizon for tourism (Cong & Thu, 2021). As the tourism sector of South Africa was not classified as 'an essential service' it was required to adhere to the stringent national lockdown regulations (Dwesini, 2019). As has occurred in many countries, small tourism businesses in South Africa overnight went from being relatively stable operations to instead facing potential bankruptcy with retrenchment of workers and negotiated pay-cuts for others (Filimonau, 2021).

The first consequences for the country's urban accommodation services sector were that nearly all establishments were compelled to shut business operations and expected to remain closed potentially for several months (Cong & Thu, 2021). In common with the rest of the world the tourism industry of South Africa is experiencing the radical negative impacts of COVID-19. the pandemic represents a crisis event that potentially is set to transform the size and complexion of South Africa's tourism sector as well as the context in which it functions. Undoubtedly, the magnitude of the pandemic has reshaped extant patterns of tourism, accommodation services and commercial aviation flows for South Africa. Amidst these dynamic and challenging circumstances, there exists a notable gap in the effective implementation of strategic leadership practices for

sustainability within South Africa's 5-star hotel sector. Despite the global advancements and regional insights, the translation of these strategies into actionable measures tailored to the local context remains elusive. The pressing need to identify and address factors hindering sustainable business practices within this specific milieu underscores the urgency of this research endeavor. Thus, this study aims to elucidate these critical factors, assess their impact on business sustainability, and propose tailored strategies to foster resilience and viability within South Africa's 5-star hotel industry.

1.2.1 South Africa as a nation

South Africa, formally known as the Republic of South Africa (RSA), is Africa's southernmost country. It is bounded on the south by a coastline that stretches along the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean coastlines; on the north by Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia; and on the east and northeast by Mozambique and Eswatini, as well as the landlocked Lesotho. It is the most populous country completely south of the equator and the southernmost country on the Old World's continent (Ojogiwa, 2021). South Africa is a biodiversity hotspot with diverse biomes, plants, and animals. The country is home to over 60 million people and has an area of 1,221,037 square kilometers (471,445 square miles) (Stats SA, 2022). South Africa's legislative, judicial, and executive arms are based in Cape Town, Bloemfontein, and Pretoria, respectively. Johannesburg is the most populous city.



Figure 1.1: Location of South Africa on the African Continent (Filimonau:172)

Black South Africans account for around 81% of the entire population (Stats SA, 2020). The remaining population is made up of the continent's largest populations of White South Africans from Europe; Indian and Chinese South Africans from Asia; and mixed-race South Africans. South Africa is a diverse ethnic community with a broad mix of cultures, languages, and religious beliefs. The constitution recognises 11 official languages, the fourth-most in the world, reflecting the country's multiculturalism (Lombardi, Cunha & Giustiniano, 2021). The two most-spoken first languages in South Africa, according to the 2011 census, are isiZulu (22.7%) and isiXhosa (16.0%). The next two most-spoken are of European origin: Afrikaans (13.5%) evolved from Dutch and is the primary language of the majority of Coloured and White South Africans; while English (9.6%) is a legacy of British colonisation and is widely used in public and business life (Stats SA, 2023).

The nation is among the few in Africa that has not experienced a coup, and it has held regular elections for almost a century (Rodríguez-Antón & Alonso-Almeida, 2020). However, until 1994, the great majority of Black South Africans were denied the right to vote. Throughout the twentieth

century, the black majority fought for more rights against the dominant white minority, which had a considerable impact on the nation's recent political and historical development. Apartheid was introduced by the National Party in 1948, formalising earlier racial segregation (Elkhwesky, 2022). After a protracted and often violent fight by the African National Congress, and other protesters both inside and outside the country, the repeal of discriminatory legislation began in the mid-1980s. Nelson Mandela believed that 'nation-building' in South Africa required bridging the gaps between the ethnically distinct 'nations' (Lombardi et al., 2021). Since 1994, all linguistic and ethnic groups have been allowed to participate in the country's free democracy, which includes a parliamentary democracy and nine provinces, which have had political representation (Stats SA, 2022). In 1998, the then deputy-president Thabo Mbeki stressed racial disparity in a contentious speech in which he defined South Africa as possessing 'two nations, the one black and the other white'. To highlight the country's multicultural richness, the RSA is commonly referred to as the 'rainbow nation,' particularly in the aftermath of racial segregation.

South Africa is a strong regional power in global relations, as a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, as well as the Group of 20. It is a developing nation, ranking 114th on the Human Development Index (Cong & Thu, 2021). The World Bank classifies it as a newly industrialised country, having the second-largest economy in the continent, and the world's 33rd-largest. In Africa, South Africa has the most UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

1.2.2 Study location



Figure 1.2: KwaZulu Natal Province map (eThekweni Municipality, 2020).

KwaZulu-Natal, located on the eastern coast of South Africa, is a province known for its rich cultural heritage, stunning landscapes, and vibrant communities. Home to a diverse population, the province is a melting pot of Zulu, Indian, and European influences, creating a unique blend of traditions and lifestyles (Golensky & Hager, 2020). The Zulu people, with their distinct language and customs, have a strong presence in the province, and visitors often have the opportunity to experience their warm hospitality and vibrant cultural events (eThekweni Municipality, 2020). The geography of KwaZulu-Natal is equally captivating, featuring a diverse range of environments. From the lush green hills of the Midlands to the golden beaches along the Indian Ocean, the province offers a picturesque backdrop for both residents and tourists. The Drakensberg Mountains, with their breath-taking peaks and valleys, are a prominent feature, attracting nature enthusiasts and adventure seekers. Additionally, the province is renowned for its wildlife, including the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, one of the oldest game reserves in Africa, where visitors can witness the beauty of diverse flora and fauna. KwaZulu-Natal's economic significance is notable, with its bustling cities like Durban serving as major economic hubs. Durban, the largest city in the province, is a popular coastal destination known for its golden beaches, vibrant markets,

and diverse culinary scene. The province's economy is diversified, encompassing sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism. With its combination of cultural richness, natural beauty, and economic vitality, KwaZulu-Natal stands as a dynamic and captivating region within the tapestry of South Africa (Yang, Luu & Qian, 2021).

1.3 Statement of the problem

The hospitality industry is undergoing a significant transformation in response to global concerns over sustainability and environmental impact (Golensky & Hager, 2020). In this context, 5-star hotels, renowned for luxury and opulence, are facing mounting pressure to adopt sustainable practices. This mounting pressure stems from various sources within the industry itself, as well as from broader societal expectations. Internally, stakeholders, including guests, investors, and employees, are demanding greater accountability and transparency in hotel operations. Externally, regulatory bodies and environmental organizations are pushing for stricter standards and regulations to mitigate the ecological footprint of hospitality establishments. According Goh and Okumus (2020), as sustainability practices become more mainstream, failure to incorporate them can tarnish a hotel's reputation and brand image, potentially leading to loss of clientele and revenue. Consequently, 5-star hotels are navigating a complex landscape where the pursuit of luxury must harmonize with the imperatives of sustainability. The challenge lies not only in implementing eco-friendly initiatives but also in communicating these efforts effectively to guests and stakeholders, thereby aligning their expectations with the evolving ethos of the industry.

KwaZulu-Natal, with its rich biodiversity and cultural heritage, presents a unique setting to examine the challenges and opportunities that luxury hotels encounter in their quest for sustainable operations (Shukla, Sufi, Joshi & Sujatha, 2023). The global tourism industry, of which luxury hotels are a key component, is both a contributor to and a victim of the environmental challenges that humanity faces today. Sustainable development and responsible business practices are no longer optional but imperative. Within this context, it is essential to understand the factors that drive or hinder the integration of sustainability initiatives in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.

The hospitality industry, particularly 5-star hotels, plays a significant role in the global economy, contributing to job creation, tourism development, and regional economic growth (Yang, Luu & Qian, 2021). However, the industry also faces unprecedented challenges related to environmental

sustainability, social responsibility, and economic viability. In the context of KwaZulu-Natal, a province known for its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, the 5-star hotels are under increasing pressure to adopt and implement sustainable practices that balance business objectives with social and environmental responsibilities (Shukla et al., 2023).

The global hotel industry is increasingly under pressure to adopt sustainable practices that minimise environmental impacts, enhance social responsibility, and contribute to economic stability. The 5-star hotels within KwaZulu-Natal are no exception, as they operate in an ecologically diverse region known for its cultural and environmental richness. Without a strategic leadership framework, these hotels may struggle to fulfil their obligations towards sustainability, potentially jeopardising their long-term viability and competitiveness. Leadership is a critical factor in steering organisations toward sustainability. However, there is a dearth of research that comprehensively addresses how leadership within the 5-star hotel sector in KwaZulu-Natal can strategically promote and integrate sustainability practices into their operations (Goh & Okumus, 2020). Existing leadership models may not adequately capture the unique dynamics of the hospitality industry within this specific region.

KwaZulu-Natal, as a province in South Africa, presents unique challenges and opportunities for the 5-star hotel sector. These challenges include addressing economic disparities, conserving natural resources, and respecting cultural diversity. Understanding the specific contextual factors that influence sustainability and leadership within KwaZulu-Natal is crucial to developing an effective framework. South Africa's market share in tourism arrivals declined in 2015 which could be due to significant restrictions in visa regulations, political and social unrest as well as overall weak global economy (Dube, 2021). South African economy has been struggling to achieve high growth rates and has been in a technical recession from the fourth quarter of 2016 to the first quarter of 2017, only escaping it in the second quarter of 2022 (Stats SA, 2022). This could be the result of various socioeconomic challenges faced by South African citizens, including poverty, unemployment and inequality (Golensky & Hager, 2020). The 5-star hotels are expected to deliver exceptional service while aligning with sustainable practices. A strategic leadership framework that fosters sustainability not only helps these hotels meet regulatory requirements but also positions them to gain a competitive advantage by appealing to environmentally conscious customers and investors.

Although sustainability in the hotel industry has received considerable attention, the intersection of strategic leadership and sustainability, especially within the context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, is underexplored. This research therefore intends to tackle the issue of the lack of a well-rounded strategic leadership framework specifically designed for 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The current scenario in these hotels is marked by a dearth of guidance tailored to their unique context, hindering their efforts in implementing sustainability measures (Goh & Okumus, 2020). Despite the increasing global awareness of sustainability, 5-star hotels in the region lack a cohesive framework within their strategic leadership models, leading to sporadic and disjointed sustainability initiatives (Dube, 2021). Consequently, sustainability has become a focal point in the contemporary hotel industry, emphasising the necessity for responsible business practices that encompass economic, social, and environmental aspects. This research endeavours to address the challenge by developing a comprehensive strategic leadership framework that aligns with the distinctive circumstances and obstacles faced by 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Moreover, this study holds the potential to serve as a model for other regions and industries, offering insights into the strategic leadership dimensions of sustainability in practice.

1.4 Research aim

The aim of the study is to explore critical factors affecting the business leadership in 5-star hotels, to what extent those factors impact on the business sustainability and also to propose the new strategies that can be used to improve business growth of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.

1.5 Research objectives

Based on the above aim, the study will strive to meet the following specific objectives:

- To establish the sustainable leadership practices for 5-star hotels within Kwa-Zulu Natal province.
- To identify factors that contribute to sustainable leadership for Kwa-Zulu Natal province 5-star hotels from perspective of internal and external factors.
- To evaluate the extent to which these factors influence business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal province.
- To explore the primary challenges faced by 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal in effectively implementing a strategic leadership framework for sustainability?

- To recommend strategies that can improve the business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal province.

1.6 Research questions

The research purports to provide answers to the following questions:

- What are the sustainable leadership practices employed by 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal?
- What internal and external factors contribute to sustainable leadership in 5-star hotels within Kwa-Zulu Natal?
- To what extent do the identified factors influence the business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal?
- What are the primary challenges faced by 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal in effectively implementing a strategic leadership framework for sustainability?
- What strategies can be recommended to enhance the business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal?

1.7 Significance to the study

The primary objective of this research is to develop a Strategic Leadership Framework for Sustainability in 5-star hotels within KwaZulu-Natal. This framework will be specifically designed to address the contextual factors, leadership dynamics, and sustainability challenges faced by these hotels. The research seeks to create a roadmap for hotel leaders to effectively lead their organisations toward sustainability while maintaining competitiveness and contributing positively to the province's economic and social development. This research is significant because it will provide valuable insights into how these establishments can maintain their reputation for luxury while adhering to sustainable principles, thus ensuring their long-term survival in an environmentally conscious world. Thus, the significance of this study resides in its pivotal role in addressing the pressing need for a strategic leadership framework tailored specifically for sustainability within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. By exploring into this unexplored territory, the research not only contributed to the conceptual development of sustainable practices within the hospitality industry but also filled a notable gap in the existing literature, enriching scholarly

discourse on sustainable leadership. Methodologically, this study set a precedent for future research endeavours by showcasing innovative approaches to addressing sustainability challenges within the context of luxury accommodations. Furthermore, its findings hold profound implications for government bodies and policymakers, offering insights that could inform the development of regulations and initiatives aimed at fostering sustainability within the hospitality sector, thereby promoting environmental conservation and economic resilience on both local and global scales.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

The research employed a multifaceted approach by integrating various theoretical frameworks to comprehensively understand and address sustainability challenges in the hospitality industry. One of the key frameworks guiding the study is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations. This framework allows the research to align with specific SDGs relevant to the hospitality sector, such as Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and Goal 13 (Climate Action), providing a holistic perspective on sustainability. Furthermore, the research incorporated the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, emphasising economic, social, and environmental dimensions. In the context of 5-star hotels, the study examines how strategic leadership practices contribute to financial success, positive social impacts, and environmental stewardship. The Resource-Based View (RBV) was also employed to analyse the internal resources and capabilities that 5-star hotels utilise to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Transformational Leadership, another framework in focus, explores how inspirational leadership styles contribute to the implementation of sustainability practices in these hotels, encouraging extraordinary outcomes.

Moreover, the research drew on Institutional Theory to examine how 5-star hotels respond to external pressures, both regulatory and normative, and how leadership influences these responses. Stakeholder Theory is employed to highlight the importance of considering the diverse interests of stakeholders, including guests, employees, local communities, and regulatory bodies. The study explored how strategic leadership aligns with and addresses these various stakeholder needs in the pursuit of sustainability. Lastly, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) frameworks, such as Carroll's CSR pyramid and ISO 26000 guidance, provided a structured approach to analysing how 5-star hotels fulfil their economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities toward society and the environment. Through the integration of these diverse theoretical frameworks, the research

aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of strategic leadership for sustainability in the context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.

1.9 Brief Research Methodology

In exploring the development of a strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, a comprehensive research methodology was employed to gain insights. The study opted for a mixed qualitative approach, leveraging both key informant interviews and focus groups to capture a diverse range of perspectives (Japutra & Situmorang, 2021). Purposive sampling was applied to select 20 participants, ensuring a representative sample comprising key stakeholders within the hospitality sector. The qualitative nature of the research facilitated a deep exploration of the intricate dynamics involved in the adoption of sustainable practices within the context of luxury accommodations. Thematic analysis emerged as the chosen method to interpret the qualitative data obtained from the key informants and focus groups. This rigorous analytical approach allowed for the identification of recurrent patterns, emerging trends, and critical themes relevant to the strategic leadership framework for sustainability (Marobhe & Kansheba, 2023). By examining the narratives, opinions, and experiences of the participants, the study aimed to construct a robust foundation for the proposed framework, fostering a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with embedding sustainability practices in the operational fabric of 5-star hotels in the unique context of KwaZulu-Natal.

1.10 Definitions of key terms

Hotel: A Hotel provides accommodation with full or limited service to the travelling public and has a minimum of 80 rooms. A Hotel has a reception area and offers a dining facility

Small hotel: A Small Hotel provides accommodation with full or limited service to the travelling public and has up to approximately 10 rooms. A Small Hotel has a reception area and offers a dining facility

Apartment Hotel: An Apartment Hotel provides accommodation with full or limited service to the travelling public and has a minimum of 10 rooms. An Apartment Hotel has a reception area and offers a dining facility. There is a kitchenette and dining area in each room

Boutique Hotel: A Boutique Hotel provides accommodation with full or limited service to a travelling public. A Boutique Hotel offers unique rooms, has a reception area and offers a dining facility.

1.11 Delimitation of the study

This study focused on developing a comprehensive strategic leadership framework tailored specifically for enhancing sustainability practices within the context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The research was delimited to investigating the strategic leadership approaches and mechanisms employed by senior management within these establishments to promote and integrate sustainability initiatives. The study encompassed aspects such as environmental conservation, community engagement, economic viability, and social responsibility. Furthermore, this study concentrated on 5-star hotels in the KwaZulu-Natal region, limiting its scope to this specific geographical area to ensure depth of analysis and relevance to the local hospitality industry.

1.12 Overview of the thesis

The summary, below, indicated the flow of each chapter and gives an analysis of its key ideas. The thesis is structured in the manner described below:

Chapter one: Introduction

The first chapter introduces the study and covers the study's background, the research problem, the study's goal, the research objectives, the research questions, and the study's relevance and thesis structure.

Chapter two: Strategic leadership in the hospitality sector

This literature review topic would delve into the concept of strategic leadership and its role in the context of the hospitality industry, particularly in 5-star hotels within KwaZulu-Natal. You can explore the existing literature on leadership models, styles, and strategies that have proven effective in promoting sustainability in hotels. This review can also delve into the unique challenges and opportunities that leaders face in the hotel sector when striving for sustainable practices and their impact on the overall business strategy.

Chapter three: Sustainable Practices in the Hospitality Industry

This literature review topic would focus on examining the various sustainable practices and initiatives that have been adopted by hotels and the broader hospitality industry, with a specific emphasis on 5-star hotels. You can explore the sustainability trends, challenges, and success stories in the industry. This review can also discuss the implications of adopting sustainability practices on the hotel's operational performance, reputation, and customer satisfaction.

Chapter four: Research design and methodology

This chapter provides an overview of all the components and features of the research employed in this study. It addresses data collection, processing, and analytic techniques, as well as research methodologies, research philosophies, instruments, and sample strategies. Qualitative methodology was used. This chapter deliberates on the key informant interviews and focus group interviews, the data collection processes and the tools utilised for analysis in greater depth.

Chapter five: Findings and discussions from interviews

In this chapter, the study's qualitative findings are given based on the data acquired during the interviews. The chapter presents and discusses the first two objectives of the study supported by additional research and literature. The data interpretation and analysis intent to address the important issues stated in the first chapter.

Chapter six: Findings and discussions from focus group interviews

This chapter presents the findings from the analysed qualitative data which was collected during the focus group interviews.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter draws conclusions and makes recommendations for changes from the findings of the study, which need to be explored in order to ensure that the holistic management of stakeholders is in place. These emerged from the findings presented in Chapters Five and Six, and also from the theory discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

1.13 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided context for the study, as well as the issues, research objectives, and research questions. This chapter provided a summary of the issue under consideration, explanations in the following critical areas: research challenges; the motivation for the study; and objectives. The next chapter provides information about the relevant literature and also the theoretical framework used in this study.

CHAPTER TWO: STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR

2.1 Introduction

The importance of this literature review is in the search for gaining a thorough understanding of the concept strategic management in order to provide guidance and provide the appropriate framing towards process and practice-oriented research. Constantly changing competitive landscapes and internal organisational complexities increase the challenge of articulating a corporate strategy in a simple, compelling way (Öğretmenoğlu, Akova & Göktepe, 2022). As a result, it is thought that business strategy is unable to remain effective for long periods, as competitors continuously react and render the strategies void (Abu-Rumman et al., 2021). The pace of change and unremitting uncertainty has not negated the need to define organisational strategy, but instead has explicitly refocused the need for a creative and adaptive strategy articulated in a simple, compelling manner to ensure competitive success and sustainability.

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature on the concept ‘strategy’. The broader review incorporated seminal works that created the base for research on the topic over the last 60 years, with an extension to more recent works. The chapter begins with an introduction to the concept of strategy, its origins in a political and military context in several areas around the world, followed by its interpretation in modern warfare of the 20th century and ultimately in the environment of business. The said concept has been defined and redefined by numerous authors over the past years; within this chapter a number of the definitions are consolidated to provide a view of the purpose and elements behind the construct. The chapter then provides an overview of the three strategy constructs through which research strategy has been themed: process research focused on strategy formulation and implementation; content research concerned with the types of strategy; and the relatively new academic field of strategy-as-practice – interested in how strategy is organised: who does it, what they do, how they do it, what they use, and what implications this has for the shaping of strategy as a whole (Ajmal et al., 2022).

2.2 Strategic management Overview

2.2.1 Strategy

From its inception, strategy has primarily been concerned with searching for competitive advantage (Thukral, 2021). Archaic military history indicate that the primary focus of strategy has been on winning (Ebrahim & Ganguli, 2019). The concept of strategy is thought to derive from a socio-political structure coined during the political reforms of Kleisthenes in ancient Athens (508-7 BCE). Several tribal divisions, acting both politically and militarily, were created in the district of Athens, with the head of each tribe elected as a '*strategos*'. '*Strategos*' is compounded from the word '*stratos*', defined as an encamped army which is spread over an area, and '*agein*', meaning to lead. Increased military complexity, and the co-ordination of many land and naval units, increased the necessity for co-ordination and synergy, resulting in the practicing of strategy in arguably its purest form (Öğretmenoğlu et al., 2022).

Kautish et al. (2022) included several qualities of effective '*strategoi*': employing resources, limiting of risk, staying true to points and principles, but most critically, knowing the business which is to be carried out. During a similar timeframe, in Asia, Sun Tzu (544-496 BCE) authored an extremely influential ancient Chinese book on military strategy, '*Art of War*'. The opus outlined several critical points of consideration for the development of military strategy: meticulous planning, vanquishing of the enemy indirectly without the need to fight, qualities of effective generals and management of troops as well as principles and tactics for engaging the enemy (Camilleri, 2022).

Strategic planning was further demonstrated in the campaigns of Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Julius Caesar, Qin Shi Huang and Machiavelli. However, military strategy only gained significant importance as a subject during the eighteenth century, as articulated by the works of Frederick the Great, Napoleon, and Carl von Clausewitz, all of which focused on superior manoeuvrability to obtain victory (Freire & Gonçalves, 2021). Several wars in the 20th century strengthened the influence of military strategy, building upon the principles of earlier strategists. Current doctrine is constructed based on previous practice and lessons learned from intensive study of battles, both successful and unsuccessful, leading to future innovations and best practice. British Defence Doctrines, similar to those of NATO and the US Army, outline 10 principles of war (Gürlek &

Koseoglu, 2021): selection and maintenance of a clearly defined overall aim; maintenance of resource morale; offensive action; security in defence of high value assets; surprise involving secrecy, concealment, deception, originality, audacity and speed; concentration of force; economy of effort; flexibility; co-operation and sustainability. Parallels can be drawn between the principles of war and organisations engaged in competitive environments.

While it may be said that strategy originated from military roots, however, since the 1920s it has been embraced by the business environment with Chester Barnard of AT&T (1938) and Alfred Sloan of General Motors (implemented in 1921, but documented in 1963) identifying the need for strategy to guide the business context (Ali et al., 2019). However, the period 1950-1973 is identified as the 'golden years' for the development of strategy (Koch, 2011). Chandler, in *Strategy and Structure* (1962) identified the need for strategy before the organisational structure is defined while Peter Drucker, in *Concepts of the Corporation* (1946), pronounced that the purpose of a business is to create and satisfy customer needs.

Younas and Waseem Bari (2020), published '*Marketing Myopia*', identifying a need for a radical and broad perspective on corporate strategy, followed in 1965 by what is arguably the bible of strategic planning, Ansoff's *Corporate Strategy*, a blueprint for the outlining of an organisation's objectives, expansion, product-market position and resource allocation (Xu et al., 2020). Further increasing the development of strategy was the founding of the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) (1963) by Bruce Henderson with his formulation of the experience curve and the growth/share matrix, two important tools in the historical context of strategy (Donate et al., 2022).

Later development in the area of strategy saw several authors gain significant attention through their individualised contributions: Henry Mintzberg, Michael Porter, and Kenichi Ohmae, all focusing on the creation of models for the development of business strategy. At this time Porter strongly argued that profitability informed a relative competitive position and structural characteristics of the organisation's industry, after which he focused on the development of his five forces framework, value chain and generic strategies (AlNuaimi et al., 2022). Several further contributions have added to the context of strategy, focusing on the positions of organisations to change the rules of their industry and advancing the use of core competencies as central to the organisational strategy; John Kay elaborated on this with his seminal work on the resource-based view of strategy (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2019).

Liu and Yang (2021) further argued for the need of a corporate centre acting as a parent to operating companies. Many authors have since debated the form of strategy, with a focus on the competitive advantage achieved through best practice, business process re-engineering, quality, strategic change, information and technology and innovation (Ebrahim & Ganguli, 2019). Owing to the proliferation of publishing on cutting-edge management thinking, the popularity of strategy within the business media and business schools and the overarching importance of it in guiding organisational direction, it is clear that strategy is no longer the exclusive domain of just an enlightened inner circle but should, as a concept, be well-defined and clearly articulated. Hence, the following review of the literature will clearly articulate the on-going discourse and evolving nature of the strategic management (Madi Odeh et al., 2023).

2.2.2 Defining Strategic management process

Strategic management is defined in different ways by different authors. It is the researcher's view that any organisation has a strategy even if the strategy is undocumented or unplanned. Sorin and Sivarajah (2021) present that a strategy is created because a working organisation can neither be totally flexible nor turn around constantly. The concept of strategy is affected by semantic problems as a result of the many variations in the meaning of its use stemming from differences in perspective, focus and context, both in the business world and in academia. Ambiguity and confusion are prevalent due to the lack of a consensual definition. The result is the emergence of a broad term used to mean anything (Freire & Gonçalves, 2021). Context, provided by the origins of strategy, related the concept to its use within the military establishment. Transition to the business environment was driven, although from an economic perspective, and promptly expanded upon into the field of management (Lee, 2022).

Öğretmenoğlu et al. (2022) introduced strategy as 'the determination of the long-run goals and objectives of an enterprise and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals', while strategy was advanced as the common thread among a firm's activities. New definitions flowed in abundance during the period 1960 to 1980, with the construction of 'strategy' leading to greater diversity based on each author's appreciation of the concept.

In one of his original definitions of strategy, Sen and Bhattacharya (2019) focused on an organisation's unique nature by stating 'competitive strategy is about being different. It means deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value'. Younas and Waseem Bari (2020) expand on Porter's view by suggesting that strategy could be a plan followed, or a pattern of consistent behaviour, over time. Strategy could be a position or a perspective or a ploy by acting as a specific manoeuvre intended to outwit a competitor. In summary, strategy should provide consistency in setting direction, focusing effort and defining the organisation (Ali et al., 2019). It requires strategy to be a synergy of these five concepts in order to understand it and most important apply it.

Strategy as a plan, deals with how leaders try to establish direction for organisations, to set predetermined courses of action. Strategy as a plan also raises the fundamental issue of recognition how intentions are conceived in the human brain in the first place, indeed, what intentions really mean. As a ploy, strategy takes us into the environment of direct competition, where threats and feints and various manoeuvres are employed to gain advantage. This place the process of strategy formation in its most dynamic setting, with moves provoking countermoves and so on. Yet ironically, strategy itself is a concept rooted not in change but in stability in set plans and established patterns. There is need then to reconcile the dynamic notions of strategy as ploy with the static ones of strategy as pattern and other forms of planning (Palácios et al., 2021).

As pattern, strategy focuses on action, reminding that the concept is an empty one if it does not take behaviour into account, if it is not executed. Strategy as a pattern also introduces another important phenomenon in organisations, that of convergence, the achievement of consistency in behaviour. This consistency comes from the realisation that strategy is an important means of conceiving and describing the direction actually pursued by organisations, and when considered alongside strategy as plan, encourages strategists to consider the notion that strategies can emerge as well as be deliberately imposed. It means that aligning strategy is crucial for achieving objectives and that execution could be always more important than ideas (Thukral, 2021).

As position, strategy encourages to look at organisations in context, specifically in their competitive environments –how they find their position and protect them in order to meet competition, avoid it, or subvert it. This enables the thinking of organisations in ecological terms, as organisms in niches that struggle for survival in a world of hostility and uncertainty as well as

symbiosis. It gives the organisations the choices available as well as how much room for manoeuvre. Intra-organisational ecology of strategy approach could be very important in this context, the way all of the employees in the chart align efforts to come up with new strategies or maintaining the current strategy (Donate et al., 2022).

And finally, as perspective, strategy raises intriguing questions about intention and behaviour in a collective context. It focuses attention on the reflections and actions of the collectivity in order to share norms and values. Ultimately, it is this view of strategy that offers the best hope of coming to grips with the most fascinating issue of all, that of the ‘organisational mind’. This topic could be related to the concept of distributing decision-making where people at all levels are part of the decision-making process aligned with the organisation's interest (Kimbu et al., 2021).

Therefore, strategy is not just about how to deal with an enemy or a set of competitors or a market, as it is treated in so much of the literature and its popular usage. It also draws us into some of the most fundamental issues about organisations as instruments for collective perception and action. Hence, strategy becomes effective by the assemblage of shared perceptions and actions. Arici and Uysal (2022), after analysing the various strategy definitions in literature, suggested that strategy can be clustered into three groups or models referred to as; (1) the linear strategy, (2) adaptive strategy and (3) interpretive strategy. Similarly, after their analysis of strategy literature, Imran and Aldaas (2020) discovered ten distinct perspectives about strategy and suggested ten schools of thought on the formation of strategy, namely, the ‘Design, Planning, Positioning, Entrepreneurial, Cognitive, Learning, Power, Cultural, Environmental, and Configuration’ schools. The first three of these schools are prescriptive in nature and have the same characteristics as Chaffee’s linear strategy (Teo et al., 2020).

Inherent in the linear strategy model, is the assumption that strategy is comprised of decisions, plans or actions that are integrated to attain the goals of an organisation. This view portrays top managers as having considerable capacity to change the organisation (Zhang et al., 2020). The linear model is associated with terms such as strategy formulation, strategic planning, and strategy implementation. The linear strategy model is what Tosun et al. (2022) referred to as strategic choice theory which also separates the formulation of a strategy from its implementation. Strategic choice theory like Chaffee’s linear model, assumes that organisations change successfully when

top executives form the right intention for the overall future shape of the whole organisation and adequately specify how this is to be achieved.

According to Piwowar-Sulej and Iqbal (2023), the adaptive strategy model on the other hand considers the environment to be a complex life support system of an organisation as it consists of events, trends, stakeholders and competitors that have an impact on the implementation of an organisation strategy. Because of the highly permeable boundary between an organisation and its environment, it is therefore critical that management considers the environment as a major key when determining the actions of an organisation. This therefore means that organisations are expected to assess both their external and internal environments in order to adjust themselves or their relevant environments to ensure alignments of environmental opportunities and threats on the one hand, and capabilities and resources, on the other.

Correspondingly, according to Bukhari et al. (2023) organisations are connected through feedback links to their environments and therefore to reach their goals organisations need to adapt to those environments. According to Imran and Aldaas (2020), adaptive strategy rests also on the assumption that the environment within which organisations operate is dynamic and therefore not predictable, and that organisations must change with their environment.

Sen and Bhattacharya (2019) further asserts that strategy in the interpretive model can be defined as orienting metaphors or frames of reference that allow the organisation and its environment to be understood by organisational stakeholders. On this basis stakeholders are motivated to believe and to act in ways that are expected to produce favourable results for the organisation. This model is a social constructionist perspective in that it assumes that reality is socially constructed.

The above-mentioned models of strategy as suggested by Jolly and Lee (2021) can be summarised briefly as follows: In linear strategy, organisational leaders develop strategies and plans on how to deal with competitors in order for them to achieve organisational goals. In adaptive strategy, organisations and their components change in proactive and reactive ways, in order to be aligned with the dictates of the environment, whereas in interpretive strategy, organisational leaders communicate messages that are directed at motivating relevant stakeholders to behave in a manner that that has a positive impact to the organisation.

According to Öğretmenoğlu et al. (2022), the competitive realities for business appear to demand not only efficiency and high quality, but also fast cycle capability, strategic flexibility and attention to social-environmental concerns. Fast cycle capability means the ability of an organisation to do things right the first time and every time. It also means an organisation's ability to take decisions fast, where an organisation does not tolerate bottlenecks and delays. Strategic flexibility is an organisation's ability to identify changes in the environment, adjust the strategic plans quickly and allocate resources to alternative actions where necessary. Piwovar-Sulej and Iqbal (2023) further suggested that strategy making is the key to ensuring that organisations meet these demands. They however, suggested that most existing models of strategy making do not reflect the variety and complexity of strategy making, instead strategy making is portrayed in either rational or incremental or separated into formulation and implementation.

Sorin and Sivarajah (2021) suggest that many writers of strategic management are aware of the uncertainty, ambiguity and conflicting goals that managers have to deal with and have developed different ways of understanding the nature of strategic choice. Through the notion of logical incrementalism, managers sense the changes in their environment and gradually adapt their strategies to those changes and by so doing, they maintain a continuing dynamic equilibrium with their environment. This view also supports the notion of strategic flexibility. Wang (2022) suggested that organisations pass through a series of stages as they become more adept at strategic management. They suggested that organisations start with traditional financial and forecast based planning and later adding strategic analysis skills, before achieving full strategic management capability which requires broad diffusion of strategic thinking throughout the organisation. Similarly, Sen and Bhattacharya (2019) also suggested that organisations develop strategic management skills over a period of time and that the linear form of strategy-making represents the entry level in the strategy-making types hierarchy, and the second level is the adaptive mode which is followed by the interpretive mode.

Faraj et al. (2021) after their study to determine the direct link between the strategy making process and organisational performance, concluded that organisations that demonstrated high capability levels in the process of strategy making, exhibited higher levels of performance in diverse environments and settings. They however pointed out that this does not imply that there is one universal way to perform strategic management.

It is the researcher's view that for an organisation strategy to be effective, there is need for an internal consistency or congruency between the strategy, organisational processes and systems, organisational culture, organisational structure, human resources and the organisation's external environment. Imran and Aldaas (2020) suggest that the criteria for evaluating a strategy as suggested by few studies are amongst others the alignment of the strategy with the environment and resources available, the clarity of the strategy, the risk levels, internal consistency, alignment with the values of the organisation's key leaders, time horizon and the level of achievability of the strategy.

Unlike the private sector, the public service has many stakeholders that have an influence on the services and products that a public service organisation must deliver. These stakeholders need to be identified and engaged during and after strategic planning to have their buy-in and therefore increase the possibility of an effective implementation of the strategies. For example, Dhiman and Arora (2020) suggested that strategic management in the New Zealand public sector served to (1) ensure cross-sectoral coordination and alignment in the nation's public administration by providing an overarching framework for departments to develop their strategies, and to (2) serve as an instrument of vertical integration between the political and managerial environments, which was lacking.

It is clear from the above discussion that the environment of the organisation has a crucial influence on the organisation's ability to implement its strategies and thereby meet its goals. Hidayat et al. (2021) suggests that to develop an organisation's strategy one need to also consider the following four environmental variables: the uncertainty, dynamism, hostility, and complexity of the organisation's environment. According to Dhiman and Arora (2020), the uncertainty of an organisation's environment indicates unavailability of information for predicting environmental events and external changes to the organisation's decision makers. Environmental dynamism on the other hand means the rapidity and amount of change in the environment. Environmental hostility is according to Wang (2022), the prevalence of factors that pose threats to an organisation, such as price competitions, technological competition, resources availability and the like.

The awareness of the character and levels of the above-mentioned environmental variables in the environment of an organisation will enable an organisation strategy-making team to develop strategic plans that are realistic in terms of the targets. Most importantly this awareness in the

researcher's view should be a way to justify taking actions to mitigate the impact of the environment where possible and also marry it with strategic flexibility as suggested by Faraj et al. (2021), where, a new course of action is taken where necessary.

As alluded to earlier, the capacity of managers of organisations to implement their strategies is critical for an organisation to achieve its goals. For a strategic plan to be implemented effectively managers need to ensure that internal systems, processes, resources and organisational culture are aligned to the dictates of the strategic plan. According to Jolly and Lee (2021) the formulation of a strategy and ensuring that the strategy is implemented effectively, require different sets of managerial competencies, in that, strategy implementation is an action oriented activity that tests management's ability to manage organisational capabilities, engender a corporate culture that is supportive to the strategy, achieve continuous improvement in business processes, and achieve or exceed performance targets.

There are multiple variables that constitute the environment in which an organisation operates, and which affect its ability to perform. The complexity of the environment in which businesses operate has increased drastically in recent years with factors such as globalisation and the unprecedented pace of technological advancement and change (Martínez-Martínez et al., 2019) Such factors or variables most definitely affect performance; however, they have the potential to affect the very survival of an organisation. It is therefore important for organisations to formulate, execute, monitor and evaluate their strategy consistently, and to revisit their strategic management framework regularly to ensure its relevance (Freire & Gonçalves, 2021).

This notion that organisations need to engage consistently in strategic management is supported by Vo Thanh et al. (2020), who refer to the danger of an unstable business environment as a risk to the survival of any business. Given the difficult global and local economic climate, the need for strategic management processes to develop, execute and evaluate strategies has never been greater. According to Sorin and Sivarajah (2021), strategic management is intended to enhance the entire set of managerial decisions and actions that determine the long-run performance of an organisation. Further to this, Faraj et al. (2021) describe strategic management as a dynamic process of formulation, implementation, evaluation and control of strategies to realise the organisation's strategic intent. The need for a dynamic process is an important point as rigid

strategic management approaches in an uncertain, complex and rapidly changing environment can jeopardise the very existence of an organisation (Alagarsamy, Mehroliya, & Aranha, 2023).

That strategic management is a vital component of an organisation has been demonstrated by many researchers. Strategic planning began to emerge as concept in the mid-1950s and has been utilised mostly by the private sector, as the public sector has focused primarily on constitutional mandates and laws. There has, however, been a shift in recent times as both the private and the public sector are now using strategic management as a developmental tool. In fact, strategic planning is now regarded as a key management component of the public sector. It is, however, noted that the reputation of strategic management in public organisations has been somewhat tainted by its inability to execute the desired results (Madi Odeh et al., 2023).

Segovia-Pérez et al. (2019) explains that strategic management is attracting considerable attention within the public sector as part of efforts to improve service delivery in a constantly changing and complex environment. This complexity arises from the fact that the public sector is politicised and is unable to predict emerging social dynamics accurately whilst at the same time dealing with and satisfying many different stakeholders with divergent expectations. The debate on the positioning of strategic management and the attendant complexities within the public sector is also dealt with by Öğretmenoğlu et al. (2022), who expands on the high levels of bureaucracy, bureaucratic procedures, decreased managerial autonomy and low levels of organisational commitment that prevail in public organisations. In summarising the above discussion, it is clear that strategic management is vital to both the private and public sectors. Strategic management is a process that at the very minimum entails formulation, execution, monitoring and evaluation of a strategic plan (Ali et al., 2019).

Several authors focused their definitions of strategic management on the selection of long-term goals and the plans for achieving them (Khuong, Mai & Phuong, 2020) by articulating the proper allocation of resources (Alagarsamy et al., 2023). Substantial attention was allocated to the attainment of objectives through the use of actions, plans, policies, programmes and orientations (Sürücü, Maşlakçı & Şeşen, 2020). Others related strategy to the linking of the environment to the organisation (Marshall, 2019). Some conceived strategy as a rational technique for enhanced decision making (Martínez-Martínez et al., 2019) while strongly highlighting a process orientation to meeting organisational objectives. Further areas identified in strategy definitions include

change, competitive advantage and organisational performance, and shaping the future (Raza & Khan, 2022).

2.2.3 Origin of Strategy

Baxter and Casady (2020) argue that while research has been prone to focus on an either-or stance towards using a deliberate or emergent approach, the levels of adaptability, creativity and influence required by organisations demand alternative strategies or styles for making strategy based on environmental predictability and the organisation's power to change its environment. Dhiman and Arora (2020) concur that flexibility should be established, arguing that strategy is rarely purely deliberate and few are purely emergent: all real-world strategies contain a mix of control and fostered learning. One of the main reasons where strategy relies its importance is that it not only determines which activities the organisation must focus but also how good executive recognise the best tasks that should be kept and evolve to reflect changes in the competitive landscape (Ukeje et al., 2021). Canhoto and Wei (2021) support that every organisation's strategy describes its intentions to create value for their shareholders, customers and citizens. This way even though strategy is internally formulated its impact or execution will be reflected on the firm's external environment. Then, strategy will be the compass for every organisation's decision (Abu-Rumman et al., 2021).

Numerous seminal researches into the concept of strategy during the 1960s and 70s, two research constructs emerged, facilitating research progress in the field. Strategy research was characterised by the formal distinction between the process of creating strategy and the content of strategy (Marshall, 2019). Process research uncovered the actions leading to and supporting a choice of strategy; focusing on providing prescriptive and descriptive guidance on planning methods, sequence of behaviours and decision making; guiding alternative means for generating and implementing strategy based on individual and group characteristics and structure (Sürücü et al., 2020).

In comparison, content research focused on the domain of the strategic decision –linking specific decisions and broader economic structures to performance outcomes. Content research concentrated on relationships amongst environmental conditions, strategic decisions and performance results as well as on decisions about the goals, scope, diversification, strategic groups,

market share, competitive strategy taxonomies and stages of market evolution and competitive strategies of the organisation and its business units (Ohunakin et al., 2019). Subsequently, several authors suggested the distinction proved an impediment to furthering research, creating an artificial boundary between the two streams, which if removed, would lead to superior strategy processes articulated for different strategic issues and environments (Khalifa, 2019). In summary, the process stream was focused on strategy formulation and implementation, while the content stream was concerned with the types of strategy. The conclusion was that strategy forms part of the property of an organisation, something an organisation possesses in one form or another (Ali Ababneh et al., 2021).

Recent work proposes a third research construct, ‘the notion that strategy is a practice’, something that people do, a human activity or a social practice (Madi Odeh et al., 2023). This view invites us to delve deep into organisations to understand the activities individuals undertake in intimate detail, while aggregating all activities that collectively produce strategies that shape our world. Strategy-as-practice, developed in the past decade, is a research theme interested in how strategy is carried out: who does it, what they do, how they do it, what they use and what implications this has for the shaping of strategy as a whole (Tariq et al., 2022). From a strategy-as-practice viewpoint, strategy is a situated, socially accomplished activity, while the art of strategising involves the actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors at multiple layers, as well as the practices from which they draw to accomplish these activities (Palácios et al., 2021).

Strategy-as-practice has evolved through the development of a conceptual framework, by defining the reciprocal relationships, which span the micro and macro levels of organisations between the three core elements of praxis, practices and practitioners. As such, Soelton (2023) concludes that a practice perspective on strategy must incorporate consideration of how strategy ‘practitioners’ utilise institutionalised strategic ‘practices’ in creative ways within their strategy ‘praxis’ to generate strategy, potentially creating new strategy ‘practices’.

Strategy practitioners are those individuals who undertake the work of making, shaping and executing strategies (Martínez-Martínez et al., 2019). They are the actors who draw upon the different practices to act. Practices identify the actors’ way of behaving, thinking, emoting, knowing and acting in ways prevalent within their society. This allows the actors to combine, coordinate and adapt the practices to their organisations’ needs in order to ensure they act and

influence their society (Jones & Wynn, 2019). Strategy practitioners are not just senior executives who have strategy as the core of their work, but also those countless others who carry out strategy work, as part of a larger function. These include strategy planners, who still assume a large function in strategy formulation, middle managers who engage in and implement the strategies, and strategy advisors, such as strategy consultants from consulting firms and bankers, lawyers and business school gurus (Khalifa, 2019).

Strategy practitioners engage in strategy praxis – the various and numerous activities involved in the formulation and implementation of strategy. Praxis is the labour of strategy-making outlining the flow of activities through which strategy is accomplished (Banmairuoy, Kritjaroen & Homsombat, 2022). Strategy praxis includes the intra-organisational work that is required for the development and execution of strategy. While this work is diverse, it often includes formal and ad-hoc meetings, board meetings, management retreats, consulting interventions, team briefings, presentations, projects, simple talk and actions and behaviours that influence the formulation and implementation of the organisation's strategy (Baum, 2019). The domain of strategy praxis is extensive and includes activities which are routine and non-routine, formal and informal, internal to the organisation and found at the organisational periphery.

Strategy practices include those routines, procedures, norms and culture employed by strategy practitioners to carry out strategy work (Baum, 2019). They are diverse and variable and are utilised, altered and combined, based on specific uses altering the flow of activity of which they form part. Practices include stand-alone items such as forming strategy project teams or strategy away-days and implicit items such as bodily actions, forms of mental activities, background knowledge, expertise, states of emotion, motivational knowledge and the various tools of strategy (Raza & Khan, 2022). Tools include analytical techniques such as SWOT analyses (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats), environmental scanning and other industry recipes or else technologies and equipment such as flipcharts, computers and software, Gantt charts, white boards or even post-it notes (Gebbers, Gao & Cai, 2020). Strategy practices might inform those of whole societies and social practices, which include the strategic scale, scope or structure across nations or the world as well as types of discourse which inform the right ways of doing strategy including strategy techniques, for instance Potterian analysis.

Studies undertaking a strategy-as-practice approach need not combine all three elements at the same time. The elements allow for an interconnectedness, providing a means for understanding how to recommend an approach that is able to associate different subsets of the three core elements, based on the assignment at hand, while acknowledging their relationship to the integrated whole (Memili et al., 2020). In addition, a very important aspect in the process of strategic management is the level of employee involvement and their consequences of their actions.

2.3 The Elements of Strategy

Broadly, strategy can be regarded as a means to achieving objectives (Tariq et al., 2022). It can be perceived as a tool used by organisations to guide them in ensuring successful performance as well as their survival and growth in the long-term (Mendiratta & Srivastava, 2023). Management textbooks frequently outline strategy as an integrated process of three interrelated steps: formulation, implementation and control, focusing narrowly on planning.

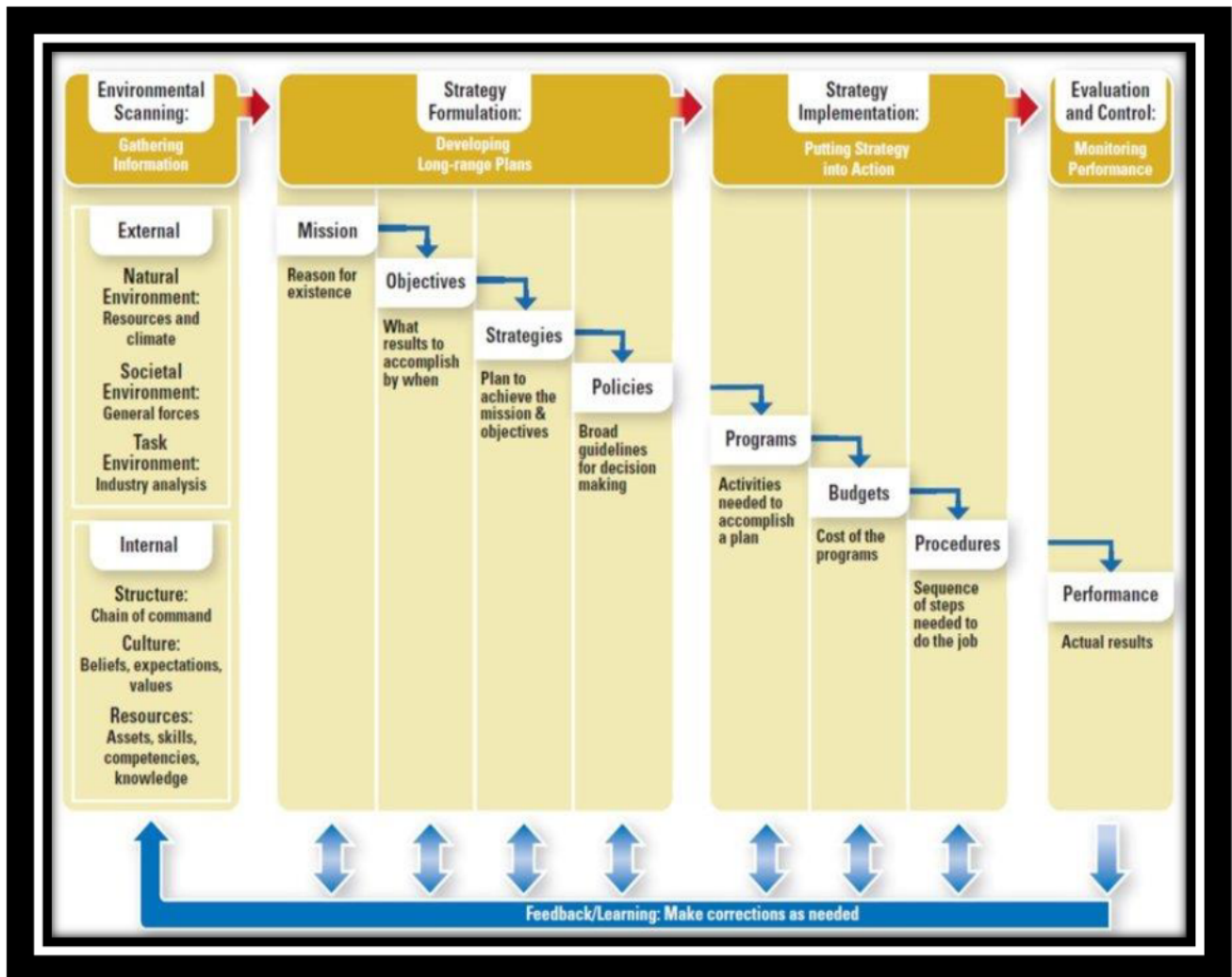


Figure 2.1 Strategic Management model (Almaaitah et al., 2020)

2.3.1 Diagnosis/Environmental scanning

Environmental scanning includes: (a) performing a situation analysis (analysis of the internal environment of the organisation), including identification and evaluation of current mission, strategic objectives, strategies, and results, plus major strengths and weaknesses; (b) analysing the organisation's external environment, including major opportunities and threats; and (c) identifying the major critical issues, which are a small set, of major problems, threats, weaknesses, and/or opportunities that require particularly high priority attention by management (Memili et al., 2020). Strategic analysis serves three purposes: it breaks down the strategic questions and issues into constituent parts and identified triggers; it establishes the basis of these parts into insight and it

provides a framework for generating the bigger picture required for strategy formulation (Golubovskaya et al., 2019).

Such analysis incorporates a multidisciplinary combination of scientific and informal processes to identify, derive correlations and evaluate trends, patterns and performance gaps (Luu, 2020). The use of frameworks allows for the understanding of the pieces within the bigger picture and, thereafter, assists the development of trends which tell a story, rather than snapshots as provided by rational techniques such as PESTEL analysis, or value chain analysis. Vivaly, the value of strategic analysis is not correctness, but development of focus and discipline brought about by thinking and debating. Frameworks which could be utilised include: the opportunity-response framework, key success factor analysis, the VRIO (Value, Rarity, Imitability, and Organisation) framework and the unique competing space analysis (Chang et al., 2020).

2.3.2 Strategy formulation

The formulation phase of the strategic management framework is also referred to as strategic planning (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2022). In order to better understand the concept of strategic planning, a deeper analysis of the term strategy reveals that it emanates from the word *strategos*, a Greek term meaning a general set of manoeuvres taken to defeat an opponent (Gharama et al., 2020). Put simply, strategies are the instruments by which identified goals are realised and as such organisations need to undertake strategic planning to produce the plans or strategies that will map the way forward and enable the achievement of objectives (Mehta et al., 2023)

In examining the definitions of strategic planning, as opposed to the broader concept of strategic management, a study of the relevant literature indicates that most researchers refer to a systematic process that assists leaders in understanding their micro and macro environments better through proper assessments, hence empowering them to make better decisions to achieve the vision of the organisation. A more comprehensive definition is provided by Vo Thanh et al. (2020), who state that Strategic planning is defined as the process by which organisations determine and establish long-term directions and formulate and implement strategies to accomplish long-term objectives while taking into account relevant internal and external environmental variables (Nhamo, Dube & Chikodzi, 2020).

Strategic planning is used both in the private and public sectors to promote strategic development and improved administration (Khawaja et al., 2022). The process involves identifying an ideal future state known as the vision, setting out the underlying principles that the culture is going to be built on in terms of the values, clarifying the mission which spells out what will be done to achieve the vision, addressing strategic issues, structuring programmes and plans for strategy implementation, and lastly defining the key performance indicators by which programme performance is measured. Again, the significance of understanding the internal and external factors influencing the business has been highlighted to be of vital importance (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2021).

Vo Thanh et al. (2020) describes strategic planning as a transparent, future-focused, collaborative process that utilises many different sets of techniques that can be combined into three phases. In the first phase, an environmental assessment is performed to gain a collective understanding of external forces that may affect the business (Jooss et al., 2019). The second phase consists of running scenario analyses in an effort to identify those success factors that will facilitate business success irrespective of which scenario plays out. During the third phase, a strategic plan with high-impact strategic actions is mapped and the vision, mission and values are revised.

In contrast to the often-generalised definitions and processes, Russen et al. (2021) offer a more specific set of logically constructive approaches to strategic planning. The starting point should be to gain a common understanding of what or where the organisation is, what its aspirations are in terms of its ideal state, and how it intends to achieve its desired state. The authors identify four important steps within the formulation phase that would need to be carried out before the implementation of any strategy starts (Martínez et al., 2019). The first step in developing a strategy is the crafting of a vision that outlines the core ideologies and aspirations of the entity for which the strategy is being developed. The vision would also be an indicator of the entity's values, purpose and future path. The second step is the development of an effective mission statement that conveys information such as the organisation's target markets, products, services, service locations and philosophies, amongst others.

The third step is analysis, which usually involves the use of models such as SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) and value-chain analyses to gain insight into the entity's micro as well as macro environment. The fourth step is the formulation of a long-term strategy, and models such as Porter's generic strategies can be very useful. Khassawneh et al. (2022) point out that despite sophisticated planning processes and good plans, many organisations fail to deliver on their strategic objectives due to a lack of proper risk management. Sorin and Sivarajah (2021) propose that the strategic framework should have a component of risk management within the formulation and execution phases, as detailed in Figure 2.2 below. Whilst this diagram is titled Strategy audit environment, it provides a good basis for a visual representation of the basic strategic framework.

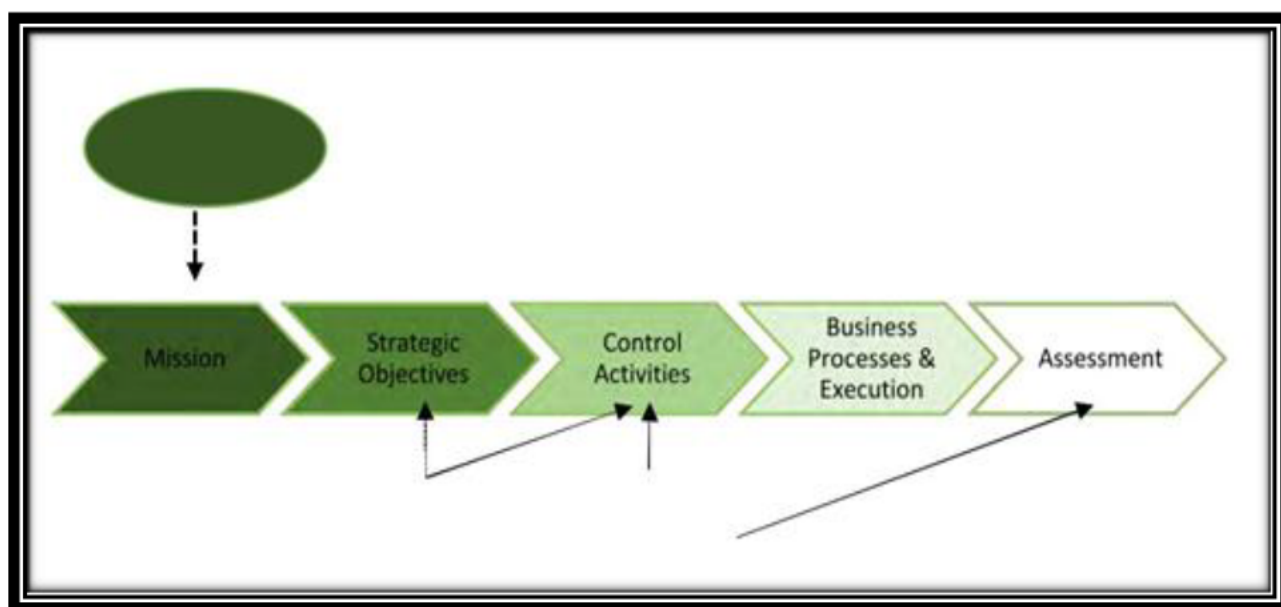


Figure 2.2: Strategy audit environment (Almaaitah et al., 2020)

According to Ivanov and Webster (2019), the framework depicted in Figure 2.2 above enables internal auditors to assess an entity's exposure to risk in relation to its strategy, more specifically to its strategic objectives. The authors explain that a proper risk-management system is an essential component of the strategic management process. Once strategic risks have been identified, they need to be assessed, and the management controls that are in place need to be evaluated. If the existing controls are deemed insufficient, the level of control would need to be improved. Hence, combining risk identification and assessment of control activities as a risk management

component, and combining other aspects of the strategic management process mentioned above, Figure 2.2 can be adapted as follows.

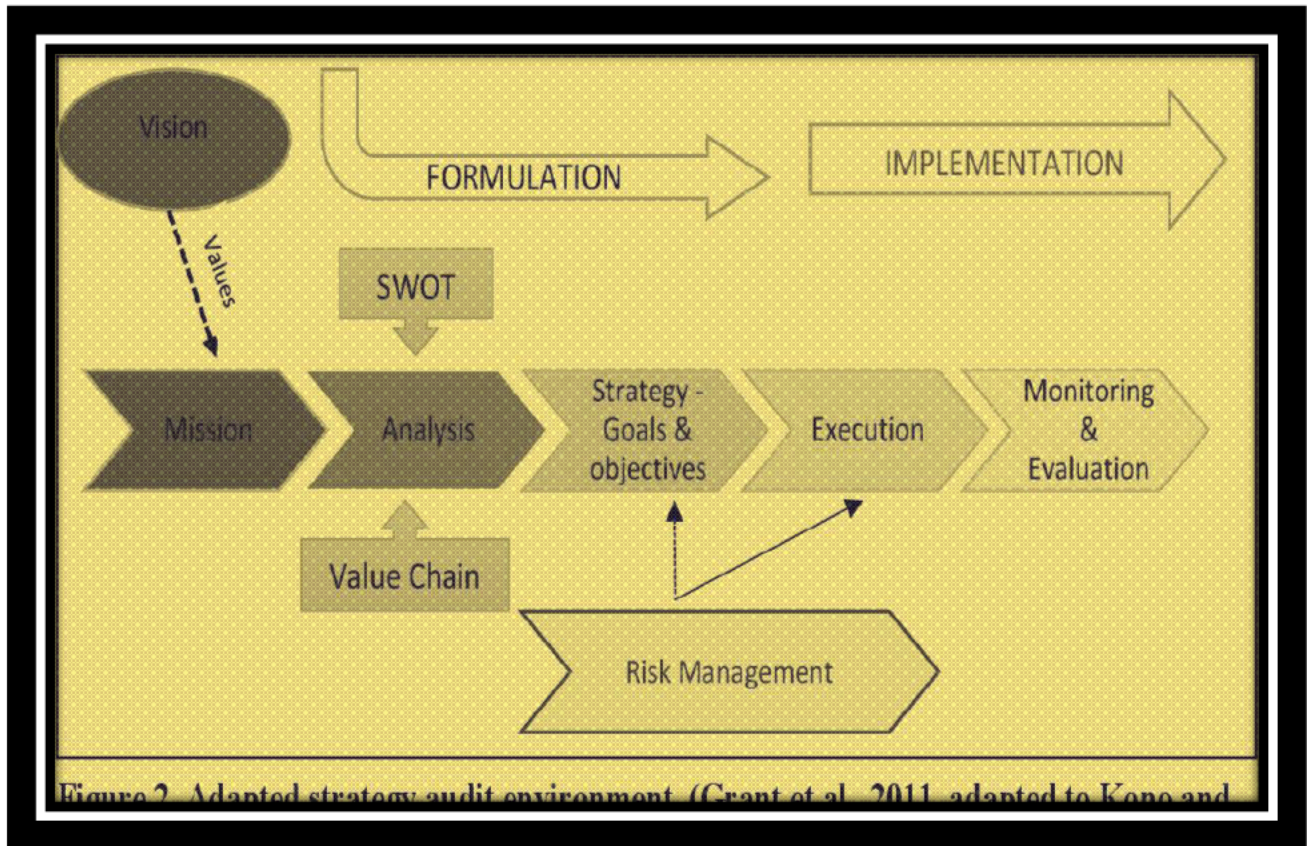


Figure 2.3 Adapted strategy audit environment (Jones & Wynn, 2019)

Figure 2.3 is the framework presented by Jones and Wynn (2019), adapted to the research performed by Almaaitah et al. (2020). It can be seen that the fourth step outlined by these authors contains the development of the strategy, as well as the goals and strategic objectives. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, this will be used as the primary framework and adapted to accommodate new research findings if necessary and where applicable. This adapted framework has been segmented to reflect the formulation and implementation phases, and also has an added analysis component. Risk and control activities have been combined into risk management, and certain other terminology has been modified, such as strategic objectives becoming strategy with goals and objectives (Ciftci & Erkanli, 2020).

In relation to the issue of goals and objectives, clear goal and objective setting is key to effective strategic planning. Kautish et al. (2022), state that goals and performance measures in

governmental agencies are decided and set while simultaneously considering internal (for example top leadership and senior managers) and external (for constituents, service consumers and regulators) stakeholders (Helmold & Helmold, 2020).

Whilst some researchers use the terms goals and objectives interchangeably, Dhiman and Arora (2020) explain that goals and objectives are not the same and should be clearly distinguished. Goals tend to be general, high-level, intangible, qualitative, hard-to-validate statements, used to define corporate strategies based on long-term planning as the end result. A goal might require a multitude of objectives or sub-goals. Hence, the starting point in crafting clear goals, the distinction between goals and objectives must be acknowledged and understood (Pellegrini et al., 2020). Once a goal statement has been crafted, objectives that enable the achievement of that goal need to be identified. The SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) principle is a popular and widely accepted tool that is commonly used to ensure that objectives are properly formulated; however, Faeq et al. (2021) argue that the SMART principle lacks the human touch.

Whilst Soelton (2023) presents some alternative models, Leta and Chan (2021) presents an improved version called the 'SMARTER' framework, which retains the original components of SMART and adds 'ER' (engage and reward). Engage refers to engaging the relevant stakeholders in order to create a sense of ownership, and reward refers to attaching the right kind of incentives to the achievement of objectives, in order to foster desired behaviour. Setting goals and objectives are the final elements of the formulation phase.

Linking strategic planning to the performance of an organisation is important in order to create an environment that is conducive to executing strategy. Research has shown that utilising a comprehensive approach, with feasibility studies and in-depth environmental analyses, as well as action plans with targets as part of the strategic plans, has proven to assist with improving the performance of an organisation (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2021). Another aspect for consideration is the debate on whether strategic planning should involve a top-down or bottom-up approach. Whilst the debate continues, the general consensus is that having more participation from relevant stakeholders, e.g. middle managers, can be advantageous in promoting and strengthening the link between strategy and organisational performance (Jawabreh, Mahmoud & Hamasha, 2020).

Khan and Hashim (2020) takes a different view of the strategy development process by proposing that leaders affirm the organisational mission, values and vision as the first steps. Whilst the

mission describes the purpose of the entity, the vision defines an ambitious measurable target, ideally put forward in a very concise statement. It is often useful for organisations to summarise their strategy statement for easy understanding, communication and buy-in.

Ultimately, every strategy formulation process ends up with the creation of some sort of strategic plan. Ahmed et al. (2021) point out that strategic plan can cause strategic ambiguity if it is not written properly and too many aspects are left open to interpretation. Whilst this can play an enabling role initially, over time it can lead to internal contradictions and over-extension. It is therefore prudent to ensure that there is little, or no strategic ambiguity caused by the process as well as the plans produced as a result thereof. In general, strategic plans should clearly articulate the link between goals and measurable outcomes and should pay particular attention to how these are communicated to the rest of the organisation. The result of such communication should be buy-in from the relevant stakeholders with simultaneous alignment to operational planning. In all these aspects, customer value should be the central point of reference (Ghaderi, King & Hall, 2022). A clear strategic plan that takes into consideration these factors will definitely assist in the next phase which is strategy implementation.

Summatively, strategy formulation produces a clear set of recommendations, with supporting justification, that revise as necessary the mission and objectives of the organisation and supply the strategies for accomplishing them. Formulation tries to modify the current objectives and strategies in ways which make the organisation more successful. This includes trying to create sustainable competitive advantages, although most competitive advantages are eroded steadily by the efforts of competitors. A good recommendation should be: effective in solving the stated problem(s); practical in the sense that it can be implemented in current situation with the resources available; feasible within a reasonable time frame; cost-effective; not overly disruptive; and acceptable to key stakeholders in the organisation. It tries to consider fits between resources plus competencies with opportunities, and also fits between risks and expectations.

2.3.3 Implementation

This third stage in the strategic management process involves developing an implementation plan and then doing whatever it takes to make the new strategy operational and effective in achieving the organisation's objectives. Strategy implementation is the sum total of the activities and choices

required for the execution of strategic plan by which strategies and policies are put into action through the development of programs, budgets and procedures. Although implementation is usually considered after strategy has been formulated, implementation is a key part of strategic management. Said in other terms, strategy formulation and strategy implementation are the two sides of same coin (Jawabreh et al., 2020).

Formulation refers to how strategy is defined by an organisation for an instance and implementation refers to the process that every leader deals when taking necessary actions to follow the strategy. Bryson et al. (2021) mentions that strategy formulation in every organisation is only possible to achieve as long as it is clear: a) the concept of strategy, b) the very different views of how it can be formed (without necessarily being formulated) in an organisation, and (c) to associate this view especially, but not exclusively, with the configuration we are calling adhocracy. The concept of adhocracy corresponds to the opposite of bureaucracy. While bureaucracy claims for rigidity of routines, adhocracy wants to simplifying processes and allows fast organisational adaptation to particular situations. The essence of adhocracy, in contrast to bureaucracies that seek to control their environments to support standardised systems, is a rapid and continuous responsiveness to the environment, with minimal organisational momentum (Marshall, 2019).

About planning versus execution, Faeq et al. (2021) claim that ‘the crafting image better captures the process by which effective strategies come to be. The planning image, long popular in the literature, distorts these processes and thereby misguides organisations that embrace it unreservedly’. Formulation and implementation merge into a fluid process of learning through which creative strategies evolve. Craft evokes traditional skill, dedication, and perfection on action. They should be not separated, planning without execution is meaningless.

Porter tells that in the formulation of a strategy it is important to understand the forces that affect the competitive environment in an industry, and at the same time, it is necessary to identify the factors that affect it, this way, the organisation’s strengths and weaknesses over its competitors, customers, etc. can be easily visualised. That is why a strategist can devise a plan of action that may include ‘(1) positioning the organisation so that its capabilities provide the best defence against the competitive force; and/or (2) influencing the balance of the forces through strategic moves, thereby improving the organisation’s position; and/or (3) anticipating shifts in the factors

underlying the forces and responding to them, with the hope of exploiting change by choosing a strategy appropriate for the new competitive balance before opponents recognise it ‘ (Belias et al., 2022).

As already seen, the challenge of strategic management lies not only in the strategy formulation but also in the correct implementation, since both of them determine the success or failure of Strategic Management as such. Williamson and Harris (2019) maintain that success in the implementation is concentrated on two words: alignment and focus (strategy-focused organisation). Although the specifics of each organisation can lead to different roads when speaking of alignment and focus, the principles of a strategy-focused organisation are: translate the strategy to operational terms, align the organisation to the strategy, make strategy everyone’s everyday job, make strategy a continual process and mobilise leadership for change (Ghaderi et al., 2022).

2.3.4 Strategy Evaluation and Control

The final stage in strategic management is strategy evaluation and control. All strategies are subject to future modification because internal and external factors are constantly changing. In the strategy evaluation and control process managers determine whether the chosen strategy is achieving the organisation's objectives. According to Fatoki (2019), the fundamental strategy evaluation and control activities are: reviewing internal and external factors that are the bases for current strategies, measuring performance, and taking corrective actions.

Broadly, strategy can be regarded as a means to achieving objectives (Hussain et al., 2020). It can be perceived as a tool used by organisations to guide them in ensuring successful performance as well as their survival and growth in the long-term (Almaaitah et al., 2020). Management textbooks frequently outline strategy as an integrated process of three interrelated steps: formulation, implementation and control, focusing narrowly on planning. The evaluation of a strategy requires several elements to be present: clarity, motivational impact, consistency, environmental compatibility, resource appropriateness, degree of risk, personal values of the organisation, time horizon and workability. Examples from historical business and context, however, infer the following minimum elements should exist: well-defined; decisive objectives; maintaining the

initiative; concentration; flexibility; coordinated and committed leadership; as well as surprise and security (Mintzberg, Quinn & Ghoshal, 1998).

However, a transition has taken place, whereby, as noted earlier, the understanding of strategy has shifted from plan to direction. Strategy is perceived as a theme providing coherence to individual and organisational decision making, integrating and guiding the collective of different individual knowledge. It acts as a coordinating device, communicating the identity, goals and positioning of an organisation as its strategic intent and is, crucially, concerned with the future (Patiar & Wang, 2020). Strategy can be disruptive, innovative, combine co-operation and competition, introduce value creation and value capture, focus on performance, but importantly, always remains provisional (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2019).

The presence of several key elements in strategy evaluation is crucial for ensuring the effectiveness and success of organizational strategies. Clarity within a strategy ensures that all stakeholders understand the objectives and direction, minimizing confusion and facilitating coordinated action. Motivational impact is vital for inspiring and energizing employees towards common goals, fostering commitment and engagement. Consistency ensures alignment between various components of the strategy, reinforcing coherence and reducing contradictions that may hinder implementation. Environmental compatibility acknowledges the need for strategies to adapt to external conditions, enhancing resilience and responsiveness to changing market dynamics.

Resource appropriateness ensures that the organization possesses the necessary capabilities and assets to execute the strategy efficiently, avoiding resource constraints that could impede progress. Assessing the degree of risk associated with a strategy enables informed decision-making, balancing potential rewards against potential threats. Consideration of personal values within the organization ensures ethical alignment and cultural cohesion, promoting a shared sense of purpose and identity. Time horizon awareness acknowledges the temporal dimension of strategy, recognizing the need for both short-term results and long-term sustainability. Finally, workability assesses the feasibility and practicality of the strategy's implementation, identifying potential barriers and facilitating realistic planning. In essence, these elements collectively contribute to the robustness and adaptability of strategic evaluation and control processes, enabling organizations to navigate complexities and uncertainties effectively while pursuing their objectives.

2.4 Complexity and Uncertainty in the Changing Business Environment

Catastrophic world events have changed the business and social environment, reducing the prevalent hope for stability. Several global revolutions thrust challenge and opportunity upon organisations: population growth (growth, aging, migration, urbanisation), resource management (food, water, energy, climate), technology (robotics, biotechnology, nanotechnology), information (big data, privacy, education), economics (integration, competition, debt, poverty, inequality), security (new social dynamics, health, cyber) and governance (civil society, social unrest, non-profits, future outlook) (Jabeen et al., 2022).

The pace of change within the business environment has speeded up significantly (Sadraei et al., 2023). The marketplace has increased in complexity and challenge: greater competition, erratic economic cycles, market fragmentation, demanding customers, regulation/deregulation, increasing costs of employment, labour disputes, technological enhancements and consumer attitudes and tastes all require special attention by organisational management (Belias et al., 2022). Products will become obsolete, customers' tastes will change and technology will render the latest business model uncompetitive (Ayachit & Chitta, 2022).

Aharon et al. (2021) argues that strategies are not created equal. He contends that simply knowing who, what and how one will compete and what one will not do, is often not enough to provide value to customers or differentiate one's business to increase the difficulty of replication by competitors. In summary, Sorin and Sivarajah (2021) posits that disrespect, hatred or arrogance towards one's competitors is not viable to a competitive environment. In addition, wrong ideas, unattainable strategies, incorrect stewardship and immediate inclusion of the latest management fad into organisational structures, without understanding the whole, often lead to desperation management (AlNuaimi et al., 2022).

Moreover, it is suggested that naive planning, misreading markets, developing the incorrect product lines, basing decisions on gut feel, guess work or only on hard facts while ignoring the competitive environment and valuable insight from employees working on the floor and in far flung areas, lead to organisational failure (Khuong et al., 2020). Internally, organisations have been found to encounter several internal behavioural problems during the development of strategy;

compounded by the pace of a dynamic and ever-changing external environment (Hussain et al., 2020).

Organizational effectiveness can be hindered by an array of challenges. Among these are the inability to reach a consensus on overarching strategic objectives, leading to a lack of cohesive direction during deliberations. Communication breakdowns exacerbate this issue, stemming from a failure to maintain open dialogue channels within the organization. Additionally, unclear delineation of roles and responsibilities among sub-units contributes to ambiguity and inefficiency. Securing commitment to proposed plans or strategies proves challenging, often due to discrepancies between their intended form and actual substance. Moreover, a deficiency in strategic thinking pervades, hindering the organization's ability to adapt and innovate effectively. Furthermore, the perceived inadequacy of the reward structure discourages both the development and execution of strategic initiatives. Conflict between line and staff members arises from conflicting priorities, further impeding progress. Personal apprehensions regarding uncertainty during the planning phase also undermine strategic endeavours. Finally, garnering individual buy-in for the strategy development process presents a persistent difficulty, compounding the organization's challenges in achieving its goals. Addressing these multifaceted issues is essential for fostering a more robust and resilient organizational framework.

Patiar and Wang (2020) have highlighted several critical challenges within the realm of strategic management, drawing attention to the impact of managerial human behavioural economics as identified by Ahmad et al. (2021). Despite a well-defined theoretical framework and extensive training among senior executives, these challenges reveal hidden flaws that can impede effective strategic decision-making. Among the notable issues are overconfidence in both formulating and evaluating strategies, which can lead to suboptimal outcomes. Mental accounting introduces biases by categorizing and treating money differently based on its source or intended use, potentially skewing investment decisions. Anchoring to past successes or historical perspectives may hinder adaptability and innovation by limiting consideration of alternative approaches. The sunk cost effect further complicates matters by encouraging continued investment in failing strategies due to past expenditures. Additionally, the herding instinct can lead to groupthink, stifling independent critical analysis. Misestimating future hedonic states and assuming false consensus further contribute to decision-making errors. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced

understanding of human behaviour within strategic contexts, emphasizing the importance of integrating behavioural insights into strategic management practices for more robust decision-making processes.

As a result, the greater demands of an uncertain organisational environment; increased importance of organisational culture; lack of support and consensus from the entire organisation and the threat of internal politics derailing effective strategy, significantly increase complexity (Ayachit & Chitta, 2022).

Vo Thanh et al. (2020) continue to argue that strategy is in crisis as a result of a knowledge vacuum, where, very often, strategy remains the preserve of a single elite group of practitioners. The belief is factored around their misguided assumption of their advanced knowledge of the concept and their need to maintain their powerbase. In practice, for strategy to be successful, all organisational stakeholders must be involved in the strategy development (Öğretmenoğlu et al., 2022).

As intimated, environmental turbulence has increased and strategic issues clearly challenge the way in which organisations have traditionally planned, requiring a greater focus on monitoring environmental turbulence levels and forming appropriate and dynamic responses (Asif, 2020). Kautish et al. (2022) argue that strategy issues are often not just ‘tough or persistent’, but rather ‘wicked’ and crop up when organisations face unprecedented or constant change. Wicked problems can be identified through several attributes: they have innumerable causes, are tough to describe and often unique with no precedent; emerge as a symptom/s of another problem and often do not have a right answer. To stay effective, organisations must proactively monitor their environment for changes, rather than conducting occasional analyses of their business landscape (Sadraei et al., 2023).

Organisations slow at managing change ignore trends that, although peripheral and not obvious, lead to the changing of consumers’ attitudes, aspirations and behaviours. Organisations need to be aware of these changes and infuse certain aspects of the trends to augment traditional offerings and to produce radical offerings that transcend the traditional category and counteract any negative effects of the trends by developing products and services that reaffirm the organisation’s values (Lee, 2022). In competitive markets, there are major unknowns and organisations should have the ability to focus on alternative strategies, depending on how the uncertainties are resolved, thereby focusing on managing uncertainty rather than on achieving results (Raza & Khan, 2022).

2.5 Leadership

2.5.1 Leadership: A traditional overview

Leadership is widely considered to be about hierarchical positions, with leaders filling specific roles from which they provide vision, guidance and direction, generally from the top of the hierarchy (Altinay & Arici, 2022). The leadership process is generally controlled by a centralised authority at the top of the organisation, and they are responsible for strategic decision-making. These views allude to the perception that direction on a number of activities, roles, responsibilities and organisational procedures is given by predominantly singular figures who enjoy top of the hierarchy privileges. This single leader perspective suggests limited shared participation and group effectiveness within organisations (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). Over the last hundred years, leadership has been analysed across multiple disciplines, including management, social and psychological sciences. The dominating literature in these disciplines has focused on leadership styles and behaviours. External observable behavior can be an indication of a leader's internal traits, values and beliefs, and vice versa (Asif, 2020).

Leadership has many facets, dimensions and aspects and eludes a definite definition. For the purpose of this study, however, a few working definitions of leadership are highlighted in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1: Definitions of Leadership

Year	Researcher/Theorist	Definition of a leader
1950	Truman as cited by Ali (2012)	A leader is a man who can persuade people to do what they don't want to do, or do what they're too lazy to do, and like it.
1959	Bennis as cited by Yukl (2010)	...the concept of leadership eludes us or turns up in another form to taunt us again with its slipperiness and complexity. So, we have invented an endless proliferation of terms to deal with it ... and still the concept is not sufficiently defined.

1961	Tannenbaum, Weschler and Mussarik as cited by Ali (2012)	Interpersonal influence exercised in a situation and directed, through the communication process, toward the attainment of a specialised goal or goals can be called leadership.
1974	Stogdill as cited by Yukl (2010)	There is an almost equivalent number of leadership definitions as the number of people who have tried to define the phenomena.
1988	Bennis as cited by Ali (2012)	A leader or manager sets the target (vision) and then explores the means and ways (leadership) to reach that target
1993	Charlton (1993)	Leadership encompasses the skills, competencies and processes that are required for the empowerment of ordinary people in order to achieve extraordinary goals during adverse conditions, and also to ensure top performance at all times to the benefit of all stakeholders and the organisation.
1999	Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy as cited by Ali (2012)	Men are nothing; it is the man who is everything. It was not the Roman army that conquered Gaul, but Caesar; it was not the Carthaginian army that made Rome tremble in her gates, but Hannibal; it was not the Macedonian army that reached the Indus, but Alexander. Here it is well clear that strength of army is nothing, but the abilities of the commander matter. So, leadership is paramount for every moment, action and adventure
2007	Northouse as cited by Sharma and Jain (2013)	Leadership is a process whereby an individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.
2007	George	Leadership is a highly complex phenomenon, where individuals possess distinctive qualities that cannot be clearly defined by a number of traits or a person's characteristics.
2010	Yukl	Leadership is a process whereby influence is exerted intentionally by one person over others in order to provide

		direction, guidance and structures, as well as to facilitate group or organisational activities and relationships.
2011	Shriberg and Shriberg	Leadership is a non-coercive influence process that can shape people and an organisation's culture, and motivate people to achieve a common goal.
2012	Allio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The early simplistic paradigm - leadership is good management. -The semantic description - leadership is the process of leading. -The transactional definition - leadership is a social exchange between leaders and followers. -The situational notion - leadership is a phenomenon that precedes and facilitates decisions and actions. -The aesthetical concept - leadership is an art or a craft.
2013	Sharma and Jain	Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organisation in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent.
2014	Sixsmith	Leadership builds strong relationships among people through influence that culminates in the achievement of goals. It is particularly important that leaders create an environment that influences the attitudes and behaviors of people, such that they will feel empowered and consequently strive to maximise their potential.

From these it can be deduced that leadership as a process involves leaders who possess particular qualities and characteristics, and their followers, with both groups striving for collaborative working relationships in order to achieve organisational goals and objectives.

2.5.2 Leadership Theories and Sustainability

Leta and Chan (2021), suggested that there is a certain romanticism around individuals wanting to be leaders, often linked to the status and prestige of the position. Leaders' motivation to lead thus

comes from an individualistic or capitalistic orientation. The researchers also suggested that motivation to lead could simply emanate from an individual's credence that they are capable of a challenge (self-efficacy and perseverance of an individual). Research carried out by Younas and Waseem Bari (2020) also found that the valence associated with the motivation to lead was rated higher than duty and responsibility to lead, with altruism being rated the lowest. It is thus evident that leaders today lead after calculating the personal benefits and costs of doing so. Narratives and mythologies on past leaders suggest that leaders are born and not made. The Great Man Theory of the 1800s suggested that leaders like Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi and Alexander the Great were not taught to lead.

When trait theories came into vogue in the 1900s, they suggested that specific genetic traits and behaviours resulted in effective leadership (Ngayofotso, 2021). Recent research proposes that a leader's face alone can give an indication of that leader's effectiveness with regards to necessary traits associated with effective leadership (Ribeiro, Duarte & Fidalgo, 2020). According to Faeq et al. (2021), the trait of integrity is the most important mark of an effective leader. He states that effectiveness is about the person performing that role. The mid 1930's brought in behavioural theories which suggested that leaders can be made. These leaders would either adopt autocratic, democratic or laissez-faire behaviour. Contingency theories and situational theories suggested that leaders could alter their behaviour in given situations. The hypotheses were that no one style was the best, but varying styles were required by the same leader.

Fatima and Elbanna (2021) found that organisational success was linked to effective leadership, and varying leadership styles had varying influence on the organisation's performance. Since leadership has an impact on work environment, applying varying leadership styles within organisations was also supported by Anlesinya et al. (2019), who stated that in order to achieve successful results, leaders should not be reliant on a single style. In the case of sustainability leadership, a multitude of old and new leadership styles will need to be adopted and applied within banks to ensure positive results. In the case of sustainability leadership, a transformational leadership style might prove beneficial for banks.

Faeq et al. (2021) suggested that transformational leadership entails empowering and motivating individuals, which leads to self-sacrificing and minimising resistance to change. Various economic, social and ecological crises have created many challenges, and in order to survive these

challenges, high levels of integrity, accountability and character is being demanded from leaders. Moral and ethical leadership is being sought by societies who seek peace, stability and equity (Ribeiro et al., 2020). Authentic leaders are needed in such situations, as suggested by (Safavi & Bouzari, 2020), who described these leaders as demonstrating values-based leadership where optimism, transparency, hope, resilience, ethical behaviour, concern for the development of others and effective communication at all levels are displayed. Authentic leaders know, accept and behave in accordance with their own preferences, beliefs, values and emotions and are consistent with their core values. Such leaders understand their leadership roles to be more than just about power, self-esteem or status. Sustainability leaders who value economic, social and ecological sustainability with equal importance would behave in accordance with their core values, like authentic leaders; and sustainability within organisations can be improved.

Since leaders work towards collaborative relationships with followers, varying leadership styles are adapted and utilised by leaders depending on the situation within the leader's environment. Some of these styles are authoritative, democratic, coaching, transactional and transformational (Hussain et al., 2020). In adapting their styles, leaders thus address the needs of the followers and the demands and challenges of their environments. An integrated approach, where multiple leadership approaches and styles are practised, would therefore prove beneficial in organisations seeking to adopt a truly sustainable organisational strategy that focuses on economic, social and ecological issues within their environment (Ukeje et al., 2021). Although a vast amount of literature and models on leadership and leadership skills exist, there has been no agreement by researchers on the ideal mix of skills, behaviours and attributes of successful leaders (Patiar & Wang, 2020).

Common traits found among leaders are those of intelligence, integrity, self-confidence and determination (Huang & Farboudi Jahromi, 2021,). However, these researchers argue against the ability of a leader to manage by traits alone, but suggest rather that it is the relationship between the leader and the social circumstances within which they operate that is critical for success. A problem with early trait research was that there was little empirically substantiated personality theory to guide the search for leadership traits (Freund & Hernandez-Maskivker, 2021). At that stage, studies of universal leadership traits were limited and replicative investigations of similar traits that could be associated with effective leadership, were rare. Today, universal leadership

traits like self-confidence, drive, integrity, persistence, motivation, cognitive abilities and internal locus of control can be found in leaders (Jones & Wynn, 2019). It should be noted that the interaction of leaders with their environments can have some influence on the development of these leadership traits.

Sen and Bhattacharya (2019) suggested that even though some people are born with certain leadership traits, it is indeed possible for people to develop their skills; and in so doing, every person has the potential to become a leader. Today, researchers generate leadership development models to create effective leaders. Leaders follow these models, attempting to replicate what researchers have deemed the best qualities of ideal leaders and instead of innovative leadership that stands out, we have leaders following a blueprint or a prototype (Jabeen et al., 2022). The purpose of all for-profit organisations is to maximise wealth. Employee performance is the driver of wealth maximisation. Transactional theories of leadership propose that leaders either reward or punish employees for effective performance. Almost seventy years later, transactional theories are the most universal and prevalent theories used within organisations to boost productivity and thus profits (Valeri & Katsoni, 2021).

Kimbu et al. (2021) suggested that effective or competent leaders recognise, control and use emotions to inspire and influence people well beyond task completion. Relationship theories like transformational leadership suggest that by creating progressive change within employees, organisations would experience effective performance. All theories of leadership drive leaders to be effective in wealth maximisation for the organisation. Leaders are only developed for organisational success as this leads to competitive advantage. What about success within the environment and society and the self? Leadership theories have, to some degree, been preoccupied with the notion that a leader needs to develop himself or herself. Many have argued that leaders need to cultivate a deep understanding of themselves in order to take on leadership. By leadership, it is meant the process of influencing other people towards common objectives, in which endeavours a leader must take leadership and by doing so create followership (Safavi & Bouzari, 2020).

Most ancient works on leadership, like the Hindu Bhagavad Gita, recommend a practice in the field between the individual and universal. It is the leader's own development process which is central, and it is the leader's self-awareness, environmental mastery, connection to ideals, and

mind and heart-based actions that constitutes leadership (Hsieh et al., 2020). This becomes essential in cultivating leadership for true sustainability challenges – economic, social and ecological. The story of the last 50 years of leadership development has been the story of the individual. A leader within this context became an individual who was a ‘hero’ and was looked upon as someone who had all the abilities and characteristics to guide others towards success in their chosen endeavours. In the last 15 years, however, this model has become less effective, as the fit between the challenges of the environment and the ability of the heroic individuals to solve them has started to diverge. Staggering unemployment; violence; corruption; and religious, cultural and communal crises; coupled with political and economic instabilities; all point to the ineffectiveness of leadership. Societies seek peace, equity and stability (Altinay & Arici, 2022).

There are large power distances and inequalities between the poorest and the wealthiest. Respect and dignity have long been forgone as we look into our recent history of xenophobia and other ethnic and racial prejudices. Organisations maximise wealth for the few at the detriment of the environment and the communities in which they operate (Qiu et al., 2019). Leaders have at their disposal a myriad of leadership models and philosophies to guide them towards good ethical business practice. However, taking all of the above into consideration, what is amiss with these models that have delivered us into economic, social and ecological uncertainty? Currently, organisations, as a form of competitive advantage or as a social obligation, or as a public relations initiative, implement some form of corporate social responsibility (CSR). To move beyond basic philanthropy and public relations, organisational drivers for CSR needs to be strengthened, and only substantive engagement will result in effective development (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021).

CSR can only be taken strategically to the next level by leaders as they establish the culture of the organisation (Zhong et al., 2021). Competition among nations has become evident as water and other natural resources become threatened. Researchers and theorists have been warning about the collapse of society as the impact of scarce resources leads to conflict worldwide (Ahmad et al., 2021). Water scarcity results in food scarcity and technology alone is not expected to keep up with population demands (Hussain et al., 2020). As the population grows, the economy grows, resulting in an increase in resource usage and increased carbon emissions. Climate change, leading to disastrous consequences, will be the result (Freund & Hernandez-Maskivker, 2021). Research by Kitsios and Grigoroudis (2020) ultimately associated strategic leadership, as key to the

development and assimilation of environmental values, to the culture of the organisation for both economic and environmental performance. New leadership models will thus need to drive self-leadership, value sharing, integrated development and communal success; as opposed to individual, capitalist orientations towards leadership.

2.5.2 Leadership for Sustainability

Sustainability leadership is defined as anyone who takes responsibility for understanding and acting upon complex sustainability challenges, whether or not they hold formal leadership positions or acknowledged political and social-economic influence. Sustainability leaders take conscious actions, individually and collectively, leading to outcomes that nurture, support, and sustain healthy economic, environmental, and social systems (Jafari, Özduran & Saydam, 2023). A paradigm shift, or a quantum leap, is required from the traditional leadership frameworks and models to one that embraces a balanced or integrated approach to organisations' and society's bottom lines. But have strategies been implemented to develop leaders into sustainable leaders? In the 90s, CSR emerged as the main concept in organisational sustainability, a concept that was largely paralleled by an organisation's reputation and philanthropic initiatives (Ali Ababneh et al., 2021).

As sustainability progressed, its principles became more integrated into essential business operations. A growing number of entities acknowledged the advantages of incorporating sustainability to mitigate financial and societal risks, striving to ensure their societal license to operate (Afriyie, Du & Ibn Musah, 2019). A contemporary perspective regards sustainability, along with social and ecological concerns, as potential avenues for an organisation to gain a competitive edge. This viewpoint is reflected in extensive research on the correlation between sustainability and performance, as well as the increasing dedication of global organisations to sustainability and related initiatives (AlNuaimi et al., 2022). Examples include General Electric's 'ecoimagination,' Walmart's Sustainability Commitments, and IBM's Smart Cities. Whilst most businesses operate and ask how they can use society and the environment to be successful, sustainable leadership saying the opposite, seeking how they can contribute to society and the environment to be successful (Hoang et al., 2022). Companies failing to adopt climate risk awareness strategies could be subjected to material economic disadvantage. (Su et al., 2022). Current sustainability trends arise from the acceptance that business, society and the natural

environment are interconnected and interdependent, with one not functioning without the other (Hsieh et al., 2020).

Organisations need to make decisions after considering the economic, social and ecological perspectives with regards to joint value creation for business and the society it serves (Zhang et al., 2020). Successful organisations need to make a profit, but it is their decisions on how to do so that will create value for all stakeholders (Zhong et al., 2021). Porter and Kramer (2011) stated: ‘If capitalism is to survive, business should rediscover and redefine its purpose of creating shared value with society.’ This has been described by Soelton (2023) as Business Sustainability 3.0, where ecological needs are thought to be more critical than social needs, which in turn is more important than economic needs. Leta and Chan (2021) described this as ‘the new interconnectedness paradigm in economic thinking.’ This is an indication that organisational sustainability is in the process of adjusting to a new reality (Jafari et al., 2023). New stakeholder demands are driving adjustments to business models – from shareholder to multi stakeholder models – incorporating social and natural environmental value into economic value indicators. With regards to sustainable development, stakeholder engagement is paramount (Dimitrios et al., 2020).

In the long run, organisations who make the adjustment successfully, create value for all stakeholders (including nature and society) and achieve better financial performance (Buhalis & Park, 2021). Sustainability in this form represents the next stage in organisational thinking and capability. In building high quality relationships with all stakeholders, an organisation will progress through various stages of development towards a stakeholder value orientation (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). A continuous, mutual and interactive approach between the organisation and the issues within its environments stimulates organisational learning, which can take organisational development from a basic level to increasingly more engaged, innovative and game changing levels towards sustainability (Hoang et al., 2022). This implies that organisational strategies need to be created to serve all stakeholders by creating shared value with them. This requires a major shift in attitudes and behaviours of strategists (Davahli et al., 2020).

In conjunction with this, changes in governance, structures and measurement systems are needed. A singular shareholder value orientation (financial value) is currently prioritised within organisations because this is the key measure of a successful organisation. However, as

organisations progress with sustainability development, the structures, processes and systems utilised to manage sustainability will become more sophisticated and triple value (economic, social and ecological) will be measured and prioritised (Su et al., 2022). Effective measurement indicators for sustainable performance are lacking. Whilst economic indicators exist, indicators to measure social and ecological successes need to be developed; especially since society and government demand clear measurement standards to be in place to prove adherence with, and performance in, sustainability (Valeri & Katsoni, 2021). Tideman (2016) proposed nine domains that can be considered when developing effective screening tools for measuring sustainable value. These are good governance principles; living standards; community vitality; education; time use; psychological well-being; cultural resilience; health and the environment.

The thinking is that the market and workplace can be seen as mechanisms for creating valuable relationships, and not just as a place to trade in financial transactions. ‘This line of thinking corresponds to the shift away from the worldview of the individualistic ‘homo-economicus’ who is merely interested in transacting for his personal gain, to a worldview of mutually beneficial relationships. It may be a stretch to regard all societal and environmental issues as needs that can be met in some sort of market exchange, but if one adds governance/leadership as providers of conditions for fairness and far-sightedness, this scenario is more feasible’ (Chon, Park & Zoltan, 2020). This could result in organisations becoming more innovative and creative regarding sustainability services and products in such a market or workplace. For organisations to progress through the various stages of sustainability development, the mind-sets, behaviours and attitudes of organisational leaders need to be adapted (Dimitrios et al., 2020). ‘Mind-sets are defined as the deeply ingrained attitudes and beliefs that create our worldview and shape our lives’ (Gómez-Suárez & Veloso, 2020). For sustainability leadership, the mind-set required is one that understands the dynamic nature of the internal and external organisational environments that address shareholder expectations. A sustainability mind-set can enhance leadership and employee capacity to deal with environmental complexities creatively, and to foster organisational resilience (Gürlek & Koseoglu, 2021).

Adopting sustainability leadership is a long-term process. However, Qiu et al. (2019) identified a few challenges for organisations when adopting this model. These are as follows:

- It is easier and more comfortable to do things as they have always been done. Conventional wisdom trumps contemporary wisdom.
- In most cases, change can be disruptive and costly (both financial and intangible) and the thought of low profits or slow growth deters change.
- A key human weakness in decision-making is that often leaders, despite their training, ignore hard evidence and make decisions based on ideological beliefs.
- Major change involves risks and most shareholders become concerned with short term losses even if they might lead to profits in the long run.
- Radical changes, like sustainability strategies, can take a long time to be embedded into the organisation's culture and then be maintained. An Australian bank adapted its model to a sustainability leadership model and after becoming effective a decade later, a new CEO with a new agenda unravelled the model.
- Executives remunerated on a short-term basis are not motivated to pursue long term change, much to the detriment of the organisation and its stakeholders. In spite of criticism from well-regarded researchers, organisations still implement the shareholder-first mentality into their strategies.

Two decades ago, the French economist, Michel Albert, stated that the prioritising of profit above all else is in itself a threat to neoliberal capitalism, as it results in short term thinking, a lack of investment and planning. Charles Handy suggested that the aim of business is that of a higher purpose, beyond profits towards something better (Davahli et al., 2020). Sen and Bhattacharya (2019) criticised the belief that the business of business is to do business. He argued that organisations need to create economic value by creating societal value and so consider all stakeholders. These researchers also view the organisation as an interdependent part of society, where multiple stakeholders generate pressure on the organisation to behave ethically and morally in their social and natural environments whilst pursuing profits; and this in turn assists the organisation to pursue sustainable strategies and remain resilient (Shamim, Cang & Yu, 2019).

Sustainability leadership has, at times, been cynically dismissed as a form of humanistic management, or as following old fashioned values. However, the individual practices of sustainability leadership are not new. This can be shown as follows:

- Warren Bennis was a promoter of the concept of a top leadership team within an organisation as opposed to one CEO who did it all. He also suggested that as firms become more ethical, they become more financially transparent.
- Peter Drucker advocated that ideas and change should be instigated from anywhere within the organisation and not just from top management. Ordinary people get the opportunity to do extraordinary things.
- Stephen Covey, like Drucker, urged organisations to tap into the knowledge and engagement of all employees (Gutiérrez-Martínez & Duhamel, 2019).

What is new about sustainability leadership is that its practices are in opposition to the currently promoted shareholder-first models that exist, and that are still being taught at business schools, and still published in management journals and other media. Sustainability leadership practices form a self-reinforcing leadership system for the enhancement and sustainability of an organisation.

2.6 Diverse Views Culminating in the Key First Principles of Strategy

Kautish et al. (2022), posit that philosophy is the study of wisdom in order to obtain the ‘perfect knowledge of all that man can know’ as ‘deduced from first causes’, called first principles. Descartes described the concept of a first principle as possessing two conditions:

- In the first place, they must be so clear and evident that the human mind, when it attentively considers them, cannot doubt of their truth; and
- In the second place, the knowledge of other things must be so dependent on them as that though the principles themselves may indeed be known apart from what depends on them, the latter cannot nevertheless be known apart from the former.

It will accordingly be necessary thereafter to endeavour so to deduce from those principles the knowledge of the things that depend on them, as that there may be nothing in the whole series of deductions which is not perfectly manifest.

Descartes, crucially, describes a first principle as the base on which all other knowledge is built. Following this definition, the concept of a first principle has been defined as ‘the basic and most important reason for doing or believing something’ (Gómez-Suárez & Veloso, 2020), ‘the fundamental concepts or assumptions on which a theory, system, or method is based’ (Ali & Anwar, 2021), and as ‘any axiom, law, or abstraction assumed and regarded as representing the highest possible degree of generalisation’ (Su et al., 2022). First principles, a methodical alternative of understanding the world, found within the study of physics, focuses on breaking down elements into their foundational material components and reasoning from those fundamental truths. First principles are not simply a statement of definition of a concept, but the fundamental and core elements building a concept.

Within the sphere of strategy, the first principles have been well defined historically through the work of Sorin and Sivarajah (2021), followed by many authors providing their own perspectives. The simple proposition is that strategy is concerned with the search for competitive advantage (Buhalis & Park, 2021) and that strategy is about winning (Aboramadan, Kundi & Farao, 2021).

Physics focuses on the general analysis of nature, conducted in order to understand how the universe behaves with the aim of discovering the universal law of first principles. Although it is one of the oldest academic disciplines, the boundaries of physics have never been rigidly defined. Theoretical breakthroughs continue to make significant contributions to new technologies; one example includes the quantum computer which makes use of quantum-mechanical phenomena, such as superposition and entanglement, to perform operations on data. While classic computers make use of data encoded to binary digits (bits – the basic units of information), each with a definite state of either 0 or 1 (an analogy would be a light switch with the off position representing 0 and the on position representing 1), quantum computation makes use of quantum bits (qubits), that are able to exist in states of 0, 1, or a superposition of both (Gutiérrez-Martínez & Duhamel, 2019).

Quantum superposition is a first (fundamental) principle of quantum mechanics which concludes that a physical system can exist partly in all its particular theoretically possible states simultaneously or in parallel; but when measured or observed, it provides a result corresponding to just one of the possible configurations (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021).

Qubit states overrule the traditional view of a linear approach to bit computing (Vizzoto et al., 2021) and, by inference, may be compared to the view that traditional strategy can focus just on a single linear extrapolation of strategy, concentrating either on a deliberate or an emergent approach (Ali & Anwar, 2021), or one of several strategic styles (Im et al., 2021). Following the arguments of Kautish et al. (2022) who conclude flexibility should be established, a revised view concludes that an organisation could exist in several states simultaneously or in the form of strategic superposition.

From an organisational strategy perspective, the traditional emphasis has been on closing the gaps between external demands and internal capabilities, thereby ensuring alignment between the organisation, the business environment, and its past, present and future intent. Ensuring this alignment proved necessary for increasing stability, efficiency and enabling high performance at the cost of learning and innovation. By reducing variation, thereby increasing performance in the short-term, an organisation deprives itself of the information required to move forward (Foris et al., 2020).

Stereotypically, strategy choice is often rationalised through the use of analogical reasoning, and in similar fashion humans rationalise their decision-making resulting in iterations of previous themes and paradigms. Whilst this is a powerful method of developing strategy, since it builds on good ideas and discards bad ones, an alternative, based on revised first principles, applicable to an evolving environment or to the development of parallel strategies, is required for the deep innovation necessary for the resolution of complex problems (Aboramadan et al., 2021).

To focus on creating sustainable advantage by developing an adaptive, creative and dynamic strategy-making approach and process, Imran and Aldaas (2020) suggest several principles must be articulated as a basis for the development of strategy that will respond to the challenges faced by organisations. By expanding on the work of Leta and Chan (2021) through the review and inclusion of views articulated by several authors, this study summarises the key characteristics and elements presented as first principles of strategy. These include:

- *Strategic anticipation* which provides the capability to determine and the ability to implement a strategy highly responsive to the future and unpredictable, volatile environments (Camilleri, 2022). Strategy and corresponding plans must be flexible to respond to changes that may occur, both internally and externally. Organisational foresight

provides the ability to maintain readiness and follow a provisional strategic stance, constantly ready for action in response to unfolding events (Vizzoto et al., 2021).

- *Navigational Leadership* must be provided by the organisation's strategy. It requires the capability to instil a collective sense of where the organisation is and the confidence and optimism to move forward. Coordinated leadership, guided by clear, decisive objectives, focuses effort by setting direction, defining the organisation and providing consistency. The overall aim is to provide not only security, but to increase resource morale too. By supplying this navigation, strategy is able to inspire confidence, ensure transparency, accountability and good governance, encourage speedy decision-making and engage staff at all levels, thereby providing a sense of ownership (Valeri & Katsoni, 2021).
- *Agility* incorporates the dynamic ability to move rapidly and flexibly to shape or adapt to opportunities or threats. It allows organisations to launch new products overnight, transform the market and change the rules of their industry. Agility is focused on speed of movement, exploitation and leadership (Gutiérrez-Martínez & Duhamel, 2019), allowing the organisation to remain unfixed, emergent, self-organising and co-evolving. Adaptability, responsiveness, audacity and speed increase the organisation's ability to be disruptive, while ensuring surprise through concealment and deception. Four types of agility can be identified: financial agility focused on liquidity to buffer against difficulty and provide freedom to pursue opportunities and experimentation; operational agility characterised by the creation of lean and efficient structures; portfolio agility identified by the ability to reshape, reinvent, and reallocate resources with speed as well as organisational agility dealing with empowering structures (Adiguzel, Ozcinar & Karadal, 2020).
- *Resilience* provides the ability to absorb and build on adversity, shocks and setbacks (Ajmal et al., 2022). Resilience – a continuous propensity to anticipate and adapt to critical strategic shifts in the marketplace – is an important driver of a creative and adaptive approach in order to ensure competitive advantage. Resilience enables organisations to perceive opportunities and risks more clearly and ensure an effective and rapid response (Ahmad et al., 2021). To build resilience, organisations must exude a strong sense of purpose and meaning, have a clear self-knowledge, maintain perspective, focus on realistic

optimism and persevere while enabling a culture of internal and external co-operation (Zhang et al., 2020).

- *Open collaboration* provides the capability to dissolve boundaries, forge links and reach outside the organisation through collaborative partnerships to allow for the sharing of ideas and information, consequently providing a broader perspective and maximising innovation. Through collaboration and co-operation, organisations are able to move beyond their boundaries, both mental and organisational, to allow for greater anticipation of uncertainty and its potential impact. Externalisation provides opportunity for reducing risk and increasing innovation through relationships (Ali & Anwar, 2021).
- *Predictive learning* allows organisations to sense, probe, analyse and reflect on previously hidden patterns and trends, in order to allow for the anticipation of sudden or disruptive change. Organisational capabilities must be focused around the use of strategic intelligence to guide decision-making through the use of analytics and knowledge management, double-loop learning to enable the modification of goals in the light of previously successful or unsuccessful attempts to achieve goals on multiple occasions and abduction, a burst of knowledge gained from communicative interaction among organisational members (Adiguzel et al., 2020).
- *Creativity and originality*. *Creativity* challenges assumptions, allows for the recognition of patterns and generates the ability to see in new ways, make connections, take risks and seize chances. It is the heart of any strategy and supporting process, not simply focused on the development of new products or services, but equally concerned with new processes and perceptions of opportunity. Creativity determines how an organisation realises value from new ideas and processes by which ideas are developed (Gürlek & Koseoglu, 2021). Jolly and Lee (2021) define creativity as ‘the production of novel and useful ideas in any domain, while Imran and Aldaas (2020) augment the definition by defining creativity as ‘the thinking process which helps us to generate ideas. *Originality* includes departing from the routine and ordinary, allowing for leaps from the obvious to something new or untried. Creativity is essential in order to ensure originality, be it through diversity, micro-diversity, novelty or imitation, to ensure the organisation pursues the goal of being different through its strategy (Xu et al., 2020).

- *Innovation* is the ability to use knowledge in a unique and different way; to employ new thinking (Abu-Rumman et al., 2021). It is the application of an idea towards doing things better, cheaper, more aesthetically and/ or more effectively (Im et al., 2021). Creativity provides ideas – be they outlandish, bizarre, wild or useless – as input to innovation, which creates useful, results-oriented, profitable or effective outputs (Camilleri, 2022). Innovation transforms creative ideas into successful implementation within an organisation (Vizzoto et al., 2021). It enhances the ability to experiment rapidly and frequently, both with products and services, as well as with business models, processes, and, vitally, business strategy. It also guides the development of strategy through organisational learning to create and maintain competitiveness (Adiguzel et al., 2020).
- *Entrepreneurism* involves trying new combinations; the creative destruction of an existing equilibrium within an industry; a method of transforming disembodied ideas into workable and economically viable operations, leading to value creation and value capture, aiding competitiveness (Ebrahim & Ganguli, 2019). Enabling entrepreneurial activity requires a concentration of force, allowing for a decisive, synchronised application of resources to realise intended effects, when and where required, while supported by an economy of effort and the judicious exploitation of human resources, material and time in relation to the achievement of strategic objectives (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2019).

The rapidly altering business environment has renewed focus on creating a sustainable advantage by developing creative and adaptive strategy-making approaches concerned with equipping organisations with the capability to deal with the changing environment. Approaches and processes, aligned to the first principles and broken down to their material components enable the creation of a creative and adaptive strategy articulated in a simple, compelling way to ensure competitive success and sustainability (Afriyie et al., 2019).

2.7 Summary

For a long time, strategy has been a key construct in the military and, later, the business environment. Intricacy and uncertainty in a fluctuating business environment have provided the opportunity for the construct to mature over the past years. A review of literature reiterates the on-going discourse and evolving nature of the concept, predominantly coordinated through three research themes or constructs over the past three decades. The first, process research, focuses on

the formulation and implementation of strategy through prescriptive and descriptive methods, while content research uncovered the types of strategy organisations develop, based on their environmental and organisational conditions. The third stream, a recent one, considers the practice of strategy by asking how strategy is prepared.

While the essence of strategy remains in constant flux as conversations mature, allowing the practice to remain relevant and significant, the challenge of strategy-making must be shaped by environmental realities already mentioned. As indicated, organisations in industries which act in predictable ways often utilise their unique capabilities and resources to create their market space and defend their position. Focusing on an industry's predictability it can be argued that the levels of adaptability, creativity and influence required by organisations, demand alternative styles of strategy. Realignment to a revised strategy-making process will heavily favour organisations for future advantage; however, the organisational changes required to achieve this would require fundamental shifts in corporate culture, skill building and leadership. So as to focus on creating sustainable advantage by developing an adaptive, creative and dynamic strategy-making approach and process, in this chapter several principles have been articulated as a basis. The next chapter deliberates on the sustainable practices in the hospitality industry.

CHAPTER THREE: SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

3.1 Introduction

In an era marked by growing environmental concerns and a heightened awareness of the need for responsible business practices, the hospitality industry stands at a critical crossroads. As travelers seek more than just luxurious accommodations and memorable experiences, the concept of sustainability has emerged as a guiding light for the sector. In this chapter, we embark on a journey into the environment of sustainable practices in the hospitality industry, exploring the innovative approaches and strategies that hotels, resorts, and other establishments are adopting to minimise their environmental footprint, support local communities, and enhance the overall guest experience. We delve into the myriad ways in which the industry is embracing its responsibility to the planet and society while continuing to provide exceptional service and unforgettable stays. Join us as we uncover the transformative power of sustainable practices in reshaping the modern world of hospitality.

3.2 Theoretical Background

The Institute for Social Research developed the critical social theory in 1937 under the name critical theory of society (Aladag et al., 2020). With a few notable exceptions, it has mostly gone ignored in leadership and management domains, where individuals frequently avoid challenging oppressive or unequal systems and practices in favour of focusing on micro-implementation rather than macro-societal context. This study's core premise calls for corporate leadership to consider its relationship to society, paying particular attention to the desire to engage in thought and action intended to bring about positive social change. The proof for this supposition can be found in reports of injustice, inequality, great power and wealth concentration, and widespread environmental degradation.

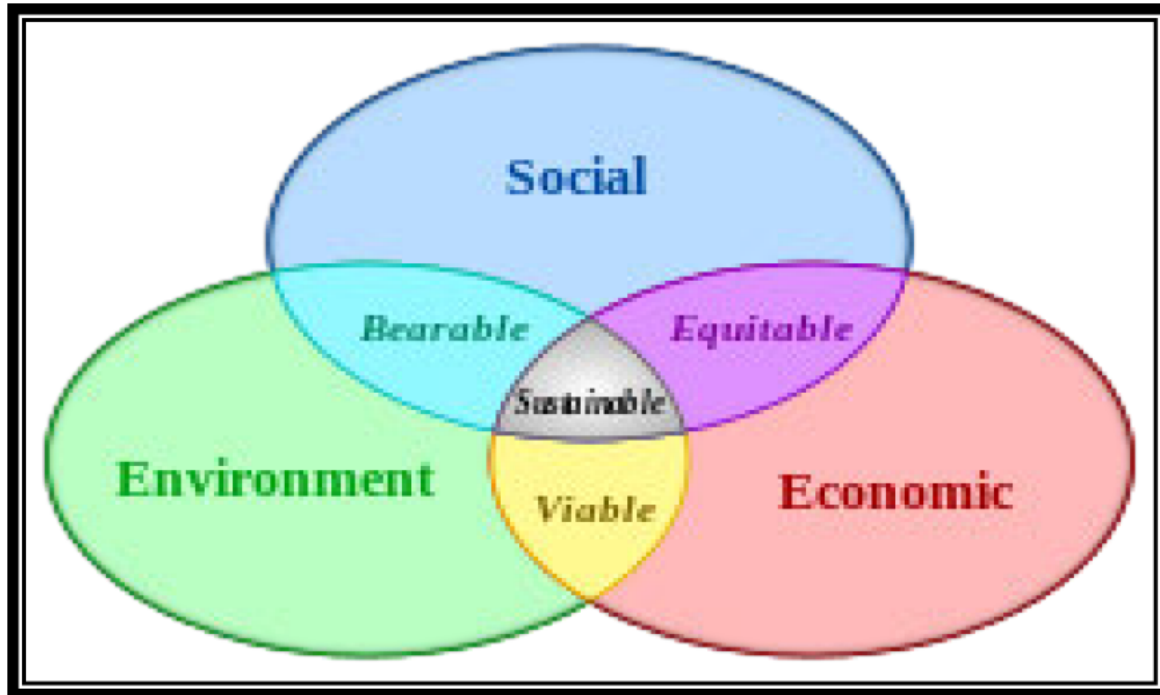


Figure 1. The Critical Social Theory Source

The fundamental tenet of critical social theory is that modern global capitalism generates a public saturated with consumer goods and oblivious to alternative lifestyles, and that present society is neither democracy nor fairness (Mohammad & Khassawneh, 2022). According to critical theory, the wealthy and powerful influence, if not dominate, the governing structures in the public and private sectors, tempting leadership to choose between serving their interests or the interests of a larger public. Critical Social Theory in sustainable leadership offers a workable alternative that combines the most recent perspectives of postmodern thinking with the fundamental components of critical social theory. The critical social research theory that encourages the use of imagination to envision a better future was used for this study.

3.3 Agency Theory

This theory exposes the agency problem, noting that managers of other people's money do not take the same care as the owner themselves. This highlights the existing separation between ownership and control of the company and its consequences (diversification of investment, low concentration of ownership), as well as the divergent interests between directors, managers and proprietary investors. In the same sense, Kalargyrou et al. (2020) defines an agency relationship and how the

principal can limit the divergences with respect to his interests by establishing appropriate incentives for the agent. Agency problems are controlled through decision systems (decision processes) that separate management decisions (implementation and application) and control decisions (ratification and monitoring) at all organisational levels (Abualigah et al., 2023). This theory focuses on: information asymmetry, adverse selection and pre-contractual opportunism and moral hazard or post-contractual.

Agency theory is one of the foundational frameworks for corporate governance. It focuses on the relationship between principals (typically shareholders) and agents (usually management or executives) and the potential conflicts of interest that arise in this relationship. The central concern is to ensure that agents act in the best interests of the principals. Mechanisms like executive compensation, board oversight, and monitoring are designed to align the interests of agents with those of the principals. opportunism (Sousa et al., 2019). The initial analysis related to the opening of capital of the entrepreneurial company, in this model originated in an analysis that focused on two objectives. The first objective was to propose a contractual theory of the firm seen as a team of productive inputs (Ohunakin et al., 2020), inspired by the theory of property rights and focusing on the concept of the agency relationship.

The second objective was to illustrate the explanatory power of this theory with respect to the problem of the capital structure of the company. The company is considered as a nexus of contracts, associating the company and the entire group of resource contributors (the input team ...), their limited objective of explaining the capital structure led them to build a more simplified model considering only two agency relationships. The first linked the manager to the shareholders and the second linked the company (represented by the administrators and shareholders) to the financial creditors. The theory offers insight to explain the phenomena of corporate governance, particularly the agency-principle problems of conflicts between external investors and managers and the expropriation of minority shareholders by controlling shareholders (Darvishmotevali & Altinay, 2022).

The main contributions of agency theory to thinking about and reforming corporate governance are the ideas of risk, uncertainty of results, incentives and information systems. The study of conjectures that applies agency theory to corporate governance issues continues to grow, because it frequently tries to explain real events that occur in the world. Finally, agency theory represents

one of the most serious attempts to formulate a general theory of the firm in the framework of social relations (Abualigah et al., 2023). The approach that supports this theory is associated with the so-called agency costs: the ‘agents’, directors or managers of the companies, may be tempted to act for their own benefit and make management decisions driven by their own interests. In any case, the agency theory has been the most applied in corporate governance research (Rodríguez-Antón & Alonso-Almeida, 2019).

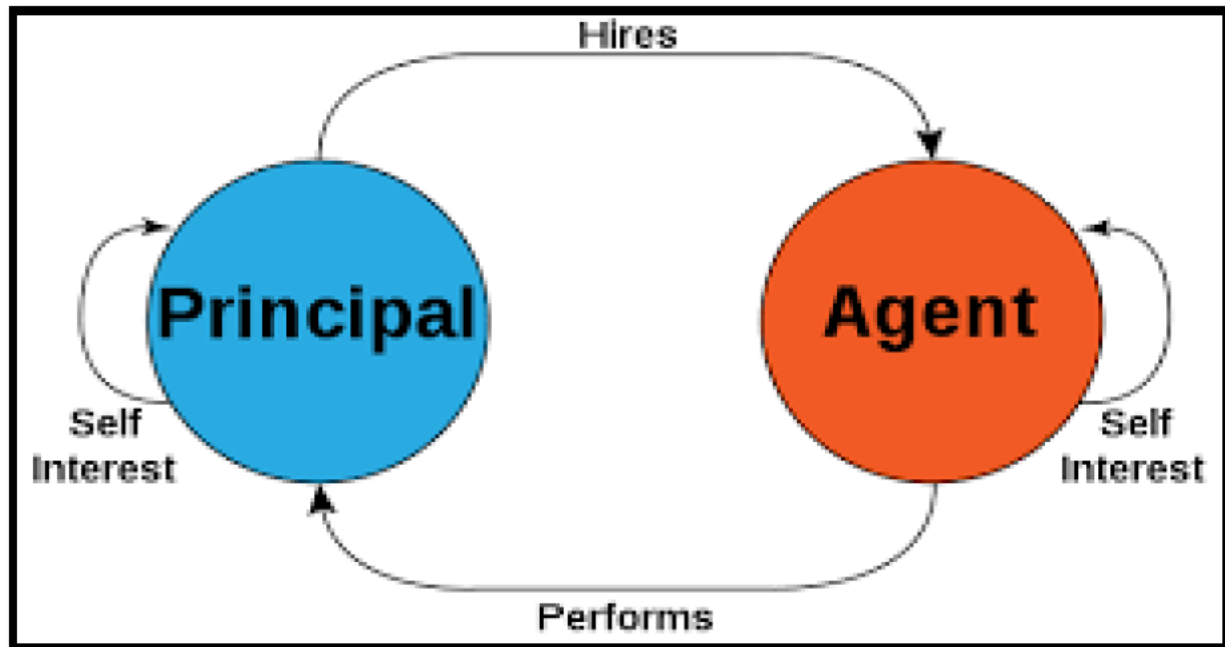


Figure 2.1: Agency Theory (Burhan et al., 2021)

The focus of agency theory of the principal and agent relationship (for example shareholders and corporate managers) has created uncertainty due to various information asymmetries (Elkhwesky, 2022). The separation of ownership from management can lead to managers of firms taking action that may not maximise shareholder wealth, due to their firm specific knowledge and expertise, which would benefit them and not the owners; hence a monitoring mechanism is designed to protect the shareholder interest (Mousa et al., 2021).

Agency theory provides the fundamental theoretical base of corporate governance. The theory is based on the concept of separation of ownership and control. Shareholders as owners of the company decide the objectives of the company and appoint the managers as their agents to pursue their objectives. Thus, the managers, many times, are different from the shareholders. Such conflict

in objectives is referred to as the agency problem which may lead to self-interested action by the managers who are in control of the company. Managers of the firm have the managerial expertise and firm-specific knowledge. So, they are in the advantageous position over the owners. By this position the managers gain control over the firm. A conflict of goals thus occurs as managers pursue actions which benefit themselves.

Managers wield their control rights in ways that serve their personal interests, often resorting to various forms of fund expropriation. These methods include paying inflated transfer prices to their associates, participating in insider trading, granting themselves excessive compensation, and investing in declining industries, among others. For owners, verifying the appropriateness of these actions proves challenging or impossible. In response to this conflict of interest, theoretical frameworks propose several mechanisms to safeguard the interests of the firm's owners. These include implementing auditing systems, securing bonding assurances from managers, and establishing contracts—both formal and informal—aimed at preventing such abuses. Additionally, organizational restructuring may be advocated to curtail managers' ability to engage in undesirable practices. These measures collectively seek to mitigate conflicts between managers and owners, ensuring alignment with the broader objectives of the firm.

Propositions and assumptions of the theory

The agency theory operates on the implicit assumption that managerial behaviour is primarily self-interested, with managers often characterized as opportunists who exploit opportunities to enhance their personal welfare, even at the expense of shareholders. Central to this theory is the identification of governance mechanisms aimed at curbing such self-serving behaviour, thus mitigating what is commonly referred to as the agency problem. Emphasizing the importance of efficient capital and labour markets, the theory contends that these mechanisms can help constrain managerial opportunism. Specifically, the theory underscores the pivotal role of the board of directors in monitoring managerial opportunism and restraining the self-interested inclinations of corporate management. It advocates for a board composition predominantly comprised of non-managerial directors who are independent from the company's management, assuming that their interests, often termed as independent directors, are aligned with those of the shareholders.

Criticism of the agency theory

The agency theory, while influential in corporate governance discussions, faces several notable criticisms. Firstly, it tends to prioritize shareholders' wealth maximization above all else, often neglecting the interests of other stakeholders such as employees, customers, and communities. This narrow focus can lead to decisions that prioritize short-term profits over long-term sustainability and societal well-being. Moreover, the applicability of the theory is questioned in developing countries where ownership structures differ significantly from those in the West. In countries like Germany, Japan, and various Asian nations, block holdings by banks or business families mitigate the agency problem to some extent. Conversely, in developing countries, the primary agency issue historically lies between majority and minority owners rather than between owners and managers. Additionally, critics argue that the theory exaggerates the self-interested nature of individuals, particularly managers. Human behaviour, they contend, is influenced by a myriad of factors including background, values, experience, and interpersonal skills, rather than solely by their position as insiders or outsiders within the organization. This critique suggests a need for a more nuanced understanding of governance dynamics that considers a broader range of influences on managerial behaviour.

3.4 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory takes a broader view of corporate governance by considering the interests and expectations of all relevant stakeholders, not just shareholders. It suggests that corporations should be managed in a way that balances the interests of shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and other stakeholders. This framework emphasises the ethical and social responsibilities of corporations. There are different definitions given on stakeholder theory by different scholars. Stanford Research Institute (SRI) (2018) defines stakeholder theory as 'those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist. Kalargyrou et al. (2020) modified this definition by defining stakeholder theory as those groups who are vital to the survival and success of the organisation, indicating that the definition given is organisation oriented.

However, Zia et al. (2022) advocates for a more balanced definition that takes wider area than the definition given by SRI (2018), mainly because it includes individuals outside the firm and that groups may consider themselves to be stakeholders of an organisation without the firm considering them to be such. In addition, Bavik (2020) stated that stakeholders are identified by the organisation of concern, by reference to the extent to which the organisation believes the interplay

with each group needs to be managed in order to further the interests of the organisation. Conventionally, the interest of the organisation is nothing but profit seeking assumption. In Similarly, Elbanna et al. (2022) asserted that the view of stakeholder theory is that all the stakeholders have right to be provided with information about how the organisation is affecting them (perhaps through pollution, community sponsorship, provision of employment, safety initiatives, etc.), even if they choose not to use the information and even if they cannot directly affect the survival of the organisation. The inter relationship between various stakeholders increases the transparency of organisational activities and performance.

Therefore, it can be said that stakeholder theory can assist firms to achieve one of the corporate governance mechanisms, which is transparency, while practicing stakeholder theory helps organisation to achieve the organisational goals which include increasing profitability. Within the same line of thought, Gurmani et al. (2021) argued that stakeholder related activities are useful in developing and maintaining satisfactory relationships with stockholders, creditors and other related parties. Developing a corporate reputation through performing and disclosing necessary reports activities is part of a strategy for managing stakeholder relationships. Disclosing necessary reporting to the shareholders is the duty of management and proper disclosure can build good relationship between owners and managers while at the same time reducing agency problem. However, stakeholder theory does not directly provide prescriptions about what information should be disclosed (Elkhwesky et al., 2022) other than indicating that the provision of information, including information within an annual report can, if thoughtfully considered, be useful for the continued operations of a business entity.

The adoption of Stakeholder Theory proved pivotal in framing a strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, offering a comprehensive understanding of the interconnected relationships between the hotels and their diverse stakeholders. By recognizing the interests and concerns of stakeholders ranging from local communities, employees, guests, and environmental activists, the theory facilitated the alignment of sustainability goals with broader societal expectations and business objectives. This approach fostered enhanced stakeholder engagement, promoting transparency, trust, and long-term value creation within the hospitality sector. Moreover, Stakeholder Theory's emphasis on ethical decision-making and accountability

empowered hotel leaders to navigate complex sustainability challenges, driving innovation and resilience in the pursuit of environmental, social, and economic sustainability goals.

3.5 Stewardship Theory/Management Theory

Stewardship theory posits that managers and executives are likely to act as responsible stewards who naturally strive to maximise shareholder value. It contrasts with agency theory by assuming that managers and executives are motivated by intrinsic factors like reputation, job satisfaction, and long-term value creation, rather than just financial incentives. In it, it is considered that there is no conflict of interest between the owners and the managers and that it seeks to find an organisational structure that allows coordination to achieve greater efficiency. Managers are non-opportunistic agents, according to this theory, but good managers (Mohammad & Khassawneh, 2022). Given the limitations raised and as a reaction to the agency theory, at the beginning of the nineties, the 'management theory' (stewardship) emerged, under a vision psycho-sociological of corporate governance.

This theory considers managers as good servants of the organisation, assumes that professional managers of any company want to do a good job and will act as effective managers of its resources. This explanation does not imply that the manager lacks personal objectives, but, on the contrary, is aware of the relationship that exists between his individual goals and the aims of the organisation, and considers that the best way to achieve his purposes is work towards collective goals. However, it is considered that the stewardship theory has a limitation when studying the governance of companies and that is that it only considers the partners (owners of the company) and the steward (the manager), not paying no attention to the other interest groups (stakeholders) that affect or are affected more or less directly in society. Managers are not motivated by individual goals, but rather are managers whose motives are aligned with the objectives of their principals (Mousa et al., 2021).

Organisational managers tend to be benevolent in their actions (Darvishmotevali & Altinay, 2022). Stewardship theory is a theory that indicates that if managers are left to their own devices, they will act as responsible managers of the assets they control (Tuomi, Tussyadiah & Stienmetz, 2021). This theory assumes that long-term contractual relationships develop based on trust, reputation, collective goals, and participation, where the alignment of interests is a result that derives from

relational reciprocity (Sousa et al., 2019). The interests of the managers are aligned with those of the shareholders, there is no conflict of interest that must be overcome with mechanisms such as financial incentives (Hornig et al., 2022). Directors must recognise the interests of legitimate customers, employees, suppliers and other stakeholders, but under the law their first responsibility is to shareholders. Conflicts of interest between stakeholder groups and the company must be resolved by the pressure of competition in free markets, supported by legislation and existing legal controls to protect customers, employees, suppliers and society (Heimerl et al., 2020).

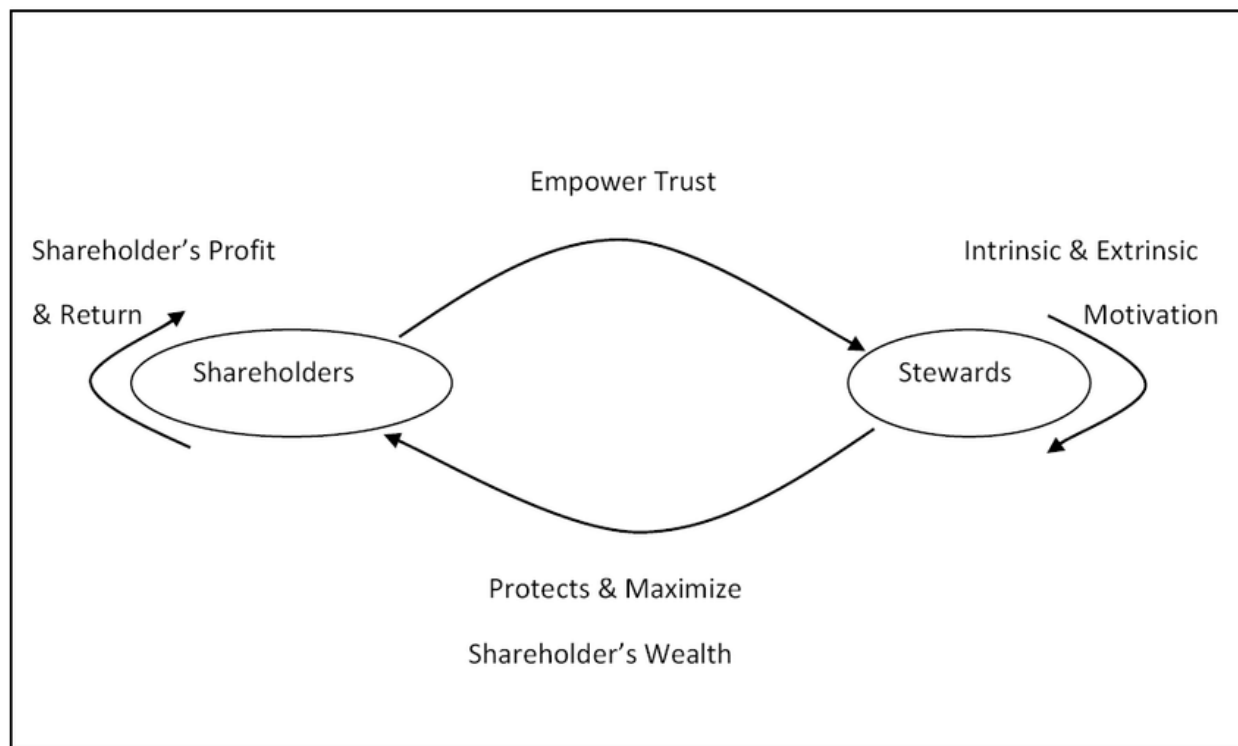


Figure 3.2: Stewardship Theory (Elkhwesky et al., 2022).

The fundamentals of stewardship theory are based on social psychology, which focuses on the behaviour of executives. The steward's behaviour is pro organisational and collectivists, and has higher utility than individualistic self-serving behaviour and the steward's behaviour will not depart from the interest of the organisation because the steward seeks to attain the objectives of the organisation (Mohammad & Khassawneh, 2022). According to Bebbington (2021) where shareholder wealth is maximised, the steward's utilities are maximised too, because organisational success will serve most requirements and the stewards will have a clear mission. He also states that stewards balance tensions between different beneficiaries and other interest groups. Therefore,

stewardship theory is an argument put forward in firm performance that satisfies the requirements of the interested parties resulting in dynamic performance equilibrium for balanced governance.

Stewardship theory sees a strong relationship between managers and the success of the firm, and therefore the stewards protect and maximise shareholder wealth through firm performance. A steward who improves performance successfully, satisfies most stakeholder groups in an organisation, when these groups have interests that are well served by increasing organisational wealth (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2019). When the position of the CEO and Chairman is held by a single person, the fate of the organisation and the power to determine strategy is the responsibility of a single person. Thus, the focus of stewardship theory is on structures that facilitate and empower rather than monitor and control (Mousa et al., 2021). Therefore, stewardship theory takes a more relaxed view of the separation of the role of chairman and CEO, and supports appointment of a single person for the position of chairman and CEO and a majority of specialist executive directors rather than non-executive directors (Elkhwesky et al., 2022).

In the exploration of a strategic leadership framework for sustainability within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, the adoption of Stewardship Theory proved paramount. Rooted in the premise of responsible resource management and long-term organizational sustainability, Stewardship Theory provided a lens through which leaders could navigate the complexities of environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic viability inherent in the hospitality industry. By emphasizing the importance of leaders as stewards entrusted with the well-being of their organizations and communities, this theoretical framework facilitated the development of strategies that aligned with the principles of sustainability, fostering a holistic approach to decision-making and operations. Through its focus on fostering a sense of ownership, ethical behaviour, and accountability among leaders, Stewardship Theory offered invaluable insights and guidance for the formulation and implementation of effective sustainability initiatives within the context of luxury hospitality in KwaZulu-Natal.

Propositions and assumptions of the theory

The theory posits that managers transcend the mere role of agents for shareholders, instead embodying the ethos of good stewardship within the company, striving to achieve elevated levels of corporate profit and shareholder return. It contends that their pursuit of personal income is balanced by a spectrum of human motivations, encompassing aspirations for achievement,

responsibility, recognition, as well as values such as belief, respect for authority, and intrinsic motivation. In this view, managers are driven to excel, not merely for personal gain, but also as custodians of the company's interests, aligning their objectives with those of the shareholders. The primary control mechanism within this framework is seen as the market for managers, where a strong personal reputation serves as a deterrent against opportunistic behaviour, emphasizing the inherent desire of managers to perform well.

Contrary to the traditional reliance on non-executive boards as oversight mechanisms, proponents of this theory advocate for granting significant authority and discretion to CEOs who are perceived as stewards of the organization. Central to this perspective is the notion that structures empowering managers are more conducive to organizational success than mechanisms solely focused on monitoring and controlling them. While the theory diverges from traditional agency theory, which emphasizes monitoring and control to mitigate opportunistic behaviour, it shares common ground in recognizing the importance of financial reporting, disclosure, and auditing as mechanisms to regulate managerial conduct. However, stewardship theory places greater emphasis on these mechanisms as means of affirming the inherent trustworthiness of managers, rather than merely detecting and deterring opportunism.

3.6 The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals Theory

This research is underpinned by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), offering a robust theoretical framework to guide its investigation. The SDGs present a holistic approach to sustainability, encompassing economic, social, and environmental dimensions. In this context, the research aligns with Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by exploring how strategic leadership can contribute to the creation of sustainable employment opportunities within the 5-star hotel industry. By emphasising decent work conditions, the study aims to foster economic growth while ensuring social equity within the hospitality sector (Yang, Luu & Qian, 2021).

Furthermore, the research probes into Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) as it investigates how strategic leadership practices can promote responsible consumption patterns within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. By examining the procurement processes, waste management strategies, and resource utilisation, the study seeks to contribute to the hotel industry's

adherence to sustainable and responsible practices. Additionally, the research aligns with Goal 13 (Climate Action) by exploring how strategic leadership can drive initiatives to mitigate the environmental impact of 5-star hotels. This involves examining practices that reduce carbon footprints, enhance energy efficiency, and promote climate-resilient strategies (Khalifa, 2021). By embracing these SDGs, the research provides a comprehensive framework that not only addresses the unique challenges of sustainability in the hospitality industry but also contributes to the broader global agenda of sustainable development.

3.7 Triple Bottom Line (TBL)

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, offers a comprehensive approach to evaluating organisational performance by considering three dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. In the context of the strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, the TBL framework proves to be highly applicable and relevant. The economic dimension involves assessing the financial impact of sustainable practices within the hospitality industry (Baloch et al., 2022). By incorporating sustainable initiatives, 5-star hotels can enhance their long-term economic viability through cost savings, resource efficiency, and the attraction of environmentally conscious consumers. Moreover, the social dimension of the TBL framework is crucial in the hospitality sector, emphasising the importance of community engagement, employee well-being, and cultural sensitivity. In the South African context, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, fostering positive social relationships with local communities and respecting cultural diversity becomes essential for sustainable development in the region's hotel industry (Wood et al., 2021).

The environmental dimension of the Triple Bottom Line framework aligns seamlessly with the sustainability focus of the research. 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal can implement environmentally friendly practices such as energy and water conservation, waste reduction, and biodiversity preservation. Adhering to these environmental considerations not only reduces the ecological footprint of the hotels but also contributes to the broader goal of preserving the region's natural beauty and resources (Mohammad & Khassawneh, 2022). A strategic leadership framework informed by the Triple Bottom Line in this research would guide hotel executives in making decisions that balance economic prosperity, social responsibility, and environmental

stewardship. Ultimately, the integration of the TBL framework provides a robust foundation for developing sustainable practices within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, fostering responsible leadership and contributing to the overall well-being of the region.

3.8 Institutional Theory

Hoang (2021) proposed that institutions were created by human beings to decrease the uncertainties of transactions between economic agents, where a major part of those uncertainties are due to opportunistic human behaviour. Evans (2019) further argued that without institutions and markets firms may have never existed and transactions could have never begun. Traditional definitions of institutions are found as what we regard or do not regard as acceptable and thus determine the framework in which any action finds its legitimacy. Dashper (2020) argued that an organisation cannot survive without legitimacy: an approval of its general environment that its actions are desirable, suitable and are adapted, with the interior of the standards, values and beliefs system, socially built. Later, Elkhwesky et al. (2022) made similar conclusion, where they posited that, institutional perspective assumes that the environment recognises and empowers institutions to award firms, or withhold from firms, resources such as legitimacy.

The tenets of institutional theory are also best met in a business environment with high level of regulation. Institutional theory argues that organisations are not just a place where goods and services are produced rather these are also social and cultural systems. In other words, firms not only engage themselves in competition but legitimised themselves also. Bebbington (2021) defined an institutional field as those organisations that in the aggregate, constitute a recognised area of institutional life: key suppliers, resources, regulatory agencies, and other organisations that produce similar products and services. Qiu et al. (2020) viewed the process by which organisations tend to adopt the same structures and practice 'isomorphism'. Isomorphism is a process that causes one unit in a population to resemble other units in the population that face the same set of environmental conditions. Balakrishnan (2020) found three different isomorphism processes namely coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism arises when organisations change their institutional practices in response to pressure from stakeholders upon whom the organisation is dependent.

Company is coerced into adapting its existing voluntary corporate reporting practices, where stakeholders are taken into consideration. Once the voluntary corporate reporting is adopted, stakeholders are pleased with the organisation. Such practice will help the organisation to be competitive on the market resulting positive firm performance. Institutional theory pressures to meet certain standards of corporate governance (Bhutto et al., 2021), which is linked to firm performance. Sousa et al. (2019) argued that institutional perspectives on corporate governance are best met in an environment with high levels of regulatory efficiency. This finding is similar to Elkhwesky et al. (2022) where it mentioned that organisations are the way they are for no other reason than that the way they are is the legitimate way to organise. The key concept of this idea is that organisational actions evolve over time and become legitimated within an organisation and an environment.

Fatoki (2019) asserted that the significance of institution theory is the openness about human behaviour and organisational practices. This theory also offers the way, how to link the institutionally informed management accounting research that has been increasingly adopted at the organisational level to the wider political, legal and social processes associated with corporate governance and professionalisation. In the pursuit of understanding and enhancing sustainable practices within the context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, the adoption of Institutional Theory proved paramount. This theoretical framework provided invaluable insights into the organizational structures, norms, and practices that shape strategic leadership behaviours towards sustainability. By examining how institutional pressures from stakeholders, industry norms, and regulatory frameworks influence the adoption of sustainable practices, researchers were able to develop a comprehensive strategic leadership framework tailored to the unique socio-cultural and environmental landscape of KwaZulu-Natal's hospitality industry. Moreover, Institutional Theory facilitated the exploration of the institutional mechanisms that drive organizational change and innovation towards sustainability goals, ultimately offering practical recommendations for enhancing environmental, social, and economic performance in 5-star hotels.

3.9 Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership, focuses on leaders who inspire and motivate followers to achieve exceptional outcomes by fostering a shared vision, encouraging intellectual stimulation, providing

individualised consideration, and exhibiting inspirational motivation (Elkhwesky et al., 2022). In the context of the hospitality sector, particularly 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, Transformational Leadership proves highly applicable as it emphasises a proactive and visionary approach to leadership, aligning with the need for strategic guidance in implementing sustainable practices. This research adopts the theoretical framework of Transformational Leadership to guide its exploration of sustainable practices within the hospitality industry.

Transformational Leadership's emphasis on vision and inspiration is particularly relevant to the sustainability challenges faced by 5-star hotels. Leaders within these establishments can utilise this framework to articulate a compelling vision for sustainability, instilling a sense of purpose and shared commitment among employees (Bhutto et al., 2021). Moreover, the framework's encouragement of intellectual stimulation encourages creative problem-solving, fostering an environment where innovative and sustainable practices can be identified and implemented. By incorporating individualised consideration, leaders can address the unique challenges and opportunities of each hotel, promoting a tailored approach to sustainability. Through the lens of Transformational Leadership, the research seeks to unravel the strategic dimensions of leadership that contribute to the long-term sustainability of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, offering insights into how visionary and inspirational leadership can drive positive environmental and social impacts within the hospitality industry.

The adoption and relevance of Transformational Leadership Theory in developing a strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal stemmed from its capacity to inspire and motivate organizational members towards a shared vision of sustainability, fostering innovation, and encouraging proactive environmental stewardship. By emphasizing values such as empowerment, vision articulation, and individualized consideration, Transformational Leadership Theory provided a framework through which leaders could effectively engage employees in sustainable practices, aligning their efforts with the long-term environmental and social goals of the organization. This approach facilitated a culture of responsibility and accountability, encouraging stakeholders to embrace sustainable practices not only as a corporate mandate but as a personal and collective commitment, thereby enhancing the environmental performance and competitive advantage of 5-star hotels in the region.

3.10 Complexity Governance (CG) Theory

The theoretical framework of Complexity Governance (CG) holds immense relevance to the research on strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star Hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. Complexity Governance, rooted in the understanding that organisations are complex adaptive systems, emphasises the need for a dynamic and flexible approach to leadership and decision-making (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2022). In the context of the hospitality industry, particularly 5-star hotels facing sustainability challenges, CG theory becomes instrumental in navigating the intricate web of interconnected factors. The complex nature of the hotel environment, involving diverse stakeholders, economic considerations, and ecological impacts, necessitates a governance framework that can comprehend and respond to emergent properties (Dube, 2021). Applying CG theory allows the research to explore how strategic leadership can effectively manage and govern the complex dynamics of sustainability in 5-star hotels, fostering adaptability, resilience, and long-term viability.

Within the specific context of KwaZulu-Natal, the CG framework provides a lens to analyse the unique socio-economic and environmental factors influencing sustainability practices in the region's 5-star hotels. As the region may present its own set of complexities, such as cultural nuances, local regulations, and ecological considerations, CG theory enables the research to develop a strategic leadership framework tailored to the specific challenges and opportunities in KwaZulu-Natal" (Bhutto et al., 2021). By embracing the principles of Complexity Governance, the study aims to contribute not only to the academic understanding of sustainable leadership in the hospitality sector but also to provide actionable insights for hotel managers and policymakers in KwaZulu-Natal seeking to enhance the sustainability profile of their 5-star establishments.

3.11 Conceptual Framework

Styvén et al. (2022) made a comparison between agency theory and institutional theory discovering the reality of different approach that exists in effective corporate governing. No one theory can give us the best performance result but a combination of all can deliver the business need and keep the organisation running while balancing the principal and the manager rights over the business.

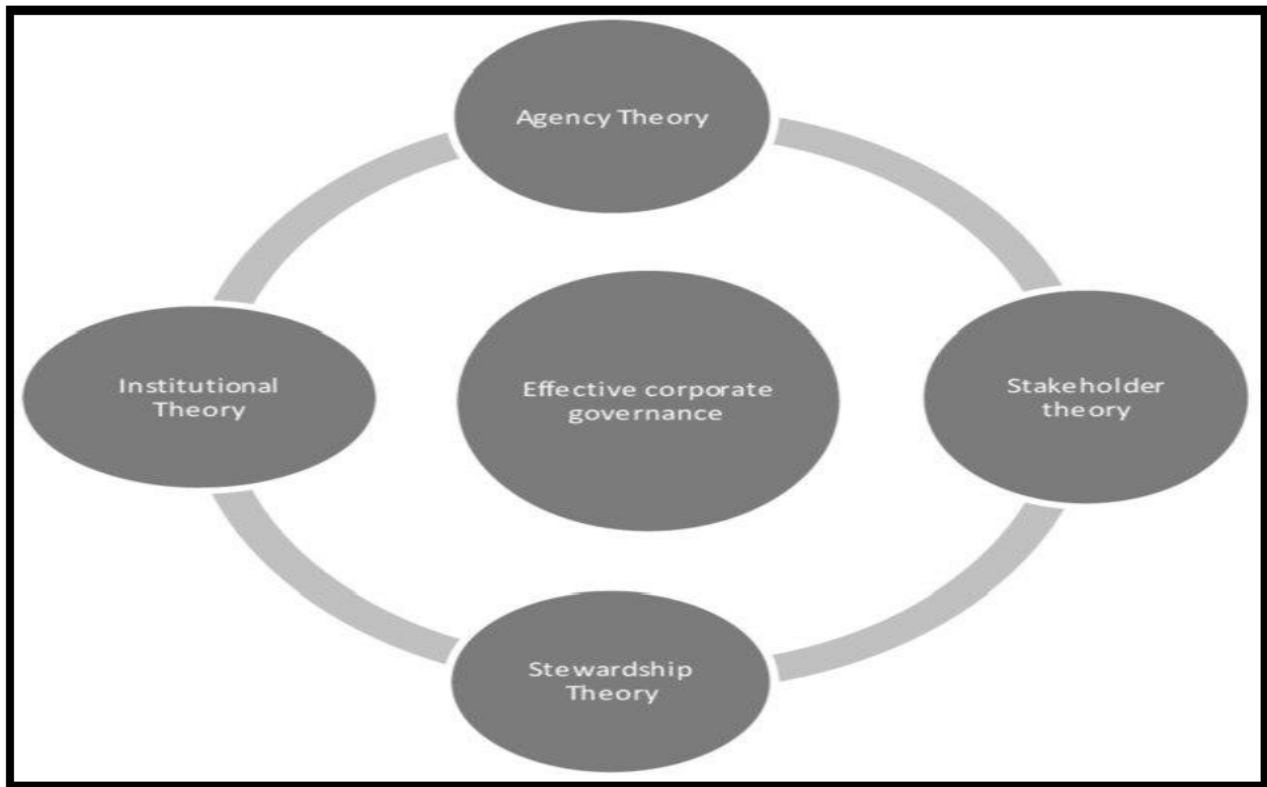


Figure 3.2: Conceptual Framework

In Figure 3.2 above, it can be seen how this has overlapping effect on the other three theories, like, the institutional theory states that firms not only engage themselves in competition but legitimised themselves. On the other hand, Stewardship theory is defined as stewards protect and maximise shareholders wealth through firm performance (Kazim, 2019). By doing so, “the steward’s utility functions are maximised”. Hence the link is clear how institutional theory is a subset of stewardship theory. Agency theory is based on the problems related to separation of ownership and controllability. In Freeman’s definitional perspective, the organisation is seen as part of a larger social system. Stakeholders would include shareholders, employees, customers, lenders, suppliers, local charities, various interest groups and governments (Siti-Nabiha, 2021). So, it can be seen how various stakeholders if left to make decision alone can open up sever loophole in principal wealth protection. Therefore, in order to strengthen corporation effectiveness, there is need for emphasising in all of them.

In conclusion, it is argued that the strength of research in the organisational field is its polyglot of different theoretical perspectives that yield additional convincing view of firms. Agency theory is revolutionary, powerful foundation and predominantly used to explain and predict phenomena in corporate governance. The theory does not address any clear problem, is in restricted focus and hence lacks the practicality. Therefore, it should be used with other complementary theoretical views. Agency theory only gives restricted view of the governance that somehow is effective. It neglects the intricacy and complexity of the firms. Additional theoretical perspectives should also be considered to capture the complexity. Furthermore, there is a need to develop a general theory of CG by keeping in view the qualities of good theory i.e. parsimonious and generalisability. The tenants of more general and specific CG theory should reflect the individual, state and enterprise, their relationship, expectations, requirements, demands, duties and responsibilities of each participant. It should also grasp the accountabilities and sanctions of participants in case of negligence, avoidance and misuses of CG's policies, rules, regulations and acts.

3.12 Defining Sustainability and associated Problems

The concept of sustainability has its origin the environmentalism that evolved in the 1960s. There people looked at the continuing growth of industry and population critically and perceived it as a force to damage the environment irreversibly. Over the years, many environmental pressure groups where founded and the public interest in the environment increased dramatically. However, the aims of this environmental movement were not very clear in the beginning, but they emerged in course of the time. (Linneberg et al., 2019) In the 1980s, the ideas and debates reached the climax with 'the concept of sustainable development' (Golensky & Hager, 2020). It started as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) published the World Conversation Strategy (WCS). Together with the WWF and institutions of the United Nations, for example the UNESCO and the United Nations Environment Education Program (UNEP), the publication had the purpose to draw up a strategy for living resources and its conservation with facing the current environmental problems like desertification and loss of diversity.

'The WCS defined conservation as the management of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations' (Tuomi et al., 2021). In particular the WCS

addressed the relation between economic development and conservation of natural resources (Khan et al., 2020). In addition, this publication boosted the environmental movement further and the concept of conservation and sustainable development was launched ‘onto the global stage’ (Linneberg et al., 2019). Although the idea about environmental problems and ideas for conserving the nature were not new, this document helped to raise awareness globally and acted as a basis for some governments to respond, for example with implementing environmental policies. Nevertheless, the term sustainability did not enter lexicons until the publication of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WECD) in 1987, commonly known as Brundtland report and Our common Future. In that report sustainable development is defined as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2022).

Within the report, five basic principles that determine sustainability were detected:

- ‘the idea of holistic planning and strategy making
- the importance of preserving essential ecological processes
- the need to develop in such way that productivity can be sustained over the long term for future generations [...]
- achieving a better balance of fairness and opportunity between nations’ (Guzmán et al., 2020).

A few years later, in 1991, the IUCN published the report *Caring for the Earth* which aimed at enforcing the call for more sustainable behaviors in our daily life. The call was especially addressed to developed countries which are wealthier than others. It became clear that humans are affected by the environmental problems, in other words environmental problems are as well human problems (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Since the publication of the Brundtland report and the report of the IUCN, sustainability and sustainable tourism became a popular field of research. However, more than 20 years after the release, the debate about the detailed definition of sustainable development, sustainability and sustainable tourism continues. In the literature, these terms are all well-established, but they are ‘used loosely and often interchangeable’ (Linneberg et al., 2019).

Styvén et al. (2022) criticises that authors publish articles about sustainable tourism without defining the term and its deeper meanings. Then the reader must find out by himself what the

author means, which can lead to misinterpretations. Furthermore, it can also be the case that the term sustainable tourism is treated very vague and is described as harmonious and balanced relationship with the environment. Nevertheless, Hunter admits that there are as well studies that describe the term very well and analyse the underlying factors for a sustainable development in an appropriate way. In order to prevent any misunderstandings from the very first, the relationship between the terms sustainability, sustainable tourism, sustainable development and ecotourism will be analysed and clarified. Kloutsiniotis and Mihail (2020) defined sustainability as state-focused and it involves ‘steady life conditions for generations to come’. Sustainable development on the contrary is more oriented towards a process and the management of changes, which should improve the living conditions for people involved in that development. Another definition of sustainable development comes from Alkhatib and Valeri (2022) who said that sustainable development is ‘the need to find a balance in the development system between economy, environment, and society in such a way that no aspect outweighs another one, in other words that the three aspects are equal.

According to Mahdi and Nassar (2021), sustainable tourism can basically be regarded as applying the ideas of sustainable development in the tourism industry. In the same regard, Butler and Harris and Leiper defined sustainable tourism as the forms of tourism that contribute to sustainable development (Arshad et al., 2022). However, the Brundtland report did not mention tourism in connection with sustainability at all. With the beginning of the 1990s and especially the establishment of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism helped to recognise that tourism brings advantages but also disadvantages to a host region. Sun et al. (2021) support this definition by saying that sustainable tourism is a positive approach that aims at the reduction of tensions that are created by the relationships between the tourism industry, visitors, host population and the environment. If all needs of the four groups are integrated and addressed, the community will profit from increased quality of life and the tourists will experience satisfaction (Singh, Bhatia & Nigam, 2021).

Furthermore, fair profit for the tourism makers will be created as well as the environment will be protected appropriately. This idea shows clearly that the focus of sustainable tourism lies in the positive long-term relation between these groups/factors. The literature about sustainability often entails also the term ecotourism in the connection with sustainable tourism. Goswami and Dsilva

(2019) defines ecotourism as ‘responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people...’. The concept provokes two opponent opinions. Liu-Lastres, Wen and Huang (2023) argues that ecotourism is only a marketing tool and does not aim at protecting or preserving the environment and its resources. Rather it is used by the tourism industry to diversify their products and to answer to the movement of the green customers.

He, Morrison and Zhang (2019) agree that ecotourism is big business nowadays and the tourism industry makes a lot of money from it. Nevertheless, he sees as well the connection to sustainability and its principles within ecotourism. According to Usman et al. (2021) common understanding of ecotourism as ‘the intersection of nature-based tourism and sustainable tourism has developed’ (2021). Both researchers see the increase in tourist numbers in the ecotourism sector and therefore, they argue that it might be difficult to stick to the principles of sustainable tourism. On the theoretical side, they both think that ecotourism ‘can be path to sustainable development’ (Su & Chen, 2020).

However, if ecotourism is only promoted for marketing reasons or if it really aims at sustainable practices remains unanswered for now. In addition, ecotourism is often used as an interchangeable term for nature tourism, which includes activities like bird watching and hiking (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2022) The existing literature about sustainability allows various interpretations of the term. ‘The concept is malleable and can be shaped to fit a spectrum of world views’ (Arshad et al., 2022). The understanding can range from extreme environmental conservation to the extreme environmental exploitation, when the growth of the economy outweighs environmental concerns. Kravariti et al. (2022) concluded therefore, that different circumstances call for different interpretations of sustainable tourism. In particular he calls sustainable tourism an adaptive paradigm and not a fixed framework that can be applied to every situation. In the end, it can be said that the concept of sustainable tourism has its roots in the environmental movement which started in the 1960s. Today, it is regarded as a desirable intention of tourism development. It embraces the natural environment, the economic situation and the society equally, which is important because these areas influence each other to a huge amount and problems in one area will affect another one.

3.12.1 Sustainable leadership

In the turbulent environment of the 21st century, there has been great emphasis on the interdependence between organisations and the societies and environment they operate in. The growing attention and awareness in sustainability and sustainable development has gained momentum in recent years predominately as a result of new global economies (Arshad et al., 2022). There is an overlap between sustainability and leadership termed sustainability leadership. Sustainability implementation is the responsibility of sustainable leaders who possess integrity and defend the principles of sustainable development. According to Usman et al. (2021) sustainability leadership as caring for the organization's resources by achieving through adapting and changing leadership patterns consistent with organization requirements.

Sustainable leadership has been widely researched and discussed as a subject on various disciplines, especially in the 20th and the 21st century with sustainability receiving global emphasis. Sustainable leadership is often defined as leadership that aims to meet the needs of present-day society, without compromising the ability of future generations to prosper (Hallinger & Suriyankietkaew, 2018). Shaaban (2020) describes a sustainability leader's point of view as one striving to create a sustainable organisation that is socially and environmentally focused. With the dynamics in societal needs changing, society keeps on evolving. With this change, sustainable leadership must adapt and adopt problem solving skills to deal with arising complex challenges (Fullan, 2020).

Heifetz and Linsky (2022) argue that adaptive work demands continuous learning and experimentations with a skill for holding difficult conversations. Gayle and Bergsteiner (2021) emphasized that sustainable leadership necessitates the need for a long-term perspective in making decisions as well as fostering systemic innovation aimed at increasing client value; developing a skilled, loyal, and highly engaged workforce; and offering quality products, services, and solutions. There has been extensive research over the years on sustainable leadership. Miller, Gaynor, Powell and Simpson (2019) researched the topic of Leadership as sustainability in terms of context and primary school principals. The study focused on challenges and opportunities faced by school leaders in demonstrating sustainable leadership. The volatility of the educational and community environments propels school leaders to lead in ways that are more resilient, more flexible, and more adaptable by engaging leadership in a manner that is aligned and acknowledges change, and by developing and implementing policies that drive sustainability.

The study *Seeking Sustainability Leadership* by Bendell and Little (2015) revealed the conventional social and academic assumptions regarding what leadership entails are critiqued. The socially constructed notions and practices of leadership as systematic logical thought by senior role holders that perpetuate power relations is addressed. On the basis of a critical deconstruction of leadership discourses conducted by Bendell and Little (2015), the study assesses what is useful for organizational change. It also addresses the awareness of the imperatives of wider sustainability, social justice and personal dignity, by the way of identifying key orientations that are sought to be promoted among participants in leadership development. The first is developing the sustainability leadership through enhancing people's understanding of how to develop leaderful groups.

This can be achieved by allowing leadership to naturally emerge from within the group and thus assist the group to better serve a social purpose. The second orientation encouraging deeper self-construal is where no outcome is hoped for, enabling this type of self-exploration to obtain insights from critical sociology, psychology, philosophy and spiritual traditions, as well as deep conversations, group work and experiences in a responsible manner. With reference to leadership traits for sustainability, Metcalf and Benn (2023) contend that sustainability leaders are required to possess extraordinary abilities. These leaders should have an ability to read and predict through complexity, think through complex problems and engage stakeholders in dynamic adaptive organisational change. Although this analysis seems to suggest that leadership for sustainability needs brilliant individuals, Bendell and Little (2015) argue that these sustainability leadership traits are not supposed to be at the expense of collective, collaborative and democratic efforts.

3.13 The Nature of Tourism Accommodation and its Role in the Tourism Industry

Although a rich international literature has been developed on the linkage between tourism and economic development, little South African based research has focused explicitly on tourism accommodation as part of a development strategy. For quite some time there has been an upsurge in the exploration of tourism accommodation development strategies in South Africa (Linneberg et al., 2019). A number of studies have indeed highlighted the important role that tourism can play in non-metropolitan areas. From the wide range of documented material consulted, those sources considered particularly relevant to this study, and therefore worth mentioning, are referred to in

this particular review. According to Alkheyi et al. (2020), tourism has many potential benefits for non-metropolitan areas. There is no doubt that tourism is an important source of employment for nonmetropolitan communities, especially those that are economically underdeveloped.

Furthermore, Elsharnouby and Elbanna (2021) emphasised that tourism could lead directly to unsightly sprawl in rural areas by creating a demand for development involving different sectors within the tourism industry. One such sector is accommodation. Accommodation has been a travel requirement since the first trading, missionary and pilgrimage routes were established in Asia and Europe in pre-Christian times. The basis for such accommodation was generally non-paying, as travellers were provided with a roof over their heads and sustenance as part of a religious obligation or in the hope that similar hospitality might be offered to the host in the future. The first reference to commercial accommodation provision in Europe dates back to the thirteenth century (Goh & Okumus, 2020). This concurs with the traditional perception that associates tourism with hotels. Traditionally, hotels played a central role in the development of tourism industry. Similarly, tourism accommodation in general and the NSMTA facilities in particular can be used as a tool for tourism development. In contrary to the traditional perception, this particular study establishes that tourism is one of the most dynamic industries that change with time (Bressan & Pedrini, 2020).

Nowadays tourism is associated with service industry that embraces business principles like competitiveness, sustainability and many others that will hopefully come-up in the proposed generic strategy in the final chapter of this study (Albashiti et al., 2021). The association of tourism with business brings accommodation to the centre of tourism studies. Several scholars (Khalifa, 2021) regard accommodation as a basic, functional business within the tourism industry. Most tourists experience the extreme luxury and opulence of tourism when accommodation is of a high standard. Such accommodation can either be informal and private or it may be provided within units operated by major multinational organisations in conjunction with governments or independently (Moin, 2021). If one considers the traditional view of a hotel as an establishment that provides accommodation, food and beverage services to short-stay guests on a paying basis, the level of luxury would depend on personal choice and expectations. However, this is a somewhat inadequate description in view of the growth of ancillary activities commonly associated with non-metropolitan tourism accommodation in particular, whether for leisure, business or other purposes (Sousa et al., 2019).

Moreover, associated with this development, is the emergence of a tourism orientated food and beverage industry that still need to be served under some kind of shelter or accommodation (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2022). Hotels constitute a greater proportion as a sub-sector of tourism accommodation businesses. Most of the existing studies only focused on hotels, ignoring the fact that there is a diverse array and numerous classifications of accommodation facilities related to the tourism industry. In short, tourism accommodation in South Africa has been researched, but with a strong bias towards the more conventional perception that hotel accommodation is the only place where tourists stay (Goh & Okumus, 2020). Hemmington and Neill (2022) suggests that today tourists want to experience something new and are insisting on impeccable, first-class service and fair value for monetary outlay. The expectations of these so-called '*new tourists*' have led to the emergence of new demand dynamics for a different type of tourism experience and means that the strategic provision of hotel accommodation has to be complemented by other types of tourism accommodation.

3.14 Classification of Accommodation Facilities

Classification of accommodation may be defined as 'the categorisation of accommodation facilities into different rating in terms of offered amenities, type of property and their size' (Shukla et al., 2023). Accommodation types may differ in terms of their style of operation (formal or informal), size (large or small), the service offered and the standard of the product. Although tourism accommodation has always been linked with entertainment facilities, food and hospitality, changes in the tourism industry have brought about the existence of different kinds of accommodation that do not necessarily adhere to traditional patterns. Djajasinga et al. (2021) state that hotels have always been major providers of a food service but this role has changed in recent years. Today customers have a choice of whether they need catering or not. Classification of accommodation varies with countries. According to the Senbeto and Hon (2021), the capacity provided by accommodation determines the type of accommodation. For instance, if an operation provides both motel and camping grounds, and the majority of its provision units are motel rooms, then it will be classified as a motel. Classification in terms of accommodation size reveals that smaller establishments tend to be more numerous when compared to the bigger establishments. This conforms to the classical geographical theories of sizes and spacing such as 'The Rank Size Rule' and 'The Central Place Theory', which claim that the number of bigger centres within a

given area will always be fewer than the number of smaller centres (Knight et al., 2020). This means that the smaller accommodation establishments would have a bigger share of the number of tourists within a given area as has been shown to be the case in Australia.

3.14.1 Accommodation grading

Grading emphasises quality dimensions. In practice, most national or commercially operated schemes concentrate on classification with quality perceived to be an add-on which does not impact upon the star rating of an establishment (Albashiti et al., 2021). It is common practice for almost all areas of the tourism accommodation sector to adhere to certain standards despite the fact that they are products of local or global forces representing socio-political, technological, and economic factors. The interplay of these factors does influence the sector's heterogeneity. In reality, a thoroughly scientific comparison of the tourism accommodation facilities is difficult because every business is based in a particular setting that is determined by specific local determinants. However, the process of accommodation grading still serves as the best mechanism to ensure standards in tourism accommodation (Marobhe & Kansheba, 2023).

In South Africa, two major bodies, the National Accommodation Association (NAA) and the South African Tourism Grading Council (SATGC) play a major role in tourism accommodation grading. Unfortunately, the reviewed literature indicates that only registered accommodation facilities may be graded, yet most of non-metropolitan tourism accommodation establishments remain unregistered and unnoticed. Furthermore, for grading, they need to apply formally and there are no obvious incentives for small non-metropolitan operators to register their enterprises. In fact, various accommodation grading and classification schemes have been applied for comparative purposes. Accommodation classification or grading is predominantly associated with large accommodation enterprises like hotels, lodges, B&B and few guesthouses and campsites. The South African Tourism Board keeps the inventory of the graded establishments (South Africa DEAT, 2023).

Standardisation and the establishment of uniform service and product create an orderly travel market distribution system. This is also useful for travellers who have to choose from the range and types of accommodation available to suit their needs within a destination area. It also helps in the promotion of a destination and development of a competitive edge for different categories of

accommodation. Different classes of accommodation require different standards of facilities and services within their respective grades.

3.14.2 The diversity of tourism accommodation facilities

South African tourism accommodation sector can be categorised into two broad groupings, graded and un-graded accommodation. The graded includes formally registered accommodation like hotels, guesthouses and lodges. The un-graded are generally not registered and they are 'informal' in nature. These range from self-catering, camps, holiday flats and many other small types of accommodation. Ouyang, Liu and Gui (2021) indicates that the grading of 'formal' tourism accommodations in South Africa still range from one to five stars. The level of grading is based on SAT star grading system. The one star graded is the least rated while the five star is the most luxurious. With more people engaging in tourism with a budget-conscious mind, the use of highly rated five-star accommodation is associated with the wealthy, while the middle-income groups prefer the middle graded three-star accommodation (Knight et al., 2020).

3.14.3 The role of accommodation in tourism development

Tourist accommodation performs an important function within both the context of rural and urban tourism. It provides the opportunity for visitors to stay for a length of time to enjoy the locality and its attractions, while their spending contributes to the local economy (Arici et al., 2021). Accommodation forms a base for the tourists' exploration of the urban and the non-urban environments. The tendency for establishments to locate in urban areas precludes peripheral opportunities from expansion thus intensifying their need to find a relevant *modus operandi* rather than relying on what happens in the metropolitan areas and within established urban tourism initiatives. The importance of infrastructure and accessibility comes clearly to the fore when hotels are built to serve specific markets. For example, an exhibition and conference market will need hotels adjacent to major conference and exhibition centres (Arasli, Altinay & Arici, 2020). However, this does not, by any means, suggest ignorance of the locational viability of the accommodation business.

Generally, accommodation do not attract tourists on its own right, rather they provide support services that are the core-element of tourism industry. It can thus be argued that accommodation does not generate the tourist's motivation for travelling (Japutra & Situmorang, 2021). The

motivation to travel is usually led by the desire to experience a wider tourism product at a particular resort or locality with accommodation as one of the crucial tourism products. Accommodation as a tourism product has to reflect the vital components of any business product. For sustainability, a product has to be well positioned or located. The location needs to be accessible in terms of transport, information technology and infrastructure. Location often determines the appeal and accessibility of properties (Shukla et al., 2023). Typically, the distance decay principle applies to decision-making when considering accommodation locations.

Often, luxury properties are located on prime town sites that have maximum access to attractions and facilities. Infrastructural facilities should include access to computers, the Internet and all sorts of entertainment and recreational opportunities (Arasli et al., 2020). The quality of the service should relate to the grading and the value of products. Quality products create a good image that can easily be advertised through mass media. All these components of the tourism product are interrelated. The attractiveness of a product is of paramount importance. Accommodation is an integral part of the overall tourism infrastructure as without it tourists will not visit the location. There are situations where its provision has dominated development plans. Moreover, it also assists in attracting wider investment in the tourism product at the locality. Majid (2019) gave the example of the province of Newfoundland, in Canada, where four hotels were built in strategic locations as part of its tourism development strategy in the early 1980s.

Talking about tourism economics, Sousa et al. (2019) agrees that accommodation could feature as an element in wider economic development strategies but it needs to play a primary and varied role as a successful tourism product too. If a hotel is simply a support facility for wider economic development only, it could easily operate at a deficit. Accommodation also plays an important role in the overall economic contribution, which tourism makes at a local and national level. It is difficult to generalise about the proportion of total tourist expenditure that is allocated to accommodation because this varies greatly according to the market, accommodation type and nature of product purchased (Sanabria-Díaz et al., 2021). A generally accepted estimate is that a third of the total trip expenditure is allocated to this sector. This figure decreases in the case of fully inclusive packages to say the Mediterranean or similar resorts, where intermediaries negotiate low-cost bulk purchases of apartment or hotel rooms.

By contrast, the proportion may be considerably higher in the case of domestic tourism where total transportation costs are generally lower than is the case with international travel (Alseiyari et al., 2019). Accommodation may be sold as a 'loss leader' to promote expenditure on other components of the tourism product. Off-season offers are frequently promoted whereby hotel rooms are provided 'free' on condition that guests spend a specified minimum amount on food and beverage. Such strategies recognise the highly volatile and fluctuating demand that exists on a seasonal and weekly basis, a broader dimension of the accommodation sector. Accommodation can act as a catalyst for a range of additional sales opportunities within the complex tourism and hospitality business (Burhan et al., 2021). Casino hotels have discounted accommodation in anticipation of generating considerable profit from customers at the gaming tables, while golfing hotels may seek to generate good profits from green fees rather than room revenues. Indeed, accommodation pricing in general, is a complex and sometimes controversial area. Rack room rates (those formally published as the price of the room) are rarely achieved and extensive discounting for group bookings, advance reservations and corporate contracts are widespread (Shukla et al., 2023).

Fixed pricing is only successful and commonplace within the budget hotel sector. Yield, measured against potential, rarely runs at much more than 60% in the mid to upper-market levels of the hotel industry and yield management systems are in place within most large companies in order to maximise achieved rates while optimising occupancy potential (Abualigah et al., 2023). Managing contracts in order to maximise yield is also an important strategy for accommodation units with the objective of replacing low yield groups or airline crew business with higher yield business or FIT guests (Stats SA, 2022). The reviewed literature shows that functions of the accommodation sector within urban tourism can be divided into serviced functions and non-serviced functions sectors. Each sector has developed in response to the needs of different markets, and a wide variety of organisational structures have emerged among private sector operators to develop this area of economic activity. Bayighomog and Arasli (2022) notes that many large chains and corporations now dominate the accommodation sector, using vertical and horizontal forms of integration to develop a greater degree of control over their business activities.

The above discussion shows that accommodation is the largest and arguably the most important sub-sector of the tourism industry. It is large and highly diverse. Together with the transport industry, the accommodation industry caters for international tourists, regional tourists, and

national tourists as well as locally based tourists. In a way, it meets the needs of virtually all tourism market groups. The different categories of tourism accommodation were identified and confirmed by different scholars. Looking at all the different categories that are given in the above review only two broad categories can still identify the formal multinational category and informal localised category. Of the two categories, the former seems to have received more scholarly attention than the latter. Issues such as standardisation, employment capabilities and environmental responsibilities are generally addressed. The rapid change within this sector of tourism does not only bring fierce competition, but it also brings about new products and new service standards. It is the new product, with new service standards, that becomes the focal point of this study. Challenges posed by technological development within the accommodation sector of the industry are still to be addressed from a different perspective.

3.15 Diversity within tourist market

Decreasing employment opportunities and less disposable income force more people to venture into different types of leisure activities. Pappas and Brown (2021) identifies market segments that specifically require cheap accommodation with readily available services. Hassanien and Dale (2019) emphasises that accommodation is a segment of the tourism product that should be viewed in terms of its production, distribution and consumption. Converting residential properties into tourist accommodation is a process taking place in some formerly solely residential areas and is actually associated with the introduction of new job opportunities. Unlike formal sector accommodation that caters even for things like conferences, workshops and other big public gatherings, this kind of tourism production is essentially a micro-level initiative, the potential for which has not been established, especially in the peripheral regions (Yacoub & ElHajjar, 2021). The tourism industry has the capacity to promote this kind of accommodation especially in the field of ecotourism, which is said to be environmentally friendly.

The issue of land use change control and private sector screening could be of neighbourhood. Otherwise, neighbouring communities may exert pressure for the removal of this type of development. Liu et al. (2021) describe this kind of land use as having both economic and social impact on the surrounding communities. The adopted approach for this study is in line with Ghani et al. (2022) tourism proclamation that it is '*an irreversible socio-cultural and economic reality*'.

Its influence in the sphere of human life is particularly important and it increases because of the known conditions of that activity's development potential. Such development poses a serious problem when it comes to the type of accommodation that the tourists would like. The tourists generally do not seem to favour typical indigenous African accommodation, a perception that actually suggests that the role of indigenous African accommodation style is of less quality (Xu, Stienmetz & Ashton, 2020). Considering the fact that accommodation in tourism promotion has been ignored for too long, this particular study intends bringing it to the fore. Currently the most desirable attributes for holiday destinations sought by prospective tourists are not only scenic beauty but also comfortable accommodation with very good security. Africa is capable of offering that. Today, tourists are increasingly seeking accommodation outside the city, which is more restful yet meets their holiday needs.

3.16 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided the outline of the systems thinking approaches as the theoretical framework that supports this research. Sustainable management practices have been discussed, and special attention has been paid to the hospitality industry. The concept of focus group interviews has been discussed as it has been used in conjunction with qualitative methods; hence, the study took a multi-methodological approach. The next chapter focuses on the research design and methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has provided the outline of the sustainable practices in the hospitality industry. This chapter provides as an overview of all the components and features of the research employed in this study. It discusses research methods; research philosophies; research tools; sample strategies; data gathering; processing; and analytic methods. In order to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of various research methodologies, and choose the most suitable research technique for this study, the researcher studied the relevant literature on research design and data collection.

According to Mitchell and Rich (2020), research is the methodical collection and impartial assessment of facts with the purpose of achieving a certain goal; and many approaches are utilised to analyse an issue or subject. ‘Conclusive of research methodology’ approaches relate to the techniques used to gather and analyse data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). These data collection and analysis techniques were created to ensure the reliability and quality of knowledge acquisition. A research strategy is deliberate and rigorous, with the objective of obtaining information about a certain subject (Zhang et al., 2020). Fundamental philosophical ideas and objectives regarding the nature of reality, and the quest for knowledge in science, are included in research paradigms. The two most prevalent schools of thought are positivist and phenomenological. This necessitated matching the research methodologies with the research objectives and research questions. As a result, the research questions and objectives are restated in this chapter:

4.2 Research philosophies

This relates to various worldviews or assumptions about a particular inquiry, which shape how it is designed, carried out, and how it is approached in order to learn more about the subject under investigation (Biggs et al., 2021). In the event of a natural or scientific inquiry, the object is used, while in the case of a management or social sciences study, a construct or phenomenon is used (Luo et al., 2022).

4.2.1 Positivism

The positivist technique, which follows the example of natural scientists, is commonly referred to as an unbiased research strategy. Positivist researchers are those who have this viewpoint. From an epistemological standpoint, positivists claim that generalising about things that are observable and measurable as real knowledge is possible. They come to the conclusion that the ‘thing’ being studied and the meaning associated with it exist independently from the researcher (Mainga, Daniel, & Alamil, 2022). This is seen in the majority of natural science, or pure scientific, study, when the actors are not involved in the object’s reality. According to objectivism, from an ontological standpoint, social phenomena, and the perception thereof, have a reality separate from that of the researchers or players (Maj & Nuangjamnong, 2020). One such social phenomenon is a corporate organisation and its culture, which has a unique identity and reality, apart from that of the social players. It also has the characteristics of an object, beliefs, and values, in addition to real-world goals.

In contrast to this, constructivism, from an ontological standpoint, asserts that social constructions are the result of the viewpoints of social actors and the actions of researchers (Matyokurehwa, Rudhumbu & Mlambo, 2020). This shows that, rather than being seen as something outside of social actors, social constructs are formed on the foundation of a thorough grasp of reality and interactions among social players. McGill et al. (2021) claimed that the constructivists are interested in co-operating to produce social processes. Since the researcher is disassociated from the subject under inquiry, and instead regards it as an object, the positivists’ axiological beliefs show, once more, that the scientific research process is value-free. This contrasts sharply with management research, where interpretation of findings is frequently influenced by the attitudes and perspectives of the researchers (phenomenologists). Because positivism is objective, positivist researchers frequently use a quantitative research methodology.

4.2.2 Realism

The two main characteristics of positivism that realism highlights are a direction that is entirely distinct from the subject of the study, and the presumption that all scientific and social science research must utilise a standard technique for data collection (Mitchell & Rich, 2020). This gave rise to empirical and critical realism, two distinct varieties of realism. Empirical/direct realism emphasises that using the right methods help us learn more about a given phenomenon. According

to Nind and Katramadou, (2023), direct realism involves social actors' awareness of the world through their senses in order to give a truthful representation of it. Due to its impartiality, this may not be entirely appropriate in commercial research, but it is appropriate in the natural sciences.

The second realism, critical realism, was born out of this debate. Critical realism, as the name suggests, challenges how accurately social actors' views reflect reality (O'Brien & Aliabadi, 2020). It lists situations where social actors have been duped by human senses, resulting in a false perception of reality. Social actors have diverse perspectives based on the scenario or conditions at hand. In order for individuals to have a similar view of reality, critical realism contends that actors must engage in the educational process (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019). Otherwise, critical realism cannot be expected to hold true. Based on the assumption that what people see is what they receive, direct realism can hold that the world is largely stable. Due to shifting and inaccurate views of what appears to be the true reality, what you see in a particular situation might not correspond to what you receive. This explains why certain business academics tend to be subjective, especially when studying marketing (the behaviour of customers) and organisational behaviour.

4.2.3 Interpretivism

Phenomenology and symbolic interactionism were the two logical foundations from which interpretivism emerged (Rashid et al., 2019). The way that social actors see the environment around them is explained by phenomenology. On the other hand, symbolic interaction explains how people continue to perceive and comprehend the reality they live in. Additionally, it clarifies how actors discuss and understand the world, through their deeds and interactions with others, which frequently form or mould their beliefs and behaviours (Ridzuan, Ridzuan & Ridzuan, 2021). In terms of natural scientific research, interpretivism is an alternative to positivism. According to interpretivism, there should be less separation between the subject of the research, who is also a social actor, and the researcher (Scholtz, de Klerk & de Beer, 2020). This shows a deep connection between the researcher and the subject matter of the investigation. This mostly applies to social and management science scholars. In order to fully comprehend the social phenomena being studied, an interpretivist viewpoint must be adopted. This is necessary to prevent a scenario in which the researcher's point of view prevails, or has an impact on how the results of a study are

interpreted and discussed. Despite the advantages of interpretivism, Sebastianelli, Isil and Li, (2021) list validity, reliability, and generalisation as difficulties.

4.2.3.1 Phenomenological research

In phenomenological research, which has philosophical and psychological foundations, the researcher provides the participants' firsthand recollections of a phenomenon. Camacho et al. (2021) claimed that, in qualitative research, the researcher isolates the essential ideas of participants' explanations of a phenomenon as they apply to their own unique human experiences. The substance of the experiences of the various people who have all encountered the phenomenon is contained in this summary. It uses units of meaning, analysis of significant utterances, and the development of essence descriptions (Atkinson et al., 2021). This design frequently involves conducting interviews and is conceptually sound.

According to phenomenologists, the universe is socially formed; science is driven by human interests, and the researcher, as a subjective being, is an essential part of the observed reality (Nind and Katramadou, 2023). One benefit of this qualitative, interpretative technique is that the results are typically more legitimate and less contrived, since witnessing happenings in actual, real-world situations generally permits researchers to gain a more accurate understanding of those phenomena. On numerous occasions, qualitative research has demonstrated a depth of understanding and a plethora of facts (Luo et al., 2022). However, phenomenological research can also be undermined by the subjectivity of the researcher and the unreliability of the results, raising the likelihood that two researchers could reach divergent conclusions based on their concurrent views of the identical occurrences (Atkinson et al., 2021). The research philosophy known as interpretivism guided this study's methodology.

4.2.4 Pragmatism

In contrast to other research philosophies, pragmatism is a branch of philosophy that bases its arguments on events, circumstances, and outcomes (Septiani et al., 2022). It uses a variety of techniques to address research issues and concerns rather than concentrating on knowledge about truth and reality. It places a strong focus on using a variety of ways to get better results. The researcher is free to choose the best approach or methods, depending on the need to use a practical

research problem or questions to create better outcomes (Skarbek, 2020). Pragmatists believe that the universe is incredibly varied, which necessitates the use of many methods to address its problems (Strijker, Bosworth & Bouter, 2020). This implies that numerous strategies for data collection and analysis are required in order to offset the drawbacks of using a single method. It does not necessary follow that researchers who use a combination of approaches, or more than one method, need not strongly support their decisions. Above all, the pragmatic worldview provides a chance for many perspectives, methods, and presumptions, which enhances data gathering, analysis, and interpretation to provide excellent research findings (Rashid et al., 2019).

Tinh et al. (2021) suggested that the choice of axiology, ontology, and epistemology is influenced by the research challenge or questions. In order to adequately address the issue at hand or offer a response, they went on to say that one philosophy may be more appropriate than another, or that the three viewpoints may be combined. As a result, mixed method approaches to resolving societal issues began to emerge.

4.2.5 Research philosophy suitable for the study

After reviewing the research philosophies, the researcher concluded that interpretivism was the best choice to frame this study because it clarifies how actors understand the world through their actions and interactions and with others. This has provided the rationale for this study's use of many qualitative research methodologies for data collection and analysis (van Baardewijk et al., 2021). Because multi-method qualitative methods might favour interpretivism when examining challenging research problems, the study takes an interpretivist approach. The interpretivism method was chosen because it clarifies how different research philosophies may be successfully combined to provide the best prospects for answering research problems. As it is not dedicated to any one school of philosophy and reality, and does not see the universe as an absolute unity, interpretivism also provides a conceptual underpinning for a qualitative study (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019).

Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) made the argument that interpretivism is less likely to adhere to conventional procedures and preconceived notions about philosophy and approaches. As a result, pragmatism is more focused on the useful outcomes and findings of a study. Not prior conditions,

but actions, circumstances, and outcomes are what give rise to interpretivism as a worldview (Kohler, 2020). Under the interpretivism paradigm, the scientific method is insufficient on its own; instead, the appropriate strategy is chosen, based on the objectives of the study and the surrounding circumstances (Lê & Schmid, 2022). Interpretivism, therefore, provides the theoretical framework for carrying out this qualitative method study.

According to Lenger (2019), the interpretivism worldview provides the chance to take into account many viewpoints, methods, and presumptions, which enhances data collection, analysis, and interpretation to generate excellent study outputs. Kohler (2020), asserts that one of the greatest ways to defend the use of non-numerical techniques of inquiry in research in the management or social sciences is to embrace interpretivist strategies as a philosophical viewpoint. According to Lo et al. (2020), a study's non-numerical data gathering and analysis methods pave the way for paradigm changes that produce credible results, which are more realistic from an interpretivist philosophical perspective.

Looi (2021) provided justification for the use of a conceptual framework during the use of qualitative methodologies in a social science investigation. The conceptual criteria must be flexible enough to allow for the selection of qualitative research methodologies. As a result, the model used in this work supports the methods used to gather and analyse non-numerical data.

4.3 Research design

A research design is a plan for conducting an investigation that brings together a philosophy, inquiry tactics, and particular methodologies (Rashid et al., 2019). In this case, the research design outlines how the study is carried out, including how, when, and from whom the data is collected. Adams and McGuire (2022) assert that the study design and the chosen research methodology are determined by the issue or subject that the researcher is looking at. Research design is the overarching process for tying theoretical research issues to pertinent and useful empirical research, and it provides specific guidelines for research activity (Anjum, 2020). To successfully fulfil the

objectives of the study, a researcher must follow this step-by-step protocol before beginning the data gathering and analysis phases.

In order to get the most cost-effective, precise answers to research questions, it is necessary to transform a problem into data that can be analysed. A research design may be defined as ‘a plan, structure, and strategy of study that is established with the purpose of uncovering answers to research questions with optimal control of variables’ (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). The research strategy is always used to identify the sort of analysis that must be carried out in order to achieve the required outcomes. It explains the information that is required, how it is collected and analysed, and how it is answers the research questions. In light of this, Anjum (2020) noted that weak and unconvincing findings are likely to be reached if a researcher gathers data without taking into consideration the elements impacting the study design and the data required to answer the research objectives. Ultimately, this can make it impossible to accomplish the research goal.

4.3.1 Experimental research

In a study using experimental research, one or more dependent variables are changed to see what effect it has on the variables. According to Dalwai and Salehi (2021), a cause-and-effect link on a specific issue is the cornerstone of experimental research. In order to determine the nature of the link between the variables being researched, two groups are used: an experimental group and a control group, where the experimental group receives treatment and the control group is left unmodified. Mendiratta and Srivastava (2023) contend that experiments are performed in circumstances when the researcher has to exercise direct, accurate, and systematic control over the behaviour of the phenomenon being examined. This method is essential when examining the ideas or hypotheses at the core of the inquiry.

Experimental designs can take many different forms. A ‘pre-experimental design’ involves studying just one group and implementing an intervention during the trial. There is no control group in this instance, for comparison with the experimental group. In simulated studies, the subjects are not randomly assigned to treatment groups; but rather the researcher uses control and experimental groups. ‘Single-subject design, [which] involves monitoring a single person’s or a small group’s behaviours throughout time’ (Balne, 2020).

One way to regulate the results of an experiment is to use variables: choosing homogenous samples; using pretest scores as moderating factors and statistically controlling for their impacts; or classifying the participants into subgroups or categories and examining the influence of each subgroup on the result (Biggs et al., 2021).

4.3.2 Case study

In the design of an investigation known as a case study, the researcher conducts a thorough analysis of a case that involves a technique; person; animal; house; group; culture; organisation; industry; or nationality. This is in line with Dalwai and Salehi (2021) description that it entails an in-depth examination of a person, group, organisation, or phenomena within its real environment, particularly when there is minimal distinction between the phenomenon and setting. ‘Depth’ in this context refers to going over every peculiarity of a situation. While a case study is an in-depth analysis of a subject, the knowledge it offers is subjective rather than objective. It gives comprehensive information on the phenomenon, but is unable to draw conclusions from that information. According to Camacho et al. (2021), a case study is a comprehensive analysis of the particular unit. It has limits in terms of time and experience. A case study can therefore be regarded as an inquiry with the goal of describing; comprehending; anticipating; and/or governing the unit under study.

Through highlighting the process by which a causal link emerges, a case study offers a thorough knowledge of how and why certain events occur (Luo et al., 2022). To gather comprehensive data, the researchers employ a range of technologies and data gathering techniques over an extended period of time. To determine the underlying factors, and how they connect to the behaviour under investigation, a case study is essentially conducted. It offers comprehensive information on the module being studied. The case study approach covers all facets of a single entity while doing qualitative analysis of the problem (Balne, 2020). Conclusions are based on a much more extensive and wide-ranging collection of facts, since this necessitates a lot of information.

This approach has drawn criticism since it relies too heavily on the researcher’s interpretation, which invariably results in different readings of the same information. Additionally, researcher

bias might affect the process of gathering data and evaluating it (Bhimani, 2020). They just describe what happened without going into detail about why it occurred, like other non-experimental approaches. Due to the small sample size used in this study, it is unlikely that the results would be applicable to others facing similar difficulties or issues (Biggs et al., 2021).

4.3.3 Narrative research

In the humanities, narrative research is a form of inquiry that entails asking people to relate stories about their lives, which the researcher is studying (Badea et al., 2020). The material is then sorted into a chronological narrative by the researcher. By fusing the researcher's and the participants' points of view, the narrative typically culminates in the creation of a shared tale (Balne, 2020). The researcher uses narrative; location; activities; climax; and denouement as structural aspects to recount the participants' stories.

4.3.4 Descriptive study

Descriptive research is frequently carried out to learn more about a subject and to describe the aspects involved. This is a spontaneously occurring arrangement that frequently includes a list of stated theories or inquiries (Maj & Nuangjamnong, 2020). Additionally, descriptive studies ensure that variables are properly and accurately recorded. Descriptive studies utilise a variety of data gathering strategies in an effort to accurately characterise occurrences (Camacho et al., 2021).

To guarantee an acceptable description of the characteristics of variables or groups, descriptive research is conducted (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). These studies offer further details on the characteristics of certain variables, social groupings, or occurrences. The focus of a descriptive study is a thorough examination of the topic under research, as the name suggests. As a result, previous exploratory investigations can be thoroughly discussed (Adams & McGuire, 2022). Descriptive studies build upon the groundwork laid down by exploratory research in order to settle in-depth disputes or arguments.

4.3.5 Explanatory studies

The use of hypothesis testing to identify or clarify the nature of the relationship or difference between two or more research variables is a crucial aspect of most explanatory investigations (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). The majority of explanatory investigations need hypothesis testing in order to explain changes in dependent variables or, occasionally, to forecast organisational consequences. Depending on the nature of the research topics, data collection and analysis for an explanatory study can be done using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methodologies (Adams & McGuire, 2022).

4.3.6 Exploratory as an adopted research design

A research technique or examination used to deepen the understanding of a particular subject is called an exploratory research project (Nazir, Islam & Rahman, 2021). When there has been little or no investigation into the problem at hand, exploratory research is carried out. Exploratory research necessitates, firstly, familiarisation with the topic in order to gather further understanding about the causes and effects of the issue (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). An exploratory research strategy is indicated in qualitative studies that largely depend on observations and interviews as data sources to cast fresh light onto a phenomenon. The study should employ an exploratory strategy when information about a phenomenon is limited and proper comprehension is required (Williams, 2021).

Nazir et al. (2021) suggested that conducting exploratory investigations should involve three main steps: reviewing the literature; interviewing key informants in the field of specialisation; and conducting focus group interviews. They noticed that, while conducting exploratory investigations, researchers first think about the phenomenon from a broad perspective, and as the study goes on, the phenomenon is seen from a narrower perspective. This is one of the fundamental conditions for making a legitimate addition to the corpus of knowledge through exploratory investigations (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019).

An exploratory research design is used when there are few or no previous studies to serve as a reference for predicting a result; while a descriptive research design is used when there are few or no prior studies to use as a reference for predicting an outcome. Additionally, exploratory inquiries are required when the researcher has to have a thorough understanding of the issue to introduce

theories and important conceptual frameworks to produce a framework of new knowledge (Nazir et al., 2021).

This study employs multi-qualitative techniques for data collecting, and analysis processes based on the pragmatism-based assumptions (Rashid et al., 2019). Considering the gap in the literature that was discovered, research questions were created, and a theoretical framework was created to fill in the blanks. An exploratory design was used to investigate how stakeholder management and outcomes relate to project management and performance.

This investigation was deemed to be exploratory in nature. Exploratory research is frequently employed to conduct early analysis into mostly unexplored areas of a research issue (António & Rita, 2021). New insights into the phenomenon of stakeholder management and project management were revealed through exploratory study. This study utilised an exploratory research design, which was appropriate because it allows for the identification of the environmental conditions that the issues, opportunities, or situations of interest exist in, as well as the identification of important factors or variables that may be found to be pertinent to the study (Williams, 2021).

Additionally, conducting exploratory research aids in the discovery of novel concepts connected to the research subject in question, in addition to being utilised to clarify and characterise the problem under examination (Kenny & Dutt, 2022). In conclusion, it should be remembered that the purpose of exploratory research is to uncover important concerns and key variables that may be utilised to answer the major research questions pertaining to the subject being studied.

4.4 Research approaches

Deduction, induction, and abduction are three different research approaches. A research strategy is a course of deliberate scientific reasoning (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). Following the research's reasoning is thus necessary while analysing a research technique. Kamiri and Mariga (2021) distinguish between the three research methodologies of deduction, induction, and abduction. They especially looked at the development of an approach's argument – that is, its reasoning through time. This research framework identifies whether a line of inquiry, such as theory or empirical study, occurred first. One factor that separates scientific inquiry from other

types of study is its unique addition to knowledge (Khimmatiev et al., 2021). Therefore, although taking different paths, all research methodologies attempt to further knowledge.

4.4.1 Deductive approaches

Deductive positivism is frequently cited as the standard research methodology in both general and logistics research (Busetto et al., 2020). The hypothetico-deductive model's line of reasoning moves from a general law to a particular situation. Deductive inquiry, especially, begins by scanning theory. Then, logical deductions from this theory are offered as *ex ante* hypotheses or propositions, which represent universal rules. Thereafter, these claims or hypotheses are tested empirically. Deductive reasoning is, therefore, described as a theory testing procedure that starts with a generalisation or known theory and checks to determine whether it holds true in a given situation (Chalmers & Cowdell, 2021). On the basis of the empirical tests that corroborate or refute the hypotheses or propositions, general conclusions are offered (Camacho et al., 2021). Developing hypotheses or ideas prior to testing them and generalising the findings is known as deductive research. The new knowledge is comprised of these generalisations and how they are discussed in light of previous information.

When a deductive method is employed in a research endeavour, the author creates a series of hypotheses that must be examined before each hypothesis is put to the test using the proper procedure (Fine et al., 2021). It is crucial to comprehend the different characteristics of deductive reasoning. If the premises are true, then the conclusions of deductive reasoning must be accepted. Deductive reasoning entails articulating the conclusions' contents, and the premises, in an implicit manner, making the argument non-implicit (Harris et al., 2019). The conclusion must still follow if the argument's additional premises are introduced. There is no intermediate level of validity for a deductive argument; it is either true or false. Applying such an argument does not require making any decisions, and no judgment is required to arrive at the outcome and conclusion.

According to Hendren et al. (2023), the deductive research technique examines a certain hypothesis and conducts tests to determine whether or not it holds true in the intended context. The deductive method follows a logical progression, perfectly. A new assumption is reached through argument, after starting with a hypothesis. This hypothesis is examined through

comparison with the observations, after which it is either accepted or rejected (Kamiri & Mariga, 2021). Deductive reasoning is sometimes referred to as a general to specific (top-down) reasoning process. The inductive method, however, is just the opposite contrary. In other words, inductive investigations do not involve making any assumptions, but the deductive technique involves generating assumptions and evaluating them during the research process.

4.4.2 Inductive approaches

According to Fellows and Liu (2021), the deductive research process can be thought of as the antithesis of the inductive research process. Argument in this process follows the pattern of case - outcome - rule, moving from a single empirical case or a set of observations to generic law; or from facts to theory. Knowledge of a general framework, or body of literature, is not always required as a starting point (Badea et al., 2020). Developing (post hoc) hypotheses or statements about the world are the result of actual observations, and their generalisation occurs through logical argument within a theoretical framework. In other words, inductive investigation begins with actual observations (facts). Induction also attempts to construct theory, rather than test it. Hypotheses or propositions are generated after this research procedure, based on the empirical examination (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019); rather than prior to observations.

The inductive method starts with individual observations, before making broad generalisations. After choosing an appropriate number of observations, through the inductive technique, one can generalise the conclusion to all groups of related conditions and circumstances (Carlos-Arroyo et al., 2023). It is necessary to test these generalisations, some of which may be confirmed and others rejected. Therefore, every principle that is formed through inductive reasoning is theoretically testable. The researchers should record what they see during the induction process honestly, without any prejudice or bias, and with an open mind. Following that, these findings provide a basis for the formulation of the theories and guidelines that constitute scientific knowledge (Chalmers & Cowdell, 2021). Additionally, inductive researchers believe that one may rationally extend the findings into all-encompassing principles, if the scientific presumptions are confirmed (Clark et al., 2021).

No assumptions are made in the early phases of research, because there is still work to be done, and the researcher is unsure of the type and quality of findings. With inductive reasoning, the researcher builds an abstract, or provides a description of the events under study using the observations (Fine et al., 2021). The main advantage of using an inductive method is that there is no need for a pre-made framework or model. Obviously, although being generalised, principles should be checked through a logical process (deductive approach). Because of various issues, the inductive method has received criticism. The primary problem with the inductive approach is that the researchers may be swayed by their incomplete understanding of the relationships and study results (Halperin & Heath, 2020).

Some contend that the fact that induction is reliant on human observations makes it a concept that can be refuted. The German philosopher, Kant, developed a new school of thought that challenged the correspondence theory of truth and addressed ontological questions for the first time (Hargitai et al., 2021). Truth is the congruence between an objective notion and reality, which no scientist or philosopher before Kant had disputed (external subject). However, observation is a form of interpretation, meaning that people interpret their experiences and observations of the world according to their cultural and personal perspectives. Therefore, while a portion of the universe, as it is represented by science, has its origins in realities outside of existence; the rest has its origins in how it is classified the world.

4.4.3 Abductive research process

A ‘puzzling’ observation or anomaly that cannot be explained by a known theory may serve as the starting point for abductive research (Camacho et al., 2021); alternatively, theories may also be purposefully used to explain a phenomenon. In both instances, an actual phenomena and an observation serve as the starting point for the abductive research process. However, even in the event of a ‘puzzling’ observation, theoretical background information is crucial, even if it cannot fully explain the phenomena (Eden & Nielsen, 2020). In order to establish a potentially matching framework, or to expand the theory employed before this observation, the researcher starts a creative iterative process of theory matching or systematic combining (Denny & Weckesser, 2022).

When researchers purposely choose the abductive method, they are applying a fresh theory or conceptualisation to a pre-existing reality. This method is used, for instance, when using theories from different disciplines in logistics (Fellows & Liu, 2021). It is crucial to note that the processes of collecting empirical data and developing theories in abductive research overlap in a learning loop (Ferreira-Lopes et al., 2021). The abductive process seeks to propose novel ideas in the form of fresh hypotheses or claims (Eden & Nielsen, 2020). Abduction generalises hypotheses or propositions to new information, only after applying these hypotheses or propositions in additional empirical investigations, or after their verification in a theory-testing phase. Inductive reasoning generalises them to new knowledge after this step. Thus, an abduction argument follows the steps of rule, case, and result (Clark, 2021).

4.4.4 Combination of inductive and deductive methods

The merging of the two techniques in social/management research was prompted by the necessity to resolve the discrepancy between subjective and objective processes in the creation of new information, or the re-examination of existing knowledge in order to give thorough explanations of the essential factors. It is not hard to combine deductive and inductive methods. da Silva and Ledgerwood (2020) noted that certain combinations have major benefits. In a single study, depending on the topic or research objectives, a mixed method refers to the employment of deductive or quantitative, and inductive or qualitative, methodologies (Carlos-Arroyo et al., 2023). The unusual character of business operations, which incorporate objects and constructions, as well as social actors, makes it logical to blend inductive and deductive methodologies in a management sciences study.

4.4.5 The approach used for the study

After weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the inductive and deductive approaches, the researcher decided that an inductive approach was best suited for this study (Clark, 2021). This is because the approach facilitates a sophisticated exploratory investigation of cause and effect in the interactions between two or more variables (Denny & Weckesser, 2022). This is also consistent with the assumptions of interpretivism, which served as the study's chosen philosophical perspective. The researcher was able to fill in the gaps in the relationship between stakeholder

management and project management by using an inductive technique to create the framework for this study.

This was accomplished through an exploratory analysis of how and why organisational stakeholder management affects project performance (Carlos-Arroyo et al., 2023). Non-numerical data collection and analysis techniques were used, and the results of the study were trustworthy (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019). Due to its ability to provide high-quality results in management and social sciences, particularly with regard to the relationship between management and other factors, many academics have backed the use of an inductive framework (Bhimani, 2020).

4.5 Research strategies

Research procedures, also known as research strategies, are the techniques a researcher uses to gather information in order to make plausible inferences (Badea et al., 2020). Different sorts of research designs or strategies are used to implement the study technique. By converting research methodology into techniques, equipment and tools, the researcher is able to examine the reasons for a specific problem through the use of study design (Carlos-Arroyo et al., 2023). As stated below, the three main categories of research investigations are further separated into several types of research design.

4.5.1 Qualitative research approach

There are three different types of research designs: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed. The researcher must select the design that is most suited to the research topic. Apgar and Cadmus (2021) identified mixed method research as the blending of quantitative and qualitative research methods from the distinctive positivism and interpretivism research viewpoints. A mixed method approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies, is comprehensive and yields more knowledge (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). For the purposes of this study, the researcher adopted the qualitative approach.

The main goal of qualitative research is to identify and understand the significance that a person or group of people attaches to a social or human event (Argyres et al., 2020). History has demonstrated that the foundations of qualitative research are found in anthropology, sociology, the humanities, and evaluation. Data that cannot be quantified are produced through the open-ended

research questions employed in qualitative studies. This method allows the researcher to understand problems by looking at their unique contexts and the meanings that others attribute to them (Atkinson et al., 2021). Its main objective is to give meaning or purpose to participants' ideas and experiences of reality.

The key underpinnings of qualitative research are that reality is a social construction; that components are intricately interwoven and difficult to quantify; that the subject matter is essential and that the data is acquired from an insider's perspective (Azzaakiyyah et al., 2023). Even if it is subjective in nature, this type of study respects diversity, culture, and social justice; as a consequence, it delivers a variety of information that is up-to-date. Participation, interviews and observations are the principal data collection methods employed in this strategy. The social component of science is the focus of qualitative research. The researcher uses semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions to collect data using qualitative techniques. Interviews are typically conducted at a subject's home or in another calm location, such a conference room (Badea et al., 2020). Qualitative research is typically used when a subject is poorly understood and there is a natural desire to fully understand the situation. Participant interviews in qualitative research typically produce a rich narrative that is then evaluated to answer the research question. Several inquiries are made in order to thoroughly understand the issue and find a solution (Balne, 2020).

To understand an issue more deeply, qualitative research methodology may use a variety of data gathering techniques, such as observations and interviews (Bhimani, 2020). Qualitative research is flexible and evolves as new data is acquired, providing a holistic picture of the topic and allowing the researchers to fully immerse themselves in the inquiry. The researcher acts as the research instrument, and the study's starting point is determined by ongoing data analysis. The decision to utilise a qualitative technique calls for thorough preparation, which includes taking into account the appropriate research design for the study, the amount of time required to finish the study, a strategy for collecting data, and the resources available to gather data.

Finally, it is important to examine any prejudices or presumptions one may have about the topic design (Biggs et al., 2021). The first stage in selecting a sample group for qualitative research is evaluating who is qualified to participate, in light of the study subject. The participant must have had direct experience with, or exposure to, the research topic. A thorough interview will reveal

details about the participant's interactions with the research subject or occurrence. There will be a few general questions for all participants, as well as additional ones based on their experiences and replies. Because of this, sample sizes are typically small, but there is a lot of narrative material to examine and assess in order to identify important trends (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019). As shown by Bhimani (2020), this enables the researcher to venture beyond statistical findings. The researcher adopted this research design in this study as it allowed the researcher to understand problems by looking at their unique context.

4.6 Research choices

The numerous methods for data collecting and processing are research options. These consist of 'the mono method, numerous techniques, and mixed methodologies' (Adams & McGuire, 2022). These writers claimed that the mono approach entails using a strategy for gathering data and a conforming method for analysing that data. Multiple approaches make use of more than one data gathering method and associated data processing (Rashid et al., 2019). This may be done by utilising many methods for data gathering and analysis; either quantitative (multi-method) or qualitative (multi-method) methods. On the other hand, mixed techniques integrate quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedures in a study, either simultaneously or sequentially. Below is a discussion of these options.

4.6.1 Mono method

A single data gathering approach and one data analysis process are referred to as a mono method (Apgar & Cadmus, 2021). Data can be obtained and analysed qualitatively or quantitatively (numerically), and then the results can be summarised numerically using complex statistical analysis (Kenny & Dutt, 2022). This method's primary flaw is the absence of data triangulation, and it is possible that the instrument's validity and dependability are in doubt. Due to the potential need for several, or mixed, approaches to enable data and methodological triangulation, it might not be the best way to address complicated or dynamic research topics (António & Rita, 2021). In light of this, the researcher did not consider the mono method to be appropriate for investigating the creation of a comprehensive model to enhance strategic leadership for sustainability in hotels.

4.6.2 Multiple methods

In research, multiple approaches to data gathering and the associated data processing can be employed. Nazir et al. (2021) divided various techniques into the four broad groups: multiple-methods quantitative research; multi-methods qualitative studies; mixed methods research; and mixed model research. This research used the multi-methods qualitative study approach, since it enabled the researcher to fuse several data collecting approaches. This method focuses on the depth of the information obtained up until the point of data saturation, rather than a large sample.

4.7. Target population

The definition of a target population is ‘those units for whom the survey findings are meant to be generalised’ (Sharma et al., 2021). Thus, a ‘population is the larger pool from which the sample is formed and on the basis of which generalisations of the findings are sought, and it thus encompasses all the components that compose the planned unit of analysis’. Accordingly, the target population was all the five-star hotels in KwaZulu Natal province.

4.8. Sampling

A sample is a portion of the complete population from which a researcher gathers data (Anjum, 2020). The sample included heads of different portfolios in the selected five-star hotels within KwaZulu-Natal province. All levels of the workplace were represented by participants, allowing the researcher to assess a range of viewpoints, ideas, and situations without limiting the possibility for rich data by concentrating on a single level, rather than all of them. Accordingly, twenty (20) people who work for the selected five-star hotels within KwaZulu-Natal province formed the sample size for this qualitative research. The identified sample size for the research on a strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal encompassed top management, department heads, employees, and guests within the luxury hospitality sector. By engaging with these stakeholders, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the leadership approaches and practices that contribute to sustainability in the context of high-end accommodations in the unique setting of KwaZulu-Natal. The people from these various units are internal or external stakeholders in hospitality industry projects (Kenny & Dutt, 2022).

4.8.1. Sampling strategy

According to Nazir et al. (2021), sampling is a method that researchers employ to purposefully select a smaller sample of representative items or persons from a pre-defined population to function as subjects for observation or investigation. Researchers generally employ sampling because it is difficult to evaluate every member of a community. Despite being a subset, it nevertheless serves as a good indicator of the population and is simple, inexpensive, and quick to analyse (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). However, every researcher must keep in mind that the greatest way to get reliable, valid, and accurate data is to test every participant. Only when evaluating every person is impractical does one turn to sampling (Sharma et al., 2021).

A sample is a representation of the entire population, from which data is collected by a researcher (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). Sampling is the methodical selection of a smaller subset from a larger set with the intention of examining particular patterns and/or behaviours in that representation in order to draw a conclusion (Adams & McGuire, 2022). As far as sampling goes, probability and non-probability are two of the most common types. Participants in this research were picked using a non-probability selection method due to the qualitative nature of the study. This approach means that not all of the researcher's sampling units are selected to be part of the sample size (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019).

4.8.2. Probability sampling

A method of choosing units called probability sampling gives each one an equal chance of being picked (Rashid et al., 2019). Four further categories of probability sampling are cluster; multistage; stratified; and basic random sampling, which are all examples of systematic random sampling.

4.8.2.1 Simple random sampling

In this approach, each person in the population has an equal chance of being chosen (Anjum, 2020). Throughout the sampling process, each subject is selected independently from the other population members in a single phase. There is an equal chance that every object in the universe is found in the sample using this sampling strategy (Sharma et al., 2021). Simple random sampling refers to the ease of the sampling procedure. It is considered a fair way to choose a sample from a certain

community, since each participant has an equal chance of getting picked (Sharma et al., 2019). Chance is the sole element that might possibly reduce its representativeness. When the sample is not representative of the population, a random fluctuation is referred to as sampling error. The results of a study must be inferred using a representative sample and objective random selection. Because a sample obtained by simple random sampling is typical of the population, it is possible to extrapolate sample results back to the population. Kenny and Dutt (2022) said that one of the most obvious shortcomings of the fundamental random sampling technique is the need for an exhaustive list of every person in the population.

4.8.2.2 Systematic sampling

Nazir et al. (2021) assert that only the initial unit of a systematic sample is selected at random, with subsequent units being selected over a predefined period of time. Strictly speaking, it cannot be compared to a random sample. Due to its more equal distribution over the whole population, systematic sampling is more likely to out-perform ordinary random sampling. The method's application is practical, affordable, and simple to carry out when applied to a larger population (Argyres et al., 2020).

4.8.2.3 Stratified sampling

According to Nazir et al. (2021), stratified sampling is the division of a population into discrete groups known as strata. In a stratified random selection, individuals are divided into groups according to traits or qualities they share. The number of randomly selected samples obtained from each stratum is related to the size of the population (Kenny & Dutt, 2022). A random sample is then created by combining the strata's subsets. A stratified random sample is required to minimise the possibility of human bias in the decision-making process when choosing the instances to be included in the sample (Batat, 2021). The stratified random sample provides a sample that is fairly typical of the population under study, provided there are not too many missing data points. When it is impossible to adequately divide the population into distinct subgroups, stratified sampling is not practical (Anjum, 2020).

4.8.2.4 Cluster sampling or multi-stage sampling

In cluster sampling, samples are selected from the naturally existing clusters. Cluster sampling differs from all other probabilistic sampling methods in that it does not need gathering frames from each sample unit (Sharma et al., 2021). After being selected, the clusters are put together into frames. After conducting a variety of probability analyses and observations on these frames, conclusions must now be reached.

4.8.2.5 Multi-stage sampling

Another variety of cluster sampling is multi-stage sampling (Helmold & Helmold, 2020). A multi-stage sampling approach is usually suitable for use over an entire country or a large geographic area. The most effective and economical approach to combine several probability sampling techniques is through multistage sampling.

4.8.3. Non-probability sampling

When there is no known or present chance that a member of the population is chosen as a sample subject, the sampling strategy is known as non-probability sampling (Apgar & Cadmus, 2021). There are several non-probability sampling strategies, such as convenience; quota; purposive; snowball; anomalous case; sequential; theoretical; and adaptive sampling. A non-probability sampling approach was utilised due to the qualitative nature of this study. Convenience sampling is used when randomisation is not practical. This is a biased approach that includes convenience; purposeful; snowball; modal; expert; diversity; and proportional techniques (Helmold & Helmold, 2020).

4.8.3.1 Quota sampling

When strata (groups) are being researched, such as the ratio of male to female students, a sample from proportional quota sampling should be representative of the population under investigation. According to Nazir et al. (2021), quota sampling is especially helpful when it is not feasible to gather a probability sample, but one still needs to construct a sample that is as representative of the population being researched as is feasible. Any potential sampling error cannot be calculated, since quota sampling does not employ random selection (Batat, 2021). It is quite possible that units

are selected for the sample, based on difficulties with cost and accessibility, which might result in biased sampling.

4.8.3.2 Self-selection sampling

Self-selection sampling is acceptable when the researcher wishes to allow units (or instances), such as people or organisations, choose whether to participate in the study on their own. The primary determinant is whether study participants choose to engage willingly, rather than in response to contact with a researcher. According to Nazir et al. (2021), this might cut down on the time needed to find relevant units (or instances), that is, persons or organisations that fulfil the criteria for the sample. Potential participants are more likely to be dedicated to the study, which can help with attendance and boost their desire to provide more information about the topic being studied (Nazir et al., 2021). However, some self-selection bias is undoubtedly present.

4.8.3.3 Snowball sampling

In non-probability sampling techniques like snowball sampling, chain sampling, or chain-referral sampling, existing study participants recruit new study participants from their social networks (Atkinson et al., 2021). The sample group appears to be growing like a snowball as a result. As the sample gets larger, enough information is gathered to be useful for research. In secret groups, which are challenging for researchers to enter, this approach is frequently utilised (Argyres et al., 2020). Finding units to include in the sample may be difficult, partly because the relevant population is not clearly listed. It is challenging to calculate the possible sampling error and extrapolate statistical results from the sample to the population.

4.8.3.4 Purposive sampling as a technique

A class of sampling techniques known as ‘purposive sampling’ depends on the researcher’s judgment when selecting the study’s units, such as participants, cases or organisations, events, or data points. The terms ‘judgemental sampling’, ‘selective sampling’, and ‘subjective sampling’ are also used to describe it (Apgar & Cadmus, 2021). Critical case sampling, for instance, might be used to decide whether a phenomenon warrants additional examination before utilising an

expert sample approach to further analyse particular problems. According to Nazir et al. (2021), bias on the part of the researcher might seriously affect any kind of deliberate sampling.

In this study, a purposive sampling strategy was used to conduct interviews with the 20 participants, with the aim of focusing on the objectives of this study. During the data collection procedure, participants presented the main themes. Using this approach, the researcher was able to gather qualitative data, which produced more accurate findings and deeper insights. The results are pertinent to the study, since the researcher used the most competent sources to collect data. A researcher can target certain demographics to gather specialised data for a study. In purposive sampling, the margin of error in data is reduced, since the data sources closely mirror the study environment (Helmold & Helmold, 2020).

The practice of ‘judgmental sampling’ involves deliberately choosing particular locations, individuals, or events, in order to gather essential data that cannot be obtained from other sources. Purposive sampling was used in this study to ensure that the respondents could be easily reached and that the research objectives would be achieved. Interviews were used to get responses from the respondents.

The sample was chosen from among top management, department heads, employees, and guests within the luxury hospitality sector. Participants were chosen from all the stakeholders, both internal and external, so that the researcher could understand various points of view, ideas and situations, without limiting the possibility for rich data by focusing on only one level.

4.9 Sample size

The sample size is the bare minimum required to ensure that the sample is representative of the research population (Batat, 2021). Twenty research participants from the selected five-star hotels within KwaZulu-Natal province were involved in both interviews and focus group interview discussions. For participants to be included in the sample, they needed to be directly employed on the hospitality industry projects; or be a stakeholder directly involved with the hospitality industry projects. All employees and external stakeholders who were not directly working with the hospitality industry were excluded from the sample. The researcher divided the target population

for the study into two groups, one for the interviews and the other for the focus group interviews discussion. The sample size for the interviews is shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.1: Interviews sample size

Designation	Sample
Top management	5
Department heads (HODs)	6
Business Support Unit manager	3
Regulatory Bodies	2
Employees	2
CEO	2
Total	20

Source: (Researcher’s compilation, 2023)

From May to August 2023, 20 participants listed above were all chosen for the semi-structured face-to-face interviews because of their relevance to the selected five-star hotels within KwaZulu-Natal province were interviewed. The interviewees' workplace, in particular, was a handy location for the interviews. Prior to participating in the focus group interview discussions, the researcher chose to analyse the in-person interviews.

4.9.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria for interviews

For the research on developing a strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, the inclusion criteria for interviews will encompass individuals holding key leadership positions within the hospitality industry, particularly in 5-star hotels in the KwaZulu-Natal region. This includes executives, general managers, and department heads directly involved in decision-making processes related to sustainability initiatives. Professionals with a diverse range of experiences and backgrounds in hotel management and sustainability were sought to provide a comprehensive perspective. Additionally, individuals who had successfully implemented sustainability practices in their respective establishments were included to gather insights into practical strategies. Exclusion criteria involved personnel without direct involvement in leadership or sustainability decisions, as well as those from hotels outside the 5-star category or

located outside the specified region. This approach ensures that the interviews are targeted towards individuals with the most relevant expertise and insights pertaining to the strategic leadership and sustainability context in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.

According to Nazir et al. (2021), the initial few interviews provide the researcher with a wealth of information, and further interviews serve to confirm what the researcher has previously discovered. Knowledge is said to have reached saturation at this point. In establishing these inclusion and exclusion criteria, the aim is to create a cohort of interview participants who collectively offer a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of strategic leadership for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. By selecting individuals with the right expertise, experience, and commitment, the study endeavors to generate valuable insights that can inform the development of an effective and contextually relevant strategic leadership framework for sustainability in the hospitality industry.

4.9.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria for focus group interviews

A sample of twenty (20) participants was purposely selected to participate in the focus group interviews. The selection criteria were based on the condition that they were working within the hospitality industry. The selection of twenty participants for the focus group interviews in the hospitality industry was a practical decision aimed at achieving a balance between diversity and manageability. Data saturation occurred when new information or themes stop emerging from the data collection process, indicating that further interviews are unlikely to yield significantly different insights. By stopping at twenty participants, the researcher had determined that a comprehensive understanding of the issues relevant to the research question within the constraints of the study had been gathered, hence, the data saturation was reached at this point.

4.10. Data collection procedures

The term ‘data collection procedure’ refers to the act of obtaining data in order to measure or provide answers to the variables included in the problem statement, research questions, and hypotheses (Nazir et al., 2021). The researcher’s data collection techniques were in accordance with the study’s research objectives. The data collection was through interviews and focus group

interviews therefore primary data was utilised in this investigation. A semi-structured interview was one of the main sources of data gathering.

The data collection procedure utilised in this study required the researcher to approach the head of department for permission to administer the instruments. The researcher then made appointments with participants to conduct in-depth interviews. Due to their high information output, semi-structured interviews were employed to gather data (Atkinson et al., 2021). They are also suited to examining people's real-life experiences, which is an important component of the study. Understanding participants' worldviews and the significance they ascribe to their experiences is the aim of qualitative research (Helmold & Helmold, 2020). Interviews offer a chance to probe more profound consequences. In this case, the interview was useful since it allowed the researcher to examine the attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs that inform people's behaviour. Interviews were recorded in order to guarantee accuracy of the verbatim transcript.

After analysing the interviews data, the researcher then set a date for the group discussion in the form of focus group interviews. This study adopted a multiple-method qualitative research design in which semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group interviews were employed for data collection. As usual with qualitative research, the researcher in this study was fully involved in collecting data in a natural setting (Batat, 2021). The researcher conducted the focus group interviews discussion in which different stakeholders participated while the researcher was a facilitator. This agrees with the principles of qualitative research which require that participants are studied in a natural setting and not in a laboratory. Also, participants were not requested to respond to any questionnaires (António & Rita, 2021) The section below details the steps taken to collect the three categories of data in this study.

Pilot study

Atkinson et al., (2021) state that a pilot study is typically conducted as a small-scale preliminary investigation to test the feasibility, reliability, and validity of the research methods and instruments before the main study. It helps researchers identify and resolve any potential issues or shortcomings in their data collection procedures before proceeding with the full-scale study.

For the purposes of this research, the researcher conducted some form of pre-testing or pilot testing of their data collection instruments and procedures before commencing the main study. This

involved testing the interview protocols, ensuring clarity of questions, assessing the appropriateness of the data collection techniques (such as semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews), and refining the overall research process. In practical terms, the researcher conducted mock interviews and focus group discussions with a small sample of participants or colleagues who are similar to the target population. Feedback from these pilot sessions were then used to refine the interview protocols, clarify any ambiguous questions, and make necessary adjustments to the data collection procedures.

4.10.1 Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were used to collect data in this qualitative research and this involved conducting intensive individual interviews with 20 participants to explore the strategic leadership for sustainability in hotels. As noted by Nazir et al. (2021), this technique offers the opportunity to capture rich, descriptive data about people's behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions, and to unfold complex processes. In agreement, Nazir et al. (2021) said that in-depth semi-structured interviews increase the validity of information gathered because participants tend to share their opinions, values, attitudes, and beliefs in relation to the context of the research problem. Specifically, in this study, data was collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group interviews discussion that had a less-structured format with some level of flexibility.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the individuals in strategic leadership for sustainability in hotels who were purposively selected. The semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 20 participants, all selected because of their relevance to the main focus of the study, from May 2023 to August 2023. The researcher decided to analyse the face-to-face interviews before proceeding to the focus group interview discussions. Conducting a detailed analysis of face-to-face interviews before moving to focus group discussions was done to ensure a commitment to methodological rigor and systematic inquiry. This approach allowed the researcher to carefully consider the insights gained from individual interviews and use them to inform subsequent data collection and analysis activities, thereby enhancing the overall quality and validity of the research findings.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant for between 45 minutes and an hour, depending on the personality of the participants and their capacity to explain, since the questions

were open-ended. All the questions were conducted within the selected five-star hotels within KwaZulu-Natal province. The researcher called the selected participants telephonically to arrange for a suitable time; and the venue was chosen by the participants. The researcher explained the requirement of the venue to the participants as one with minimal distractions to assist the participants to focus on the interview (Apgar & Cadmus, 2021). The researcher, after seeking the approval from the participants, recorded the interviews and they were transcribed to capture all responses accurately. Capturing and transcribing was further used in data analysis.

The interview questions were designed in a way that made it easy for the researcher to build on the collected data from the different interviews and focus group interviews, which eventually led to a point of understanding of the issues pertaining to sustainable management practices in the hospitality industry, and the recommendations from the participants for the improvement of the situation. This collaboration changes the researcher from the position of an expert to the position of a process facilitator (Nazir et al., 2021). The reason why the researcher used semi-structured and open-ended questions was to allow the emergence of rich descriptions and stakeholder perspectives to prevail (Argyres et al., 2020). Questions were open-ended, so there were no questions which required a yes or no answer. A probing technique was also used by the researcher in cases where the participants were providing vague responses. Probing is one of the advantages of using interviews since the researcher can ask participants to elaborate on some of the responses. The researcher is also allowed to ask follow-up questions, and natural conversation is allowed (Nazir et al., 2021). The same probing techniques were used by the researcher during the focus group interviews since the researcher played a facilitator role during these workshops. Although the researcher played a facilitator role, notes were taken during the focus group interviews, and group presentations were recorded in the same manner as face-to-face interviews were.

Since the researcher was familiar with the terminology in the hospitality industry sector, it was easy for the researcher to understand and make sense of some issues of convergence and divergence during interviews (António & Rita, 2021). It was also noticed and observed that some participants who participated in both interviews and the focus group interviews were more confident in participating in face-to-face interviews than in the focus group interviews. This might be because participants enjoyed anonymity and confidentiality after being assured that their

identities were not going to be disclosed. Participants were a little bit reluctant to participate in the focus group interview discussions since they might have been afraid that their views could be taken as a direct insult because of their different roles in working relationships.

Although the interviewing technique is highly recommended by qualitative researchers, some challenges that were encountered by the researcher during the study cannot be ignored. These involved skepticism by stakeholders, especially the municipal officials, to participate in the research. The researcher also faced a difficulty when trying to engage in 'soft issues' with the project managers, all of whom were engineers and technical officials; and soft issues are regarded as something beyond their scope of work.

4.10.1.1 Justification for using interviews

Creswell (2014) argued that interviews are valuable tools for collecting data in qualitative research. A one-on-one interview allows the researcher to interact with the participants and to observe non-verbal cues during the interview process. In this study, a semi-structured interview was used to allow for an open-ended discussion of the research topic. Nazir et al. (2021) noted that semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to understand the complexity of the situation without imposing any prior categorisation.

Through choosing interviews as a method of data collection, the researcher hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives through dialogue and through the language they used in constructing the different discourses. This interview method allows the researcher to seek clarity and probe for deeper understanding. As a result, the reporting and analysis of data is reflective of the views of the participants. The researcher is able to build trust and rapport with the participants and the trust in the interaction or relationship makes it easier for the participants to share their own experiences without fear of being judged (Adams & McGuire, 2022).

4.10.2 Focus Group Interviews

Four groups, of five participants each, participated in the focus group discussion which took place on 09 October 2023, which was also used for data collection. Findings from the semi-structured interviews were then used to determine the extent of the problematic situation of the research

study. Themes that emerged from the key informant semi-structured interviews were then used as the bases for the focus group interviews.

4.10.3 Secondary sources of data collection

The researcher also embarked on collecting secondary data. Secondary data included a documents review of reports; peer reviewed journal publications; project plans and project progress reports; as well as newspaper articles the five-star hotels within KwaZulu-Natal province at large. The benefit of the secondary data was that the researcher learned other aspects of the problem situation and discovered other areas that required further attention.

4.10.4 Primary sources of data collection

The primary research instruments utilised in this study to get first-hand information from the participants were the key informant interviews and focus group. The researcher used semi-structured, open-ended questions to get relevant data on the challenges of stakeholder management on projects. The gap identified in the review of related literature and the study's objectives were carefully aligned in the design of the interviews.

4.10.5 Grounded theory

Using a sociological method known as 'grounded theory', which is based on the opinions of participants, the researcher creates a general, abstract theory of a process, activity, or interaction. This method includes processes for data collection, category refinement, and interrelationship analysis (Biggs et al., 2021). The systematic grounded theory approach includes the following steps: categorising data (open coding); choosing a category; including it in a theoretical model (axial coding); and ultimately explicating a story from the relationships between these categories (selective coding). Using this investigative strategy, the researcher may construct theoretical accounts based on concepts, classifications, and propositions. It is employed to provide a theoretical framework for understanding organisational difficulties associated with the adoption and exploitation of information technology breakthroughs and applications (Maj & Nuangjamnong, 2020). This suggests that the main disadvantage of this approach is that it is

susceptible to the rigour and data-interpretation skills of the researchers, which makes it unattractive for novice researchers.

4.10.6 Ethnography

The use of ethnography, a method of study with origins in anthropology and sociology, allows for the prolonged examination of the common patterns of behaviour, language, and activities of an entire cultural group. Observations and interviews are frequently utilised in data collection (Creswell, 2014). In ethnographic research, people or the setting are carefully documented before data are examined for themes or issues (Rashid et al., 2019).

Its goal is to examine a group of persons in order to understand how they perceive their social interactions. For example, communities may establish a practice culture and communication techniques to use technology breakthroughs together. Information technology researchers can utilise ethnography as a design to investigate the organisational, social, and human aspects of technological advancements (Camacho et al., 2021). Mendiratta and Srivastava (2023) stated that it is a successful assessment of the needs of technology users and facilitates consumers' perception of information technology advancements and applications.

In an ethnographic study, the researcher spends a lot of time engaging with participants in their daily life through interaction, conversation, and engagement. Since much of it is done through observation over time, it has a longitudinal perspective (Rashid et al., 2019).

4.10.7 Archival research

The administrative records of both public and private organisations are reviewed as the main sources of data in archival research (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). Archival research uses secondary sources that assist academics in responding to questions regarding the past and how a phenomenon has changed through time. It is crucial to consider the availability of the data and whether or not the commercial or governmental entity would enable access, before putting this research strategy into practice.

According to Chiwawa (2019), researchers using archived data are advised to think about four important considerations before beginning their research: Is paying for access to the data necessary? Has the relevant data been processed, or are they still in their unprocessed state? Does the database's concentration lie with the organisation or the phenomenon? How good is the data's accuracy? What sets apart an excellent researcher or archival worker is their ability to overcome these four challenges. This does not suggest that archive research and other study techniques that rely on secondary sources of data are flawless.

4.11. Data quality control

The detection of potentially missing necessary information, checking for data transfer issues, and deleting duplicates and remaining outliers, all served to provide data quality control. By choosing the appropriate participants for this study and making sure that the information provided by them was accurate, data quality control was also ensured.

Qualitative research has been criticised for lacking the rigour and credibility of traditional quantitative research (Williams, 2021). With quantitative research, the emphasis is on the accuracy of data and the extent to which data can be generalised. According to Xu et al. (2023), quantitative research concerns itself with the extent to which results are consistent over time (reliability) and whether the research truly measures what it was intended to measure (validity).

Qualitative research disputes the idea of the generalisability of results and argues that meaning is historically situated and therefore no two people can experience the same 'problem' in the same way. With qualitative research there is a multiplicity of information and results can thus not be generalised across different contexts (Zhang, Zheng & Wang Sharma, 2020). In qualitative research, reference is made to various techniques that can be used to evaluate and validate qualitative research. For example, the hallmarks of qualitative research that can be used to ensure the validity of quantitative research. The researcher acknowledges that her framework and context had an influence on the conception of the research. Therefore, by referring to her personal journey with regards to the study, the researcher provided the context and foundation upon which the research was grounded.

4.11.1 Credibility

This variable ensures that the research accurately assesses or evaluates the hypotheses for which it was designed. Several of the concerns raised evaluate how well the outcomes correspond to reality (Zhang et al., 2020). The emphasis is consequently on making sure that the research methods used retain the quality of the data and that it accurately represents the subject being studied. Regarding credibility, the semi-structured, in-depth interviews and focus group interview discussions were used to collect valuable first-hand information from the context of participants' experiences about the challenges encountered by the selected five-star hotels within KwaZulu-Natal province. The focus group interviews were conducted in a flexible manner which allowed the participants to share their experiences and their opinions freely, and the researcher was able to observe the participants' reactions during discussions.

Audio recordings were used for the in-depth interviews and focus group interview discussions sessions to ensure that the findings that emerged from the interviews were not biased, but were a true reflection of the views of the participants. The researcher used pre-determined, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews discussion questions to provide consistency between the in-depth interviews and focus group interview discussions, which is critical in understanding a research problem.

4.11.2 Dependability

Similar outcomes are attained if equivalent techniques are applied in the same situation and under the same conditions (O'Brien & Aliabadi, 2020). The methods should be sufficiently comprehensive for other researchers to repeat them in related studies, and the researcher must be able to describe the several phases required to prove the study's, and the methods', dependability. Dependability was ensured by clearly documenting the research process and ensuring that the process was logical and traceable. As suggested by Williams (2021) the research questions for the in-depth interviews were designed in a manner that should allow future studies to produce similar results.

4.11.3 Transferability

The study's findings' applicability to other, relevant research is determined by this variable. Since the results of a qualitative inquiry are context-specific, demonstrating their applicability to other contexts may be challenging. Transferability has been noted as a challenge in qualitative research

(Williams, 2021). Issues of transferability were considered important by the researcher; therefore the researcher made sure that the study was guided by the research objectives. The researcher used the theoretical framework as a guide to construct the interview guide (Annexure B) to develop the research questions that would, in turn, inform the research objectives underpinning the study (Williams, 2021). Transferability of the study's findings and data to other sectors is crucial for achieving the research's objectives.

4.12 Data analysis

The assessment of a transcript's contextual implications is the main goal of content analysis (O'Brien & Aliabadi, 2020). Content analysis is a non-numerical technique for data analysis that is frequently employed by researchers to look at narrative data by examining the substance of the transcripts in the investigation's context. By applying codes to the many themes and patterns found in the transcript, this study employed qualitative content analysis to analyse the transcript's content. The analysis and interpretation of non-numerical data benefited greatly by the grouping of the information into themes, subthemes, or patterns (Rashid et al., 2019). The qualitative data were analysed using content analysis, which looked for recurring themes that directly addressed the research questions. This made it possible for the researcher to investigate the phenomenon using the textual interpretation of the transcripts, providing logical arguments from several angles.

This study employed qualitative research where semi-structured interviews for both key informants and focus groups were employed for data collection and analysis. Data collected in interviews was analysed using thematic analysis which was assisted by NVIVO. Focus group interviews were chosen because of its flexible, but systematic, process that is useful in bringing about the improvement in a problematic situation. In depth semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were conducted with participants from different stakeholder groups.

In order to more effectively find themes that spoke more closely to the study objectives, the huge volume of transcribed material was reduced and rearranged with the intention of discovering acceptable themes and sub-themes. However, because all of the replies relevant to the study questions were equally reflected in the data analysis, reducing the data did not mean that important topics were removed. The transcript's mention of each dataset was mirrored in the order in which they were organised and presented in the condensed datasets. Finally, logical inferences were

derived from the themes that had been found by carefully examining how each topic aimed to answer the stated research question (Ridzuan, Ridzuan & Ridzuan, 2021)

4.12.1 A six-phase approach to thematic analysis

Phase 1: Familiarising with the gathered data

In order to complete this phase, the researcher must thoroughly and actively engage with the data by first transcribing the interactions, reading and re-reading the transcripts, and/or listening to the recordings (Scholtz, de Klerk & de Beer, 2020). The researcher must be fully conversant with all facets of the data and must possess a clear grasp of the interaction's core concepts. The groundwork for further analysis is laid in this phase. It is vital to use analytic software that enables the researcher to code both transcripts and audio recordings (Sebastianelli, Isil & Li, 2021). Software NVivo (version 14) was chosen because it complied with these specifications.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

In NVivo, the imported audio-file takes the form of an audio wave, which can be listened to and divided up into audio excerpts. The author followed the NVivo audio coding process described by Sebastianelli et al. (2021). After becoming familiar with the data, the researcher started looking for preliminary codes, which are aspects of the data that seem interesting and pertinent. These codes are more frequent and specific than themes, yet they nevertheless act as a context indicator for the discourse. To begin the analysis, two source folders were created in NVivo: one for audio recordings and the other for transcripts. The word-formatted transcript was easily imported into the NVivo program. Following the transfer of all required files, the next step was coding, which involved grouping extracts from the various documents that were related to one another into nodes. The transcripts and audio files were reviewed and listened to in detail, and any noteworthy sections were coded to free nodes (Skarbek, 2020).

Phase 3: Searching for themes

The process then moved on to the next step, which was to start interpreting the gathered codes. Broad themes are created by mixing or dividing pertinent data extracts. The relationship between codes, sub-themes, and themes should be acknowledged in the researcher's argument (Septiani et al., 2022). Audio files were listened to, and relevant audio excerpts were coded to new and/or

existing nodes. The content of the nodes was constantly reviewed by simply double clicking them. Coding stripes were also turned on to help manage the coding process by providing some insights; for example, where the densest parts or coding were, and so on. When this was done, nodes associated with each source were created with the relevant details (Skarbek, 2020). Apart from coding to nodes, the researcher was also able to connect ideas emerging from two or more sources using ‘see also links’.

Phase 4: Theme review

The themes were next examined in further detail, after which the researcher chose whether to integrate, enhance, separate, or reject the initial ideas. According to Vaughn and Jacquez (2020), the information contained in the themes should make sense, but there should be clear distinctions between them. Typically, this is completed in two stages: the first phase involves validating the themes in relation to the coded extracts, and the second phase involves validating the full data set. During this stage, a themed map is produced.

Phase 5: Theme definition and naming

The themes and potential sub-themes of the data must be ‘refined and defined’ at this step. The prominent topics must be strengthened by more research (Septiani et al., 2022). The researcher must provide topic headings and pithy working summaries that clearly and simply communicate the essence of each subject. At this point, the concepts must coalesce into a cohesive story about the facts. Annotations were created for both audio files and transcripts but they were particularly important when coding audio files because they were also acting as a reminder or clarification of audio excerpts.

Phase 6: Report production

Strijker, Bosworth and Bouter (2020) assert that the researchers must then add precise examples that are fascinating and vivid and link to the research topic and material in order to turn their analysis into a piece of writing that is intelligible. The report’s conclusions must convince the reader of the report’s value and veracity. It must include an evaluation based on actual facts and should explicitly address the research issue, going beyond a simple explanation of the ideas. When the analysis process reaches an advanced stage, a broader picture and/or a visual representation of

the data and progress of the work becomes a necessary prerequisite for the development and testing of the theory (Septiani et al., 2022). At this level, reports, queries, charts and models were created.

4.13. Elimination of bias

The planning, collecting, analysing and publishing stages of research can all be tainted by bias (Maj & Nuangjamnong, 2020). The authors also stressed the need to understand study bias so that studies may critically and objectively assess the findings and avoid solutions that can be hazardous, or of poor quality. The researcher focused on making sure that bias was eliminated, and that objectivity persisted throughout the inquiry.

- **Non-use of gender aligned words**

A kind of linguistic prescriptivism, known as gender-neutral language, tries to exclude (or neutralise) references to gender in sentences that describe persons (Matyokurehwa et al., 2020). The study continued to exclude anything that would reveal the gender of research participants, including gender-specific job titles. Moreover, to refute the idea that language subtly perpetuates gender and gender stereotypes, gender-neutral pronouns were used for people who were either male or female.

- **Avoiding categorising people based on their race or ethnicity**

According to McGill et al. (2021), the more significant an identity is to a person's sense of self, the more driven they should be to maintain and develop it. In fact, according to the social identity theory, people are just as driven by their own sense of self-worth to maintain and enhance the self-esteem of the group, as they are by their own. Popular social identities are significant sources of self-esteem for people (Mitchell & Rich, 2020). Vocabulary identifying persons of this origin was avoided throughout this investigation to prevent the inferiority or superiority of ethnicity and race.

- **Avoiding language that implies judgment or feeds stereotypes**

Bias and its related phenomena have been subjected to a more thorough and rigorous investigation as a result of the nature of prejudice. Nind and Katramadou (2023) asserted that industries, including business and health as well as related disciplines like sociology and political science, are now interested in prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination. In an attempt to address this issue, the study avoided using wording that implies judgment or supports biases.

4.14. Ethical considerations

- **Obtaining informed permission from participants:**

The term 'informed consent' refers to the importance of properly informing participants about the purpose and scope of the study. Only when study participants are fully informed of the study's goals, and the extent to which they are being asked to participate in the research project, can they provide their informed permission. To achieve this goal, the researcher provided participants with information about the type of activity and the intended study subjects (Annexure A). Additionally, the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions was disclosed by the researcher.

- **Making sure there is no harm to participants:**

To ensure that study participants are not harmed, researchers must implement safety procedures. Formal authorisation from the relevant warehouse was requested and granted in order to ensure that no participant was held responsible for his or her comments.

- **Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality:**

The researcher was in charge of ensuring that no participant's name was disclosed. The researcher restricted access to raw data in order to preserve participant anonymity by securely storing all data, presenting results in a way that made it hard to identify particular people, and obtaining consent before utilising the data in the future. In addition to collating the study's findings to reflect the opinions of all participants as a whole, acronyms were employed to safeguard individual identities.

- **Ensuring that consent is obtained:**

When requesting authorisation to do research, it is crucial to follow the right steps. The study's ability to reach participants determines how successful it is. The UKZN Research Committee's ethical approval was obtained before data collection.

4.15. Chapter summary

This chapter detailed and defended the technique and research design that were employed in the investigation. Before choosing interpretivism as the philosophical perspective best suited for this study, this chapter provided a thorough analysis of the various research philosophies, highlighting their benefits and drawbacks, as well as the subject areas where they are most effective. The

correlational technique, with an advanced explanatory design, was used in a non-experimental, ex post facto research design. This was supported by concomitant transformative mixing approaches and a pro-data advocacy emphasis. The study's sample size was determined by considering the competence, accessibility, and willingness of the respondents to participate; the study's population was also considered in respect to various sampling techniques. This explains why purposive sampling was used to choose individuals.

In this chapter, the data collection procedure, and a six-phase approach to thematic analysis was also discussed. The combination of semi-structured interviews and focus groups was justified in the chapter. The ethical considerations of the study were also presented in this chapter. Issues of reliability, validity, trustworthiness, reliability, validity, and trustworthiness, as well as ethical considerations, have likewise been discussed in detail.” The next chapter presents the results of the study from the data gathered from the face-to-face interviews.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION FROM INTERVIEWS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter gave a detailed description of the research methodology utilised for this study, as well as details on the population, sample, and procedures used for data collecting and analysis. The study's qualitative findings are presented in this chapter, based on the information generated by the conducted interviews. As part of this research study, several interviews were conducted with KwaZulu Natal province stakeholders. The primary aim of the interviews was to explore the strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal province. This chapter presents and discusses all five objectives of the study. The following research objectives guided the researcher in conducting the interviews:

- To establish the sustainable leadership practices for 5-star hotels within Kwa-Zulu Natal province.
- To identify factors that contribute to sustainable leadership for Kwa-Zulu Natal province 5-star hotels from perspective of internal and external factors.
- To evaluate the extent to which these factors influence business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal province.
- To explore the primary challenges faced by 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal in effectively implementing a strategic leadership framework for sustainability?
- To recommend strategies that can improve the business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal province.

Each focal area was covered by a number of questions, and the interviewer guided the conversation by asking pointed questions that led to honest discussions. Each interview lasted from thirty minutes to an hour, depending on the interviewee's availability. The results that are presented in this chapter were generated using NVivo 14. The advantage of NVivo is its compatibility with thematic analysis by enabling the development of nodes. The nodes additionally offer 'a simple-to-work-with structure' for developing scripts and identifying themes.

5.2 Themes of the study

Thematic analysis involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. Guided by the word cloud and tree map, the main themes identified are presented in Figure 5.5, below:

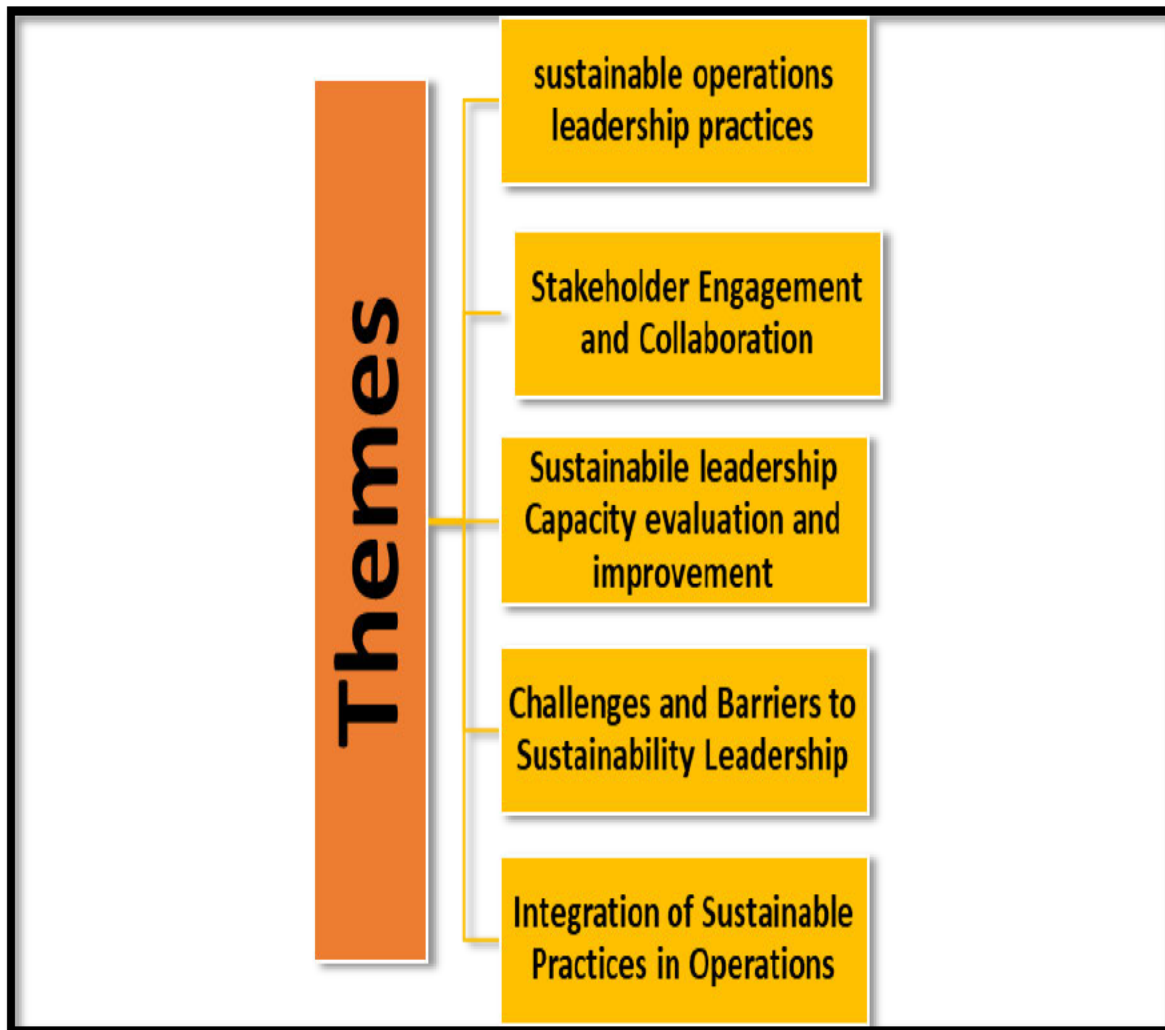


Figure 5.1: Emerging Themes

For ease of reference, as per Figure 5.1 above, the analysis was aligned to the five key themes discussed, as follows.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Sustainable leadership practices for operations

In the dynamic landscape of the hospitality industry, 5-star hotels play a pivotal role as luxury establishments that attract discerning clientele. In the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa,

the intersection of opulence and environmental consciousness becomes increasingly significant. This research delves into a crucial aspect of sustaining these high-end establishments by exploring a strategic leadership framework tailored for 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The first thematic focus addresses ‘Leadership Practices for Sustainable Operations’. As the demand for sustainable practices intensifies globally, leaders in the hospitality sector must adopt innovative approaches to integrate environmentally responsible measures into their operations. This theme aims to scrutinize and conceptualise leadership practices that not only enhance the operational efficiency and financial viability of 5-star hotels but also contribute to a more sustainable and eco-friendly industry. By understanding the nuanced role of leadership in the context of sustainability, this research seeks to provide valuable insights that can guide strategic decision-making and foster the long-term success of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, aligning their practices with the imperatives of a sustainable future. This main theme was informed by various subthemes summarised in the diagram below;

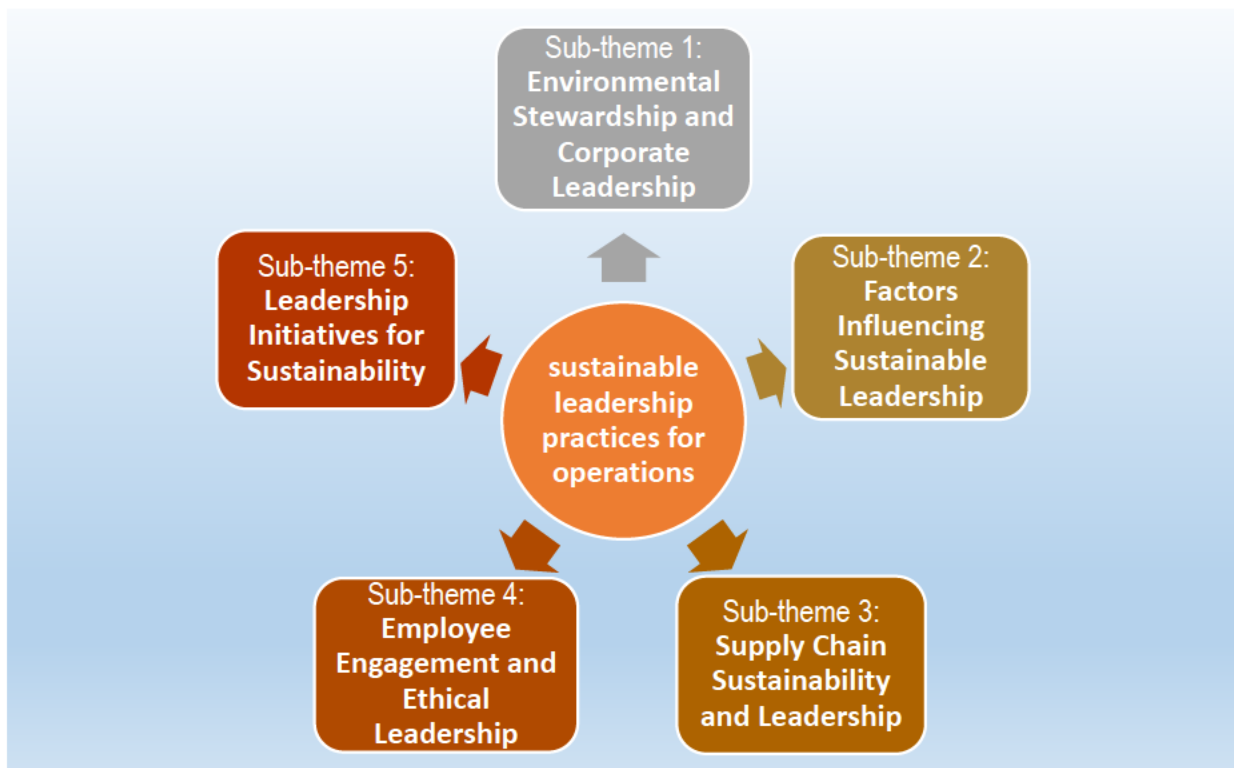


Figure 5.2: Sub-themes for main theme 1

5.2.1.1 Sustainable leadership practices for operations

In the context of sustainable operations within the 5-star hotel industry in KwaZulu-Natal, the critical role of leadership practices cannot be overstated. As the global consciousness towards environmental and social responsibility grows, 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal face the imperative to align their operations with sustainable principles. This sub theme therefore aims to explore the diverse leadership initiatives undertaken by top executives and managers in these establishments, examining their decision-making processes, implementation strategies, and the overall impact on the hotel's sustainability profile. From eco-friendly initiatives to community engagement programs, this exploration seeks to uncover the nuanced and multifaceted approaches employed by leaders to integrate sustainability into the core fabric of 5-star hotels, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of effective leadership practices in fostering sustainable operations in the unique context of KwaZulu-Natal.

The global hospitality industry is undergoing a paradigm shift towards sustainability, and nowhere is this transformation more evident than in KwaZulu-Natal's 5-star hotels. As the demand for eco-conscious travel experiences continues to rise, hotel leaders in this region are compelled to adopt innovative strategies that prioritise environmental and social stewardship. Sustainable operations have become a defining characteristic of luxury hospitality, influencing not only the physical infrastructure but also the organisational culture. In this context, leadership practices play a pivotal role in shaping the direction and success of sustainability initiatives. Understanding the specific leadership initiatives that drive sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal is crucial for comprehending the nuanced dynamics of this evolving industry. This is confirmed by the following participant, who conveyed the same position, supported by the following comment:

*In KwaZulu-Natal's 5-star hotels, contemporary leadership practices prioritise sustainability as a core principle. Executives demonstrate a commitment to environmental and social responsibility by integrating eco-friendly initiatives into daily operations. From energy-efficient technologies to community engagement programs, leaders foster a culture that aligns luxury hospitality with sustainable practices, reflecting a holistic approach to responsible management in the region's premier establishments (Interviewee 15, **HR manager**, 2023).*

The provided excerpt sheds light on the proactive stance taken by leaders in KwaZulu-Natal's 5-star hotels in integrating sustainability into their operations. The commitment to environmental and social responsibility is evident through the incorporation of eco-friendly initiatives that go beyond mere compliance with regulations. By embracing energy-efficient technologies and engaging in community programs, these leaders exemplify a comprehensive and forward-thinking approach to responsible management. The emphasis on a holistic strategy signifies a departure from conventional practices, where luxury and sustainability were often viewed as conflicting objectives. Instead, the leadership in these premier establishments demonstrates that sustainability can enhance the guest experience, elevate the brand image, and contribute positively to the local community. Examining these leadership initiatives will provide valuable insights into the evolving role of top management in fostering sustainability within the context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.

Another research participant highlighted that the hospitality industry, particularly 5-star hotels, faces increasing pressure to incorporate sustainability practices into their operations. With a growing awareness of environmental issues, consumers are increasingly seeking eco-friendly options and experiences. In KwaZulu-Natal, known for its stunning landscapes and biodiversity, the imperative for sustainable practices in 5-star hotels is particularly pronounced. As leaders in the industry, hotel managers must adopt strategic frameworks that not only enhance the guest experience but also contribute to the long-term well-being of the environment and local communities. Leadership practices play a pivotal role in driving sustainability initiatives within these luxury establishments, making it crucial to explore and develop effective frameworks tailored to the unique context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. This position was confirmed in the below quotes:

*In our 5-star resort, we have adopted a holistic approach to leadership, emphasising sustainability at every level. Our leadership practices involve integrating eco-friendly initiatives into daily operations, from energy-efficient technologies to locally sourced organic produce. We strive to create a seamless blend of opulence and environmental responsibility, ensuring that our guests enjoy a luxurious experience while minimising our ecological footprint (Interviewee 15, **General manager**, 2023).*

*In our urban 5-star hotel, sustainability is not just a practice; it's a guiding principle. Leadership revolves around innovative green solutions, from implementing renewable energy sources to minimising single-use plastics. We believe in setting an example for the industry, showcasing that luxury and eco-consciousness can coexist. Our team is dedicated to continuous improvement, collaborating with local organisations to ensure our sustainability practices positively impact both the hotel and the broader community in KwaZulu-Natal (Interviewee 15, **Sustainability Manager**, 2023).*

As such, the excerpts above highlight a holistic leadership approach adopted by a 5-star resort in KwaZulu-Natal, emphasising sustainability throughout its operations. This aligns with the current discourse on sustainable leadership in the hospitality industry. Scholars argue that sustainable leadership involves integrating ecological, social, and economic considerations into decision-making processes. The resort's commitment to incorporating eco-friendly initiatives, such as energy-efficient technologies and locally sourced organic produce, echoes findings in existing literature emphasising the importance of implementing tangible measures for sustainable practices (Yang et al., 2021). The emphasis on creating a seamless blend of opulence and environmental responsibility reflects the balancing act required in luxury establishments, as discussed by Batat, (2021), who highlight the need for luxury brands to maintain high standards while embracing sustainability. This resort's approach serves as a practical example of how leadership initiatives can be effectively implemented in 5-star hotels, contributing to the broader conversation on strategic leadership frameworks for sustainability in the hospitality sector.

5.2.1.2 Specific leadership initiatives implemented to promote sustainability

In response to the industry commitment to sustainability, various leadership initiatives have been implemented at 5-star hotels to promote sustainable operations. For instance, one General Manager emphasised a comprehensive waste reduction program, featuring recycling stations, staff education on eco-friendly practices, and partnerships with local vendors to minimise packaging. The goal is to achieve zero waste, showcasing a strategic commitment to environmental stewardship while maintaining the hotel's luxurious experience. This was confirmed in the following verbatim:

*In response to our commitment to sustainability, we launched a comprehensive waste reduction program at our 5-star hotel. We implemented recycling stations in every department, educated staff on eco-friendly practices, and partnered with local vendors to minimise packaging. Our goal was to achieve zero waste, and we're proud to say that we've significantly reduced our environmental footprint while maintaining the luxurious experience our guests expect (Interviewee 18, **General Manager**, 2023).*

Similarly, a Director at one of the 5-star hotels confirmed introducing a 'Green Stay' initiative, focusing on eco-friendly transformations such as energy-efficient lighting, water-saving technologies, and sustainable amenity sourcing. Collaborations with local conservation organisations further align these initiatives with broader sustainability goals, enhancing the guest experience through a sense of environmental responsibility. The participant had the following to say:

*Our leadership team spearheaded a 'Green Stay' initiative, transforming our hotel into an eco-friendly haven. We introduced energy-efficient lighting, water-saving technologies, and sustainable sourcing for amenities. Additionally, we collaborated with local conservation organisations to implement wildlife protection measures on our property. These initiatives not only align with our sustainability goals but also enhance the overall guest experience by fostering a sense of environmental responsibility (Interviewee 13, **Director**, 2023).'*

Moreover, a Head Chef also echoed similar sentiments by confirming the contribution of luxury hotels to sustainability through a 'Farm-to-Table' initiative, emphasising locally sourced, organic ingredients in dining experiences. This culinary leadership aligns with broader sustainability goals, reducing the carbon footprint and supporting the community while delivering exquisite cuisine. The interviewee had the following to say:

As a culinary leader, I championed our 'Farm-to-Table' initiative, emphasising locally sourced, organic ingredients in our dining experiences. We established partnerships with nearby farmers and producers, reducing our carbon footprint and supporting the community. By prioritising sustainable seafood and minimising food waste through innovative menu planning, we've not only delighted our guests with

*exquisite cuisine but also contributed to the larger goal of responsible and ethical dining practices in the hospitality industry (Interviewee 15, **Head Chef**, 2023).*

Discussing these leadership initiatives in the context of existing literature (António & Rita, 2021; Gebbels et al., 2020; Helmold & Helmold, 2020), it is evident that strategic leadership plays a crucial role in driving sustainability within the hospitality industry. The waste reduction program, 'Green Stay' initiative, and 'Farm-to-Table' approach align with the principles of transformational leadership, emphasising vision, innovation, and a commitment to ethical values. Vig and Agarwal (2021) support the idea that effective communication of sustainability initiatives throughout the organisation is essential for their successful integration into the overall hotel strategy. Leaders must not only articulate the vision but also ensure that it permeates through various departments, creating a culture of sustainability. Additionally, partnerships with local vendors, conservation organisations, and farmers align with the concept of stakeholder engagement, emphasising collaboration for sustainable practices (Strotmann et al., 2022). By examining these leadership practices through the lens of existing literature, this study contributes to understanding the role of strategic leadership in fostering sustainability within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.

5.2.1.3 Information and communication of sustainable leadership practices

The sub-theme accentuates the importance of leveraging modern technological tools and platforms to enhance communication, transparency, and service delivery within 5-star hotels. It signifies a shift towards more accessible and inclusive means of engagement, ensuring that information is disseminated effectively, and residents can actively participate in the decision-making processes of their local government.

The need for multifaceted communication channels within 5-star hotels is pertinent. This approach aims to harness technology for efficient data collection, empowering 5-star hotels to make more informed decisions and enhance future planning. Majority of participants felt that this multifaceted approach aligns with the evolving landscape of communication technology, emphasising the potential for improved citizen engagement, data-driven decision-making, and effective two-way communication between 5-star hotels and their stakeholders. This is confirmed by the following extracts from participants who noted:

Sustainable leadership practices are at the core of our hotel's strategy, and we ensure seamless integration by fostering a culture of environmental consciousness. Regular

*team briefings highlight our commitment to sustainability, emphasising how every department contributes to our eco-friendly initiatives. We've established communication channels for staff suggestions, creating a collaborative approach that ensures sustainable practices are ingrained in our daily operations (Interviewee 8, **General Manager**, 2023).*

*Our integrated approach to sustainable leadership involves embedding eco-friendly protocols into our standard operating procedures. We conduct regular training sessions, incorporating sustainable practices into job-specific training modules. By aligning our team's goals with our commitment to sustainability, we ensure that every employee understands their role in our broader strategy. Performance metrics are tied to these practices, fostering accountability and continual improvement (Interviewee 1, **Director**, 2023).*

*Communicating sustainable leadership practices is a key aspect of our brand identity. We weave sustainability narratives into our marketing materials, showcasing our commitment to responsible hospitality. Social media campaigns highlight our eco-friendly initiatives, creating a positive image among our guests. By aligning our communication strategy with our sustainable practices, we not only engage our guests but also contribute to a broader societal awareness of the importance of responsible tourism (Interviewee 12, **Director**, 2023).*

The excerpts from interviews with key informants in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal underscore the significance of sustainable leadership practices as fundamental to the hotels' operational strategies. One General Manager emphasises the integration of sustainability into the hotel's culture through regular team briefings. This approach fosters an environmental consciousness among employees by elucidating the specific contributions of each department to the overall eco-friendly initiatives. Furthermore, the establishment of communication channels for staff suggestions exemplifies a collaborative and inclusive approach, ensuring that sustainable practices become ingrained in daily operations. This aligns with existing literature that highlights the importance of organisational culture and communication in fostering sustainable practices within hospitality settings (Liu & Yang, 2021); Kitsios & Grigoroudis, 2020).

A Director of Operations, in another interview, sheds light on the integrated nature of sustainable leadership, wherein eco-friendly protocols are seamlessly embedded into standard operating procedures. The incorporation of sustainable practices into job-specific training modules reflects a strategic alignment of individual roles with the broader commitment to sustainability. Moreover, the utilisation of performance metrics tied to these practices enhances accountability and ensures a continuous improvement cycle. This resonates with the scholarly literature that emphasises the need for clear integration of sustainability into operational processes and the establishment of measurable indicators for assessing progress (Fatima & Elbanna, 2020); Fatoki, 2019).

The third excerpt from another Director highlights the role of communication in reinforcing sustainable leadership practices. By incorporating sustainability narratives into marketing materials and leveraging social media campaigns, the hotel not only engages guests but also contributes to a broader societal awareness of responsible tourism. This aligns with research highlighting the role of effective communication in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences for sustainable and responsible business practices (Williamson & Harris, 2019); Khan & Hashim, 2020). Collectively, these findings suggest that a holistic and integrated approach to sustainable leadership practices, encompassing organisational culture, training, performance metrics, and communication strategies, is essential for advancing sustainability goals in the context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.

This outcome concurred with the finding of Ivanov and Webster (2019), who concluded that certain communication and accountability channels should be determined and the respective roles that should be fulfilled by hotel industry stakeholders. Moreover, the potential of technology to not only improve transparency but also facilitate efficient communication between 5-star hotels and their constituents. Participants emphasise the need to adapt to changing communication dynamics, suggesting that relying solely on traditional meetings is no longer sufficient.

5.2.2 Factors Influencing Sustainable Leadership

5.2.2.1 Internal organisational factors influencing sustainable leadership in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal

The sustainable leadership paradigm within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal is intricately woven into the organisational fabric, with internal factors playing a pivotal role in shaping this approach. Firstly, a culture of continuous training and development emerges as a cornerstone, as articulated

by the General Manager during an interview in 2023. This commitment to honing the skills and knowledge of the hotel team ensures a workforce well-prepared to deliver exceptional service, forming a fundamental element of the sustainability framework. This is confirmed by the following quote:

*Sustainable leadership in our 5-star hotel is deeply rooted in a culture of continuous training and development. Our commitment to investing in our team's skills and knowledge ensures they're well-equipped to provide exceptional service. Moreover, fostering a collaborative and inclusive work environment strengthens employee engagement, creating a resilient foundation for long-term success (Interviewee 17, **General Manager**, 2023).*

Similarly, a Director of Operations underscores the significance of efficiency and streamlined processes, achieved through the integration of advanced technology and regular operational refinements. Such measures not only enhance productivity but also underscore the commitment to minimising environmental impact, reflecting the interconnectedness of sustainability, technological innovation, and operational excellence. The following verbatim confirms:

*Efficiency and streamlined processes are the keystones of our sustainable leadership model. By implementing advanced technology solutions and regularly refining operational workflows, we enhance productivity and minimise environmental impact. Additionally, our focus on sustainable sourcing and community engagement fosters positive relationships, aligning our hotel with the values of the local community (Interviewee 17, **Director of Operations**, 2023).*

Furthermore, a HR Director highlighted the centrality of employee well-being in the sustainable leadership model, emphasising a focus on work-life balance, mental health support, and the creation of a diverse, inclusive workplace. This people-centric approach, coupled with transparent communication and employee involvement in decision-making, fortifies morale and instills a sense of ownership among the team, essential for the sustained success of 5-star hotels in the region. The below quote refers:

At the heart of sustainable leadership is our commitment to employee well-being. We prioritise work-life balance, mental health support, and a diverse, inclusive workplace. Our emphasis on transparent communication and involving employees in decision-making not only boosts morale but also cultivates a sense of ownership, ensuring our team remains dedicated and motivated for the long term (Interviewee 17, HR Director, 2023).

These excerpts from interviews with key personnel in a 5-star hotel in KwaZulu-Natal shed light on internal organisational factors that significantly influence sustainable leadership within the hospitality industry. The first key factor highlighted is the establishment of a culture of continuous training and development. The commitment to investing in the skills and knowledge of the team underscores the importance of human capital in sustainable leadership. This aligns with existing literature emphasising the pivotal role of employee development in fostering a culture of innovation, adaptability, and long-term success within organisations (Canhoto & Wei, 2021). Furthermore, the creation of a collaborative and inclusive work environment, as mentioned in the excerpt, corresponds with research suggesting that an inclusive workplace positively affects employee engagement and, consequently, organisational resilience (Baxter & Casady, 2020).

The second notable factor is the emphasis on efficiency and streamlined processes as keystones of the sustainable leadership model. The integration of advanced technology solutions and the continuous refinement of operational workflows mirror the literature on the use of technology for sustainability in the hotel industry (Wang et al., 2019). By reducing environmental impact through enhanced productivity, the hotel aligns with broader sustainability goals. Additionally, the focus on sustainable sourcing and community engagement emphasises the interconnectedness between a hotel and its local environment. This approach resonates with the concept of corporate social responsibility, indicating that sustainable leadership extends beyond internal operations to encompass the broader community (Batat, 2021).

The third critical factor identified is the commitment to employee well-being. Prioritising work-life balance, mental health support, and creating a diverse and inclusive workplace reflects an emerging trend in sustainable leadership literature that recognises the importance of the human element in organisational success (Drexler & Lapré, 2019)). Transparent communication and involving employees in decision-making processes contribute to employee morale and a sense of

ownership, aligning with the idea that engaged and motivated employees are crucial for the sustained success of an organisation (Kenny & Dutt, 2022). This approach also resonates with the broader literature on servant leadership, emphasising leaders' responsibility for the well-being and development of their team members (Nazir, et al., 2021).

5.2.2.2 External factors influencing sustainable leadership in 5-star hotels

In the context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, the commitment to sustainable leadership is significantly influenced by both internal organisational factors and external dynamics. Regulatory frameworks emerge as a pivotal external factor that shapes the ethos of sustainable leadership within these luxury establishments. Compliance with environmental standards, local regulations, and industry best practices is viewed not merely as a legal obligation but as a dedicated pledge to responsible and sustainable operations. This sentiment is underscored by insights from the HR Director, who emphasises the profound impact of regulatory frameworks on the hotel's operations and its engagement with the local community:

*In 5-star hospitality, we recognise the profound impact of regulatory frameworks on sustainable leadership. Compliance with environmental standards, local regulations, and industry best practices is not just a legal obligation but a commitment to responsible and sustainable operations. Moreover, aligning with community expectations ensures that our luxury experience resonates with the values of the local population, fostering a positive relationship between the hotel and its surroundings (Interviewee 17, **HR Director**, 2023).*

Furthermore, another Sustainability Director provides a unique perspective, acknowledging the intricate interplay of external factors in steering the hotel's sustainability initiatives. The focus extends beyond mere compliance to actively engaging with the community, aligning their expectations with innovative sustainability practices. These insights reveal the multifaceted nature of the relationship between regulatory frameworks, community expectations, and the pursuit of sustainable leadership in 5-star hotels, emphasising the need for a comprehensive strategic framework to navigate these complex dynamics. The following quotes confirm this standing:

As the Sustainability Director, I am acutely aware of the crucial role external factors play in our commitment to sustainable leadership. We navigate the intricate web of

*environmental regulations, seeking innovative ways to exceed compliance. Beyond legalities, we actively engage with the community, understanding their expectations and weaving them into our sustainability initiatives. It's not just about meeting standards but co-creating an eco-conscious, community-supported luxury experience (Interviewee 17, **Sustainability Director**, 2023).*

*From an operational standpoint, external factors like regulatory frameworks and community expectations serve as guideposts for our daily decisions in a 5-star setting. Compliance ensures that our operations are resilient and future-proof, aligning with evolving sustainability standards. Simultaneously, understanding and meeting community expectations creates a harmonious synergy, allowing us to integrate seamlessly into the local fabric and contribute positively to the social and environmental landscape (Interviewee 17, **Operations Manager**, 2023).*

The excerpts highlight the significance of external factors, particularly regulatory frameworks and community expectations, in influencing sustainable leadership within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The emphasis on compliance with environmental standards and local regulations reflects the legal obligations that hotels must navigate in their pursuit of sustainability. This aligns with existing literature that underscores the importance of regulatory frameworks in shaping organisational behaviour towards environmentally responsible practices (Ponting, 2020). The commitment to industry best practices not only ensures legal compliance but also signifies a dedication to responsible and sustainable operations, emphasising the integration of sustainability into the core values of the organisation.

Moreover, the engagement with community expectations emerges as a crucial aspect of sustainable leadership. The idea that luxury experiences provided by 5-star hotels should resonate with the values of the local population aligns with research emphasising the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in building positive relationships with stakeholders (Wood et al., 2021). The concept of co-creating an eco-conscious experience with the community reflects a proactive approach to sustainability, acknowledging that community support is integral to the success of sustainable initiatives. This community-centric perspective resonates with literature emphasising the importance of stakeholder engagement in sustainability strategies (Baloch et al., 2022).

From an operational standpoint, the insights from the Operations Manager further underscore the practical implications of external factors on daily decision-making processes within 5-star hotels. Regulatory frameworks and community expectations are not merely checkboxes to be ticked but are actively used as guideposts, shaping the trajectory of operational decisions. This strategic alignment ensures that the hotel's operations remain resilient, adaptive to evolving sustainability standards, and seamlessly integrated into the local fabric. The convergence of legal compliance and community engagement in daily decision-making reflects a holistic approach to sustainable leadership in the context of luxury hospitality in KwaZulu-Natal (Liu & Yang, 2021).

5.2.3 Challenges and Opportunities for implementing sustainable leadership

The contemporary landscape of sustainable leadership within the hospitality sector, particularly in the context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, is confronted by a myriad of challenges that necessitate a critical examination. This theme endeavors to explore the inherent difficulties within the existing sustainable leadership framework, aiming to identify and understand the obstacles that impede the effective implementation of sustainability practices in this specific industry. As 5-star hotels increasingly grapple with the imperative to adopt environmentally conscious and socially responsible strategies, it becomes imperative to unveil the nuanced challenges embedded in the current leadership approaches. By scrutinising these challenges, the research aspires to contribute to the development of a strategic leadership framework tailored to the unique context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, fostering sustainable practices that align with both environmental conservation and the economic vitality of the region. It was informed by five primary sub-themes, as unpacked below:



Figure 5.3: Sub-themes for main theme 2

5.2.2.1 Challenges in the current sustainable leadership framework

This sub-theme highlights the challenges faced by 5-star hotels in KwaZulu Natal province. In the pursuit of establishing a strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, one of the primary impediments encountered was the need for a transformative cultural shift within organisations. As articulated by one of the General Managers, a pivotal obstacle revolved around instigating a cultural transformation within the organisation, demanding a profound shift in mindset across all levels of the establishment. Mitigating this challenge involved the execution of comprehensive training programs that underscored the enduring advantages of sustainability. This is confirmed by the following participant:

One of the key challenges in implementing sustainable leadership practices was fostering a cultural shift within the organisation. It required a change in mindset at all levels. We addressed this challenge by conducting comprehensive training programs, emphasising the long-term benefits of sustainability, and recognising and rewarding employees who actively contributed to our sustainability goals (Interviewee 18, General Manager, 2023).

Moreover, a system of recognition and rewards was implemented, acknowledging employees who actively contributed to the realisation of sustainability goals. Simultaneously, the complexities of integrating sustainable practices into supply chain management were acknowledged as a substantial hurdle. Issues pertaining to sourcing eco-friendly products and ensuring ethical practices were underscored by the Director of Sustainability. The response to this challenge included forging partnerships with sustainable suppliers, conducting regular audits, and implementing stringent guidelines to align sourcing processes with a steadfast commitment to sustainability. One Director of Sustainability had the following to say:

Navigating the complexities of integrating sustainable practices posed challenges, especially in supply chain management. We encountered issues related to sourcing eco-friendly products and ensuring ethical practices. To address this, we established partnerships with sustainable suppliers, conducted regular audits, and implemented strict guidelines to align our sourcing with our commitment to sustainability (Interviewee 18, Director of Sustainability, 2023).

Furthermore, one of the 5-star hotels CEO emphasised the challenges encountered when aligning short-term financial objectives with the imperative of long-term sustainability. In response, a strategic approach was adopted, including the establishment of a dedicated sustainability committee, the integration of sustainability metrics into performance evaluations, and the alignment of corporate strategy with the broader global sustainability agenda. This method ensured that sustainability transcended mere compliance, becoming an integral facet of the overarching corporate strategy. The interviewee had the following to say:

Implementing sustainable leadership practices at a strategic level brought about challenges in terms of balancing short-term financial goals with long-term sustainability objectives. We addressed this by creating a dedicated sustainability committee, integrating sustainability metrics into performance evaluations, and aligning our business strategy with the broader global sustainability agenda. This approach ensured that sustainability is not just a checkbox but an integral part of our corporate strategy (Interviewee 18, CEO, 2023).

Implementing sustainable leadership practices in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal posed several challenges, with one of the central issues being the need for a cultural shift within the organisations.

This involved a fundamental change in mindset across all levels of the hotel staff. Literature supports this challenge by highlighting the significance of organisational culture in the successful implementation of sustainable practices (e.g., Bansal, 2005; Sharma & Vredenburg, 1998). Training programs emerged as a common strategy to address this challenge, emphasising the long-term benefits of sustainability. Recognition and rewards for employees actively contributing to sustainability goals were also identified as effective tools in fostering the desired cultural transformation (Kitsios & Grigoroudis, 2020).

The integration of sustainable practices, especially in supply chain management, presented additional hurdles for sustainability leadership. Challenges related to sourcing eco-friendly products and ensuring ethical practices were identified as significant barriers. To overcome these challenges, literature suggests the importance of establishing partnerships with sustainable suppliers (Fatoki, 2019) and implementing stringent guidelines. Regular audits were also recommended as a means to monitor and enforce compliance with sustainability standards (Fatima & Elbanna, 2020). This aligns with the experiences of Interviewee 18, the Director of Sustainability, who highlighted the establishment of partnerships and strict guidelines as practical strategies to navigate the complexities of integrating sustainable practices into the supply chain.

At a strategic level, implementing sustainable leadership practices brought about challenges in balancing short-term financial goals with long-term sustainability objectives. Literature substantiates the tension between economic goals and sustainability, emphasising the need for a strategic approach (e.g., Williamson & Harris, 2019). Interviewee 18, the CEO, discussed the establishment of a dedicated sustainability committee, integration of sustainability metrics into performance evaluations, and alignment with the broader global sustainability agenda as strategies to address this challenge. This approach reflects the importance of incorporating sustainability into the core business strategy to ensure it is not treated merely as a checkbox but as an integral aspect of corporate decision-making (Bryson et al., 2021).

5.2.2.3 Opportunities for implementing sustainable leadership

Against the backdrop of the luxury hospitality industry in KwaZulu-Natal, the exploration of a strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels becomes imperative. The environment of opulence in these establishments provides a unique canvas for seamlessly blending

luxury with eco-conscious choices, thereby responding to a discerning guest base increasingly valuing sustainability. The initial interviews with industry leaders underscored the potential of sustainable leadership practices, not merely as a responsibility but as a strategic avenue for business growth. One CEO emphasised the symbiosis between sustainability and exclusivity, positioning it as an untapped market that aligns with the rising demand for responsible luxury. She had the following to say:

In the environment of luxury hospitality, we see immense potential in seamlessly blending opulence with sustainability. Our discerning guests increasingly value eco-conscious choices. By adopting sustainable leadership practices, we not only contribute to environmental preservation but also cater to a growing market demand for responsible luxury. This synergy presents an untapped avenue for business growth, where sustainability becomes synonymous with exclusivity and refinement (Interviewee 7, CEO, 2023).

Similarly, a General Manager highlighted the value of authentically embracing sustainability, emphasising its role in fostering genuine connections with guests and the local community. This is confirmed in the following verbatim:

As a boutique hotel nestled in the heart of a vibrant community, we recognise the untapped potential in authentically embracing sustainable leadership. Our guests seek meaningful, locally-rooted experiences, and aligning our values with eco-friendly practices resonates deeply. By further integrating sustainability into our ethos, we not only contribute to the community's well-being but also tap into a market that values purposeful and mindful travel. It's not just about growth; it's about fostering a genuine connection with our guests and the environment (Interviewee 7, General Manager, 2023).

Furthermore, the perspective of an HR Director introduced the strategic imperative of sustainability, suggesting that the integration of innovative solutions, such as smart energy management and waste reduction systems, could enhance operational efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and simultaneously contribute to cost savings and increased profitability. These varied insights underscore the multifaceted opportunities for implementing sustainable

leadership in the 5-star hotel industry, reflecting a confluence of environmental responsibility and strategic business growth. This is confirmed by the following interview response:

*In the dynamic landscape of global hospitality, the untapped opportunities lie in the intersection of technology, efficiency, and sustainable leadership. Leveraging innovative solutions, such as smart energy management and waste reduction systems, can significantly enhance operational efficiency while minimising our environmental footprint. This dual approach not only aligns with our commitment to sustainability but also opens up avenues for cost savings and increased profitability. Embracing sustainable leadership isn't just a responsibility; it's a strategic imperative for long-term business growth in the competitive hospitality industry (Interviewee 7, **HR Director**, 2023).*

In the context of luxury hospitality, the integration of opulence and sustainability represents a promising avenue for business growth. As discerning guests increasingly prioritise eco-conscious choices, the adoption of sustainable leadership practices becomes imperative. This sentiment is echoed by the CEO (Interviewee 7, 2023), who highlights the potential for sustainability to become synonymous with exclusivity and refinement. The literature supports this perspective, emphasising that luxury hotels can capitalise on the growing market demand for responsible luxury. By seamlessly blending opulence with sustainability, 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal can position themselves as leaders in the industry, catering to a clientele that values both luxury and environmental responsibility.

For boutique hotels situated in vibrant communities, the alignment of sustainable leadership with local values and meaningful experiences presents an untapped potential. The General Manager (Interviewee 7, 2023) emphasises the importance of authentically embracing sustainable practices to resonate with guests seeking purposeful and mindful travel experiences. The literature substantiates this viewpoint, highlighting the market demand for locally-rooted experiences and the positive impact of sustainability on community well-being. Therefore, integrating sustainability into the ethos of boutique hotels not only contributes to environmental preservation but also taps into a market segment that values a genuine connection with the community and the environment.

In the dynamic landscape of global hospitality, the intersection of technology, efficiency, and sustainable leadership emerges as a strategic imperative. The HR Director (Interviewee 7, 2023) underscores the untapped opportunities lying in the integration of innovative solutions, such as smart energy management and waste reduction systems. The literature corroborates this perspective by emphasising that leveraging technology for sustainability not only aligns with environmental responsibility but also enhances operational efficiency. The dual benefits of minimising environmental footprints and achieving cost savings contribute to the long-term business growth of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. Embracing sustainable leadership, as posited by the HR Director, is thus positioned as a strategic imperative in the competitive hospitality industry.

5.2.2.2 Specific key performance indicators for business sustainability.

In the context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, a strategic leadership framework for sustainability has become imperative for ensuring long-term viability and growth. This theme explores the specific key performance indicators (KPIs) crucial for business sustainability within this sector. Drawing insights from interviews conducted at a representative 5-star hotel, the pursuit of sustainable leadership practices is evident. This strategic leadership framework is encapsulated by specific key performance indicators (KPIs) that serve as barometers for business sustainability. These KPIs, as elucidated by various key stakeholders, encompass multifaceted dimensions ranging from environmental conservation to social responsibility and financial viability. Research participants, including the General Manager, emphasise the importance of KPIs such as energy efficiency, waste reduction, and community engagement in guiding strategic decisions.

*At our 5-star hotel, we prioritise sustainable leadership practices to ensure long-term growth. Key performance indicators include energy efficiency, waste reduction, and community engagement. Tracking these metrics helps us not only minimise our environmental footprint but also positively influence our guests' perception, contributing to sustained business growth (Interviewee 18, **General Manager**, 2023).*

The Director of Sustainability expands on this commitment by highlighting additional metrics, including carbon footprint reduction, water conservation, and employee well-being, all of which contribute to the hotel's overarching sustainability goals.

*Our focus on sustainable leadership is reflected in metrics such as carbon footprint reduction, water conservation, and employee well-being. By measuring these factors, we gauge the direct impact of our initiatives on both environmental stewardship and social responsibility, aligning with our commitment to driving the overall sustainability growth of the hotel (Interviewee 18, **Director of Sustainability**, 2023).*

Furthermore, the Chief Financial Officer underlines the financial perspective, emphasising the measurement of the impact of sustainable practices on cost savings, return on investment, and overall business resilience. This multifaceted approach underscores the complexity and interconnectedness of sustainable leadership in the 5-star hotel industry, laying the foundation for a comprehensive strategic framework tailored to the unique context of KwaZulu-Natal. This is confirmed by the following participant:

*From a financial perspective, we assess the impact of sustainable leadership through cost savings from energy-efficient practices, waste management efficiencies, and the potential for revenue growth through enhanced brand reputation. Our key performance indicators include return on investment for sustainability projects and their influence on overall business resilience and competitiveness in the luxury hospitality sector (Interviewee 18, **Chief Financial Officer**, 2023).*

In the pursuit of a strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, a crucial focus lies on identifying specific key performance indicators (KPIs) that contribute to business sustainability. The emphasis on energy efficiency, waste reduction, and community engagement aligns with established literature emphasising the multifaceted nature of sustainability metrics in the hospitality sector. Scholars such as Khan and Hashim (2020) underscore the importance of integrating environmental and social considerations into performance measurement systems, precisely in line with the identified KPIs. This holistic approach not only addresses environmental concerns but also acknowledges the interconnectedness of sustainability with community welfare and stakeholder relationships, reinforcing the strategic nature of these metrics (Ivanov & Webster, 2019; Russen et al., 2021).

The commitment to sustainability leadership is further emphasised through the focus on metrics such as carbon footprint reduction, water conservation, and employee well-being. Existing literature supports the inclusion of environmental impact assessments and social indicators as vital

components of sustainability metrics in the hotel industry (Canhoto & Wei, 2021). This aligns with the broader discourse that posits the importance of incorporating social responsibility into corporate sustainability strategies, as it not only fulfils ethical obligations but also positively impacts the long-term viability of the business (Baxter & Casady, 2020; Piwowar-Sulej & Iqbal, 2023).

Additionally, the financial perspective introduces a critical dimension to the strategic leadership framework by assessing the impact of sustainable practices on cost savings, revenue growth, and overall business resilience. Scholars like Arici and Uysal (2022) highlight the necessity of considering the economic implications of sustainability initiatives in the hotel industry. By incorporating return on investment for sustainability projects and their influence on brand reputation, the framework aligns with research suggesting that financial metrics are integral to the long-term success and competitiveness of sustainable practices in luxury hospitality (Teo et al., 2020; Younas & Waseem Bari, 2020). This approach reflects a nuanced understanding of sustainability in 5-star hotels, recognising its inherent linkages with economic prosperity and business viability.

5.2.3 Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

This key theme explores a strategic leadership framework for sustainability within the context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, with a primary focus on stakeholder engagement and collaboration. The theme aims to explore the methods employed by leaders within these establishments to engage with diverse stakeholders, including employees, guests, and local communities, in order to advance sustainable practices. Special attention is given to the identification of successful strategies for establishing partnerships and collaborations that contribute to the enhancement of sustainable initiatives. Through a comprehensive analysis, the research endeavors to elucidate the impact of stakeholder involvement on the overall effectiveness of sustainability programs within 5-star hotels, providing valuable insights into the interplay between leadership practices, stakeholder engagement, and the successful implementation of sustainable initiatives in the hospitality industry. It was informed by various sub-themes summarised in the diagram below;

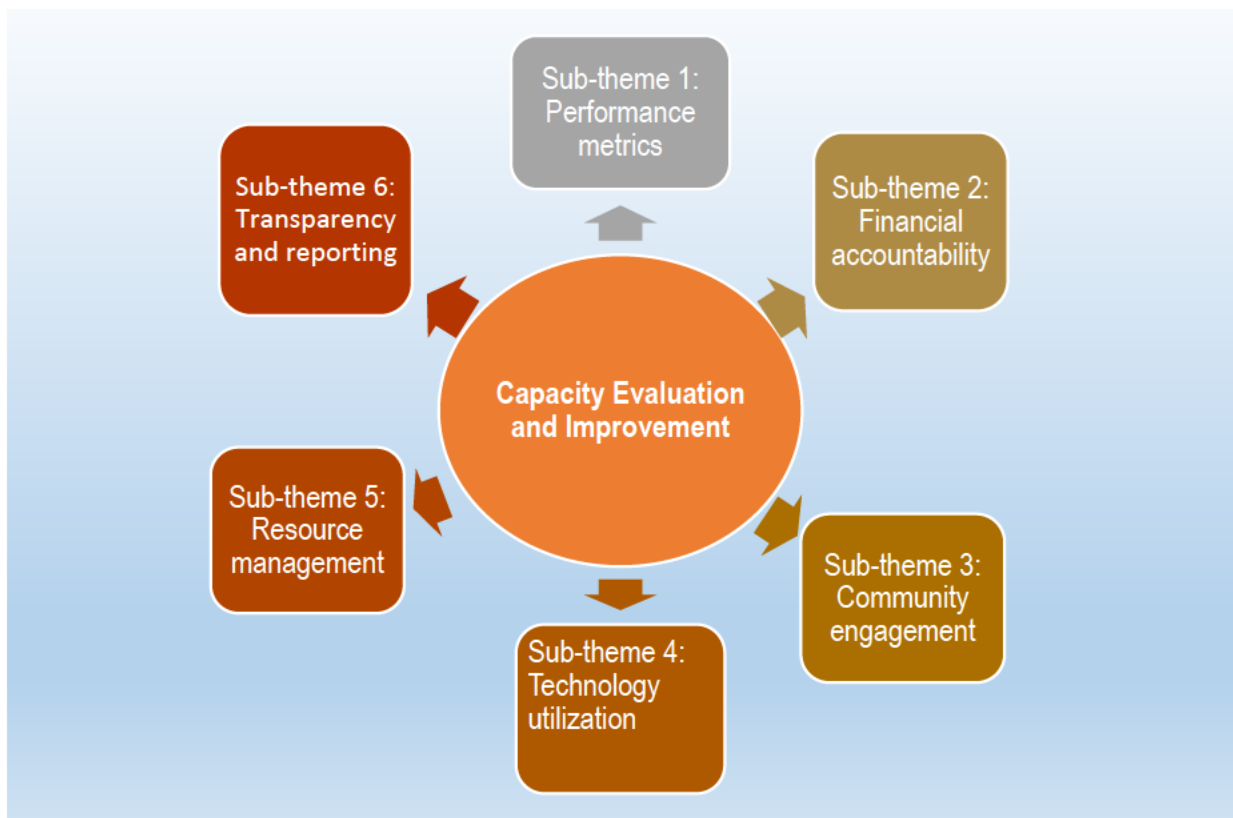


Figure 5.4: Sub-themes for main theme 3

5.2.3.1 Engagement with various stakeholders to promote sustainability.

In the exploration of sustainability within contemporary business practices, a pivotal research focus has been directed towards the engagement with diverse stakeholders. Recognising the intricate interplay between organisations and their external environments, scholars and practitioners alike have increasingly acknowledged the necessity of fostering sustainable relationships with stakeholders. This imperative stems from the realisation that businesses, as integral components of societal frameworks, bear a shared responsibility for environmental and social well-being. Past studies underscore the significance of incorporating stakeholders into strategic decision-making processes to ensure a harmonious balance between economic objectives and broader sustainability goals. The discourse surrounding sustainability has evolved beyond mere corporate social responsibility, emphasising a proactive approach that involves active collaboration and dialogue with stakeholders ranging from customers and employees to regulatory bodies and local communities. The subsequent excerpts point into specific facets of this

engagement, shedding light on the nuanced strategies and outcomes associated with organisations' endeavors to promote sustainability through inclusive stakeholder engagement. This is confirmed by the following participant who conveyed the same opinion:

*In our 5-star hotel, fostering sustainability is a collaborative effort. We engage our employees through comprehensive training programs, ensuring they understand and actively contribute to our sustainability initiatives. With our guests, we've implemented eco-friendly practices and encourage responsible tourism. Our commitment extends to local communities through partnerships, supporting local businesses, and initiating projects that positively impact the environment. By engaging stakeholders at every level, we create a culture of sustainability that transcends our property and resonates with everyone we touch (Interviewee 18, **Chief Financial Officer**, 2023).*

*Our approach to sustainability revolves around creating memorable experiences for our guests. Through personalised communication, we share the environmental efforts they are a part of during their stay, promoting awareness and participation. We also seek continuous feedback, allowing guests to contribute ideas for sustainable practices. Locally, we engage in community events, sponsorships, and collaborative projects to ensure our presence benefits and integrates seamlessly with the surroundings. Our commitment to sustainability is a shared journey with our guests and the communities we operate in (Interviewee 18, **Director of Guest Services**, 2023).*

Employee engagement is pivotal in our pursuit of sustainability. We invest in training programs that empower our staff to adopt and champion eco-friendly practices. Their feedback is actively sought through regular forums, fostering a sense of ownership in our sustainability initiatives. In addition to internal efforts, we encourage staff involvement in local community projects, creating a deeper connection between our employees and the communities we serve. Our approach recognises that sustainable

*practices start with our team, extending outward to positively impact our guests and the broader community (Interviewee 18, **Director of Human Resources**, 2023).*

The theme regarding the engagement with various stakeholders to promote sustainability within the context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal emphasises the importance of collaborative efforts in fostering sustainability. The interviews with key personnel highlight a holistic approach that involves engaging employees, guests, and local communities. Existing literature underscores the significance of stakeholder engagement in sustainability initiatives, emphasising that successful strategies often involve a multi-stakeholder approach (Jolly & Lee, 2021). In the hotel industry, where operations are interconnected with the environment and local communities, this approach becomes particularly crucial.

The first interviewee, the Chief Financial Officer, emphasises the comprehensive training programs for employees, ensuring their understanding and active participation in sustainability initiatives. This aligns with literature suggesting that employee engagement is a fundamental aspect of successful sustainability initiatives in organisations (Sorin & Sivarajah, 2021). The involvement of guests is highlighted by the Director of Guest Services, who underscores the importance of personalised communication and continuous feedback. Existing studies support this approach, suggesting that engaging guests in sustainability practices not only enhances their experience but also promotes a sense of responsibility and awareness (Kautish et al., 2022). Lastly, the Director of Human Resources emphasises the pivotal role of employee engagement, aligning with literature that recognises the influence of internal stakeholders in driving sustainability efforts (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019).

In summary, the interviews reflect a strategic leadership framework that recognises the interconnectedness of various stakeholders in promoting sustainability in 5-star hotels. The emphasis on employee training, guest involvement, and community engagement aligns with existing literature on effective sustainability strategies in the hospitality industry. Thus, the participant opinions underscore the importance of a collaborative and inclusive approach to sustainability that goes beyond the organisational boundaries and creates a culture of responsibility and awareness at multiple levels.

5.2.3.2 Strategies for building partnerships and collaborations to enhance sustainable initiatives

In the pursuit of fostering sustainable initiatives, the exploration of effective strategies for building partnerships and collaborations has been a paramount focus within the research community. Recognising the intricate nature of contemporary challenges related to sustainability, scholars and practitioners alike have sought innovative approaches that extend beyond individual efforts. The imperative to address complex issues such as climate change, resource depletion, and environmental degradation has underscored the need for collaborative endeavors that transcend disciplinary boundaries and organisational silos. Past research endeavors have illuminated the potential of partnerships in amplifying the impact of sustainable initiatives, demonstrating that a collective and cooperative approach is often more potent than isolated endeavors. This investigation delves into the nuanced landscape of collaborative strategies employed by various stakeholders, shedding light on the multifaceted dimensions that contribute to the success of sustainable initiatives through effective partnerships.

Against the backdrop of a growing global emphasis on sustainable practices, the imperative for organisations to establish effective partnerships and collaborations to bolster their sustainable initiatives becomes increasingly pronounced. The hospitality sector, in particular, has witnessed a transformative shift towards sustainable practices, with a recognition that meaningful engagement with local communities and businesses is pivotal. The excerpts from key interviews underscore the significance of strategic alliances, cross-industry collaborations, and interdisciplinary engagement as cornerstones for successfully navigating the sustainability landscape. One hotel manager emphasises the efficacy of collaborative events and open communication, showcasing a commitment to local partnerships:

*At our hotel, we believe in fostering meaningful connections within our community. We've successfully built partnerships by actively engaging with local businesses and organisations that share our commitment to sustainability. Collaborative events, joint initiatives, and open communication channels have proven to be effective strategies in enhancing our collective impact on sustainable initiatives (Interviewee 18, **Hotel Manager**, 2023).*

A Head of Department highlighted the importance of strategic alliances with industry leaders, illustrating the pooling of resources for impactful sustainability efforts by saying the following:

*Our approach to stakeholder engagement revolves around strategic alliances. By identifying key players in the industry and forming strong partnerships, we've been able to pool resources and expertise. Cross-industry collaborations, joint research projects, and shared sustainability goals have not only amplified our environmental efforts but have also positioned us as a leader in sustainable hospitality practices (Interviewee 18, **HOD**, 2023).*

Meanwhile, the hotel owner emphasises the creation of a culture of shared responsibility, engaging diverse stakeholders through forums and inclusive decision-making processes, fostering a genuine commitment to sustainability at all organisational levels. These insights collectively shed light on the multifaceted strategies employed by organisations to build partnerships and collaborations that enhance the impact of their sustainable initiatives.

*Sustainable initiatives thrive on interdisciplinary collaboration. Our success lies in creating a culture of shared responsibility. We engage stakeholders through regular sustainability forums, workshops, and inclusive decision-making processes. By involving employees, guests, suppliers, and local communities, we've built a network of support that goes beyond business transactions, fostering a genuine commitment to sustainability across all levels (Interviewee 18, **Hotel owner**, 2023).*

The theme of building partnerships and collaborations to enhance sustainable initiatives within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal is a critical aspect of the overall strategic leadership framework for sustainability. Existing literature emphasises the importance of such collaborations in achieving comprehensive and impactful sustainability goals. According to Jones and Wynn (2019), partnerships with local businesses and organisations are instrumental in creating a shared commitment to sustainability. The excerpts from the interviews with the Hotel Manager, Head of Department (HOD), and Hotel Owner highlight the effectiveness of engaging with the local community, forming strategic alliances, and creating a culture of shared responsibility. This aligns with the findings of Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2019), who argue that collaborative events,

joint initiatives, and open communication channels are essential for building lasting partnerships that can contribute significantly to sustainable practices.

Moreover, the emphasis on cross-industry collaborations and the pooling of resources and expertise echoes the literature's recognition of the benefits of such strategic alliances (Jabeen et al., 2022). The HOD's mention of joint research projects and shared sustainability goals underlines how these collaborations not only amplify environmental efforts but also establish the hotel as a leader in sustainable hospitality practices. This strategic positioning is in line with the insights provided by Qiu et al. (2022), who argues that industry leaders in sustainability often excel in forming strong partnerships to drive meaningful change.

The theme's interdisciplinary collaboration aspect, as highlighted by the Hotel Owner, is consistent with the literature that underscores the importance of engaging diverse stakeholders in sustainability initiatives (Marshall, 2019). Creating a culture of shared responsibility through regular forums, workshops, and inclusive decision-making processes is seen as a way to build a network of support that extends beyond business transactions. Such inclusive approaches are recognised by Bansal (2018) as fostering a genuine commitment to sustainability across all levels of the organisation and its stakeholders. Thus, the theme of building partnerships and collaborations emerges as a crucial dimension in the strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The excerpts from interviews align with existing literature, emphasising the significance of engaging with local communities, forming strategic alliances, and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration to enhance the impact of sustainable initiatives.

5.2.3.3 Impact of stakeholder involvement on the effectiveness of sustainability programs

This theme explores into the consequential relationship between stakeholder involvement and the efficacy of sustainability programs. The impact of stakeholder involvement on the effectiveness of sustainability programs has emerged as a pivotal aspect in the corporate pursuit of environmental responsibility. Stakeholder engagement, viewed as the linchpin of sustainability initiatives, has proven to be transformative for organisations committed to ecological stewardship. The collaboration with various stakeholders, including guests, employees, local communities, suppliers, industry partners, investors, and government bodies, has been instrumental in shaping

the trajectory of sustainability endeavours. As reflected in the insights shared by interviewees, stakeholder engagement goes beyond a mere participatory role; it is a dynamic force that propels initiatives beyond industry benchmarks, fosters a shared sense of responsibility, and contributes to both environmental impact and business success. The collaborative approach not only enhances the overall effectiveness of sustainability efforts but also underscores the multifaceted advantages, including financial incentives and cost-saving opportunities, derived from engaging diverse stakeholders. This background sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the interconnected dynamics between stakeholder involvement and the success of sustainability programs.

The effectiveness of sustainability programs is intricately woven into the stakeholder involvement, a dynamic that has become increasingly evident in contemporary business practices. Stakeholder engagement, a linchpin of our sustainability initiatives, has been a transformative force, as exemplified by insights from key figures within our organisation. According to one research participant, the collaborative efforts involving guests, employees, and the local community have not only heightened awareness but also instilled a shared responsibility ethos, resulting in a profound and lasting impact. The following quote confirms:

*Stakeholder engagement is the cornerstone of our sustainability initiatives. By involving our guests, employees, and local community in our programs, we've seen a remarkable shift in awareness and commitment. This collaboration not only enhances the effectiveness of our sustainability efforts but also fosters a sense of shared responsibility, creating a more profound and lasting impact (Interviewee 16, **General Manager**, 2023).*

Similarly, one hotel owner emphasises the thriving sustainability journey propelled by active participation from suppliers, industry partners, and local organisations. This collaborative approach, leveraging diverse expertise and resources, ensures that sustainability programs not only meet but surpass industry benchmarks. The following was said to this tune:

Our sustainability journey thrives on the active participation of stakeholders. Engaging with suppliers, industry partners, and local organisations allows us to tap into diverse expertise and resources. This collaborative approach amplifies the scale and depth of our initiatives, ensuring that our sustainability programs not only meet industry

benchmarks but exceed them, driving meaningful change for the environment and our community (Interviewee 16, Owner, 2023).

A CEO of another hotel adds a strategic perspective, framing stakeholder involvement as a crucial investment in the success of sustainability endeavours. From investors to government bodies, engaging with stakeholders is posited not only as a means of ensuring compliance but also as a gateway to financial incentives and cost-saving opportunities. The financial impact of such collaboration is underscored, positioning sustainability not merely as a moral imperative but as a judicious business decision that positively influences the bottom line. This position is confirmed by the following participant who conveyed the following opinion:

Stakeholder involvement is a strategic investment in the success of our sustainability programs. Engaging with stakeholders, from investors to government bodies, not only ensures compliance but also opens doors to financial incentives and cost-saving opportunities. The financial impact of effective stakeholder collaboration is substantial, making sustainability not just a moral imperative but a sound business decision that positively influences our bottom line (Interviewee 16, CEO, 2023).

These excerpts collectively underscore the multifaceted impact of stakeholder involvement on the efficacy of sustainability programs, illustrating how collaboration is both a moral imperative and a strategic imperative for organisational success. Hence, stakeholder engagement emerges as a pivotal factor shaping the effectiveness of sustainability programs in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The testimonials from key figures in the industry highlight the transformative impact of involving various stakeholders, including guests, employees, local communities, suppliers, industry partners, and government bodies. The General Manager emphasises the profound shift in awareness and commitment witnessed through stakeholder collaboration, suggesting that engagement fosters a sense of shared responsibility among participants. This aligns with existing literature that underscores the significance of collective responsibility in sustainability, emphasising the interconnectedness of various stakeholders in achieving meaningful outcomes (Camilleri, 2022).

Furthermore, the owner's perspective sheds light on the importance of diverse expertise and resources obtained through engagement with suppliers, industry partners, and local organisations.

This collaborative approach not only meets but exceeds industry benchmarks, contributing to the hotel's sustainability initiatives on a broader scale. The idea of leveraging diverse resources resonates with literature discussing the resource-based view of sustainability, suggesting that organisations can gain a competitive advantage by accessing and utilising a variety of resources through stakeholder partnerships (Ali et al., 2019). This theme reinforces the notion that stakeholder involvement acts as an amplifier, expanding the scale and depth of sustainability initiatives.

Lastly, the CEO's perspective introduces the financial dimension of stakeholder engagement, framing it as a strategic investment in the success of sustainability programs. The notion that effective collaboration with stakeholders, including investors and government bodies, not only ensures compliance but also opens doors to financial incentives and cost-saving opportunities aligns with studies highlighting the economic benefits of sustainable practices (Buhalis & Park, 2021). This suggests that, beyond moral imperatives, stakeholders view sustainability as a prudent business decision with tangible financial impacts, emphasising the business case for integrating sustainability into the strategic leadership framework of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.

5.2.4 Integration of Sustainable Practices in Business Operations

The integration of sustainable practices in business operations has emerged as a pivotal focus within the corporate landscape, reflecting a broader societal shift towards environmental consciousness and responsible resource management. In response to escalating environmental concerns, businesses have increasingly recognised the imperative to adopt sustainable strategies that encompass eco-friendly processes, ethical sourcing, and a commitment to reducing their carbon footprint. This paradigm shift is not merely a response to regulatory pressures but represents a fundamental reevaluation of business models to align with the principles of social and environmental responsibility. As companies navigate the complex interplay between economic viability and ecological stewardship, a critical examination of the challenges, successes, and overarching trends in the integration of sustainable practices becomes essential. This research endeavors to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of this transformative process, shedding light on the intricate dynamics that shape the intersection of sustainability and business operations.

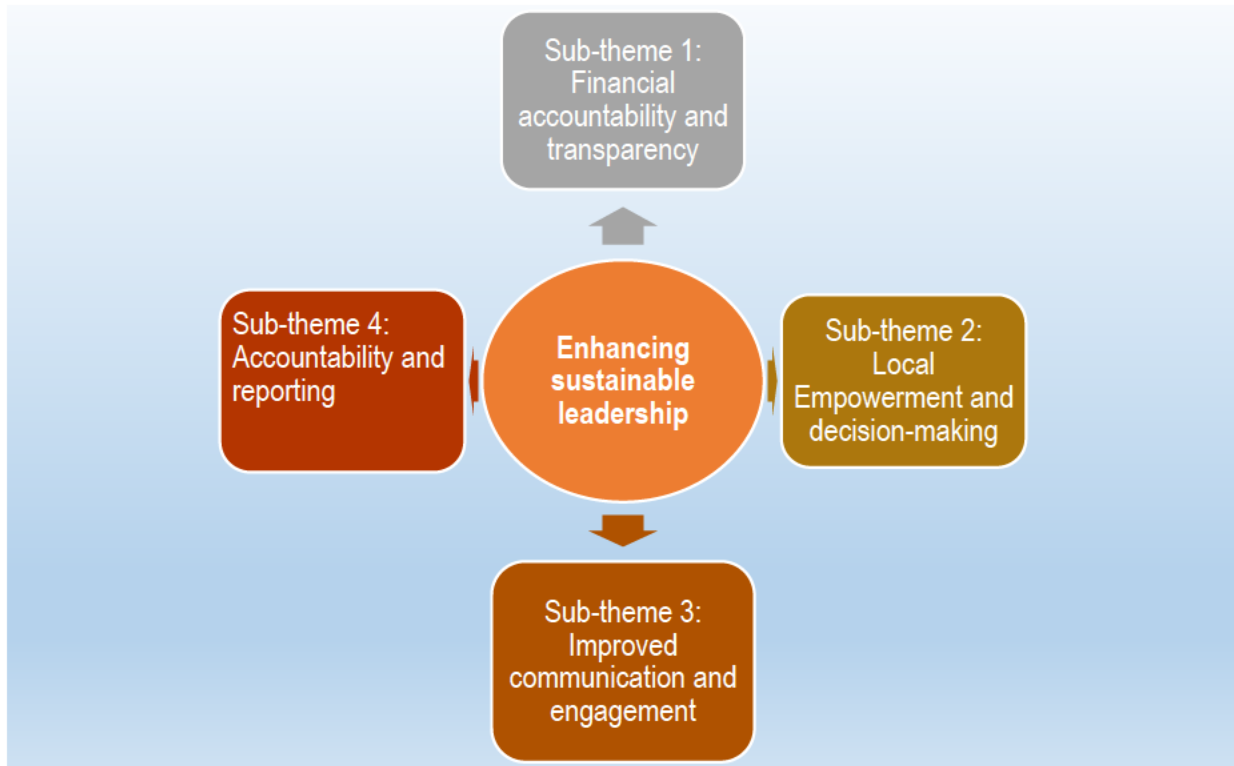


Figure 5.5: Sub-themes for main theme 4

5.2.4.1 Sustainability embedded in the day-to-day operations of 5-star hotels.

In the space of 5-star hospitality in KwaZulu-Natal, the integration of sustainability into the day-to-day operations of hotels stands as a fundamental pillar. The commitment to sustainability is not merely a goal but a pervasive ethos, as articulated by a General Manager of one such establishment. Reflecting on their practices, the General Manager emphasises how sustainability is woven into the very fabric of their operations, extending from energy-efficient lighting to eco-friendly amenities. Collaborations with local communities and suppliers have been integral to this commitment, transforming sustainability from a mere buzzword into a tangible and immersive experience for every guest. The following excerpt asserts this position:

At our 5-star hotel, sustainability is not just a goal; it's a way of life. We've woven environmental consciousness into the fabric of our operations. From energy-efficient lighting to eco-friendly amenities, we engage our stakeholders in the journey toward a greener future. Collaboration with local communities and suppliers ensures that sustainability isn't just a

*buzzword; it's a commitment reflected in every guest's experience (Interviewee 16, **General Manager**, 2023).*

Similarly, the Director of Operations underscores the symbiotic relationship between operational efficiency and sustainability in the context of 5-star hospitality. They highlight the implementation of training programs to empower staff in seamlessly integrating sustainable practices, with supplier collaboration being a cornerstone. The Director emphasises the establishment of a culture where stakeholder engagement serves as the linchpin for sustaining and enhancing initiatives on a daily basis. This is confirmed by the following participant:

*In the realm of 5-star hospitality, operational efficiency and sustainability go hand in hand. We've fostered collaboration with our staff, implementing training programs that empower them to integrate sustainable practices seamlessly. Engaging suppliers who share our commitment has been crucial. Through continuous communication and feedback loops, we've developed a culture where stakeholder engagement is the key to maintaining and improving our sustainable initiatives daily (Interviewee 16, **Director of Operations**, 2023).*

Echoing these sentiments, the Head of Sustainability stresses that sustainability is not relegated to isolated projects but is the very core of the hotel's existence. The day-to-day operations reflect a profound commitment to environmental and social responsibility, emphasising transparent reporting and stakeholder engagement. This is manifested through partnerships with local NGOs, guest involvement in eco-conscious experiences, and an overarching ethos of collaboration to ensure a collective journey towards a sustainable and luxurious future.

*Sustainability isn't an isolated project; it's the core of our existence. Our 5-star hotel's day-to-day operations reflect a deep commitment to environmental and social responsibility. We engage stakeholders through transparent reporting, seeking their input and involvement in shaping our sustainability roadmap. Collaboration is ingrained in our approach — be it partnering with local NGOs or involving guests in eco-conscious experiences, ensuring everyone plays a part in our collective journey towards a sustainable and luxurious future (Interviewee 16, **HOD**, 2023).*

The excerpts from the General Manager, Director of Operations, and Head of Sustainability highlight the intricate ways in which sustainability is woven into the day-to-day operations of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. According to Sharma et al. (2021), embedding sustainability in daily operations requires a comprehensive approach that involves integrating environmental and social responsibility into the organisational culture. The General Manager emphasises the importance of collaboration with local communities and suppliers, aligning with the findings of Helmold and Helmold (2020), who argue that partnerships with external stakeholders are crucial for sustainable practices in the hospitality industry. The commitment to sustainability extends beyond rhetoric, becoming an integral part of the guest experience, aligning with the principles of sustainable hospitality advocated by António and Rita (2021).

The Director of Operations underscores the relationship between operational efficiency and sustainability, echoing the sentiment that these aspects go hand in hand. This aligns with insights from Gebbels et al. (2020), who stress the importance of operational efficiency in reducing environmental impacts in the hotel industry. The emphasis on staff empowerment through training programs reflects the significance of human capital in driving sustainability initiatives, as discussed by Drexler and Lapré (2019). Continuous communication and feedback loops are highlighted, reflecting a commitment to ongoing improvement, a key aspect of the dynamic nature of sustainability in hospitality (Khattak et al., 2021).

The Head of Sustainability emphasises that sustainability is not a standalone project but the core of the hotel's existence, aligning with the principles of strategic sustainability outlined by Wang et al. (2019). The emphasis on transparent reporting and stakeholder engagement resonates with insights from Seyitoğlu and Ivanov (2020), who argue that transparency is crucial for building trust and credibility in sustainability initiatives. The collaborative approach, involving local NGOs and guests in eco-conscious experiences, is consistent with the findings of Kenny and Dutt (2022), emphasising the role of collaboration in addressing sustainability challenges in the hospitality industry. Overall, the theme highlights the multidimensional and integrated approach that 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal adopt to embed sustainability into their day-to-day operations.

5.2.4.2 Employees involvement in hotel sustainable leadership practices

The strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal is underpinned by a profound emphasis on employee involvement in sustainable leadership practices.

Recognising the pivotal role that employees play in the success of sustainable initiatives, hotel management has consistently prioritised the integration of sustainability into the organisational culture. As articulated by one of the General Managers, the commitment to sustainability extends throughout the entire staff, with comprehensive training sessions and open communication channels fostering an understanding and active participation in sustainable practices. This is confirmed by the following quote:

*Our commitment to sustainable leadership at our hotel extends to every member of our team. Through regular training sessions and open communication channels, we ensure that our employees understand and actively participate in our sustainable practices. From energy-efficient operations to waste reduction initiatives, each staff member plays a crucial role in fostering a culture of environmental responsibility (Interviewee 16, **General Manager**, 2023).*

Moreover, the HR Director emphasises the integral nature of employee engagement, outlining the incorporation of sustainable practices into daily operations and the encouragement of innovative ideas. This approach seeks to empower the staff, instilling a sense of ownership and responsibility, thereby creating a workplace where environmental consciousness is not only embraced but also a source of pride.

*Employee engagement in sustainable leadership practices is integral to our workplace ethos. We empower our staff by incorporating sustainable practices into our daily operations and encouraging their innovative ideas. By fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility, we aim to create a workplace where our team not only embraces sustainability but feels proud to be a part of an organisation making a positive impact on the environment (Interviewee 16, **HR Director**, 2023).*

Another interviewee in the capacity of an Environmental Sustainability Coordinator further elucidates the proactive measures taken by the hotel to cultivate environmental stewardship among employees. Workshops, team involvement in green initiatives, and the recognition and rewarding of sustainable practices are all employed to ensure that employees are not merely compliant but share a collective commitment to making eco-conscious choices. This concerted effort aims to embed sustainability into the fabric of the hotel's identity, contributing to a greener future for both the establishment and the wider community. The below verbatim asserts this:

*In our hotel, we believe in cultivating a sense of environmental stewardship among our employees. We organise workshops, involve teams in green initiatives, and recognise and reward sustainable practices. Our goal is not just compliance but instilling a shared commitment to eco-conscious choices, ensuring that every employee understands their role in our sustainability journey, contributing to a greener future for our hotel and the community at large (Interviewee 16, **Environmental Sustainability Coordinator**, 2023).*

The theme of employee involvement in sustainable leadership practices within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal reflects a commitment to fostering a culture of environmental responsibility among the staff. This commitment is evident in the interviews conducted with key stakeholders, including the General Manager, HR Director, and Environmental Sustainability Coordinator. The first excerpt emphasises the comprehensive approach taken by the hotel, ensuring that every team member is well-versed in and actively participating in sustainable practices. This aligns with the broader literature on sustainable leadership, which emphasises the importance of employee engagement for the successful implementation of sustainable practices (Je et al., 2023).

The second excerpt on this theme highlights the integration of sustainable practices into daily operations, empowering staff through a sense of ownership and responsibility. This approach resonates with the literature on transformational leadership, which posits that leaders who inspire and empower their followers foster a sense of commitment and motivation to achieve common goals (Hoang et al., 2021). In the context of sustainability, this translates to employees who not only comply with environmental initiatives but actively contribute innovative ideas, creating a more dynamic and adaptive organisation.

The third excerpt underscores the importance of cultivating environmental stewardship among employees through workshops, green initiatives, and recognition programs. This aligns with research on organisational culture and sustainability, emphasising the need for a shared commitment to eco-conscious choices (Sharma et al., 2021). Recognition and rewards for sustainable practices are also consistent with the literature on motivation, suggesting that acknowledging and reinforcing desired behaviours can enhance employee commitment and engagement (Chon & Zoltan, 2019).

In summary, the theme of employees' involvement in sustainable leadership practices within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal reflects a holistic approach that aligns with established literature on sustainable leadership, transformational leadership, organisational culture, and motivation. By actively engaging employees, fostering a sense of ownership, and recognising sustainable efforts, hotels can build a workforce that is not only compliant but enthusiastic about contributing to a greener future.

5.3 Chapter summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive report on the findings derived from the conducted interviews. the discussion was structured around five key themes, namely leadership practices for sustainable operations, challenges and barriers to sustainability leadership, stakeholder engagement and collaboration, integration of sustainable practices in operations, as well as measuring and reporting sustainability performance. the following chapter will examine into the findings from the focus group discussions.

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

6.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented and discussed into the insightful findings gathered through a series of interviews. Through an in-depth discussion of these findings, this chapter aims to contribute to the increasing literature on sustainable practices within the hospitality industry. By illuminating the specific challenges and opportunities faced by 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, and by evaluating the proposed strategic leadership framework through the lens of diverse perspectives, this research seeks to inform and guide the future trajectory of sustainability initiatives in the region's premier hospitality establishments. As the research shifts its focus towards the outcomes of the focus group discussions, this chapter pivots its attention towards these deliberations, guided by the research objectives.

6.2 Target participants

The focus group interviews targeted a diverse group of participants with expertise and roles relevant to the hospitality industry and sustainability practices. Participants included senior executives and managers from 5-star hotels in the KwaZulu-Natal region, encompassing positions such as general managers, sustainability managers, operations managers, and marketing managers. The selection aimed to capture a comprehensive perspective on strategic leadership in sustainability within the specific context of luxury hotels, ensuring representation from key decision-makers responsible for shaping and implementing sustainability initiatives. The diverse backgrounds and roles of the participants aimed to enrich the focus group discussions, providing nuanced insights into the challenges, opportunities, and best practices in fostering sustainability within the upscale hotel sector in KwaZulu-Natal province.

The focus group discussions were conducted in separate sessions over a period of three months, mainly so to accommodate the convenience and availability of participants. Each discussion group consisted of four to five participants, and these dialogues were characterised by their depth and extensive engagement, with an average of one hour per each session. This robust exchange of insights and ideas from a diverse group of participants enriched the research findings.

6.3 Findings from the focus group

The primary aim of content analysis is to assess the contextual implications of a transcript. This technique, commonly used by scholars to examine narrative data, is non-numerical and focuses on scrutinising the transcript's content within the context of the study (Dwesini, 2019). Qualitative content analysis was employed in this study to analyse the transcript's substance by applying codes to various themes and patterns identified. Grouping the information into themes, subthemes, or patterns greatly facilitated the analysis and interpretation of non-numerical data. The analysis specifically sought recurring themes that directly addressed the research questions, enabling the researcher to comprehensively investigate the phenomenon through a textual interpretation of the transcripts, presenting logical arguments from multiple perspectives. This study utilised qualitative research, employing focus group discussions for data collection and analysis. Thematic analysis, supported by NVIVO, was used to analyse the collected data.

6.4 Findings from focus group discussions

Focus groups are a qualitative research method where a small, diverse group of participants engage in open discussions facilitated by a researcher to gather in-depth insights into specific topics. In the context of this study, focus group discussions served as a valuable means of exploring and understanding various aspects related to sustainable leadership and local governance. The collected data from focus groups underwent an analysis process akin to other qualitative self-report data. The researcher followed a systematic approach that involved organising and comparing discussions that revolved around similar themes while considering the variables within the sample population.

Several recurring themes emerged during the focus group discussions, shedding light on key aspects related to sustainable leadership and local governance. These themes provided valuable insights into the perceptions and experiences of participants. The identified themes that surfaced during the discussions are summarised in figure 6.1 below:

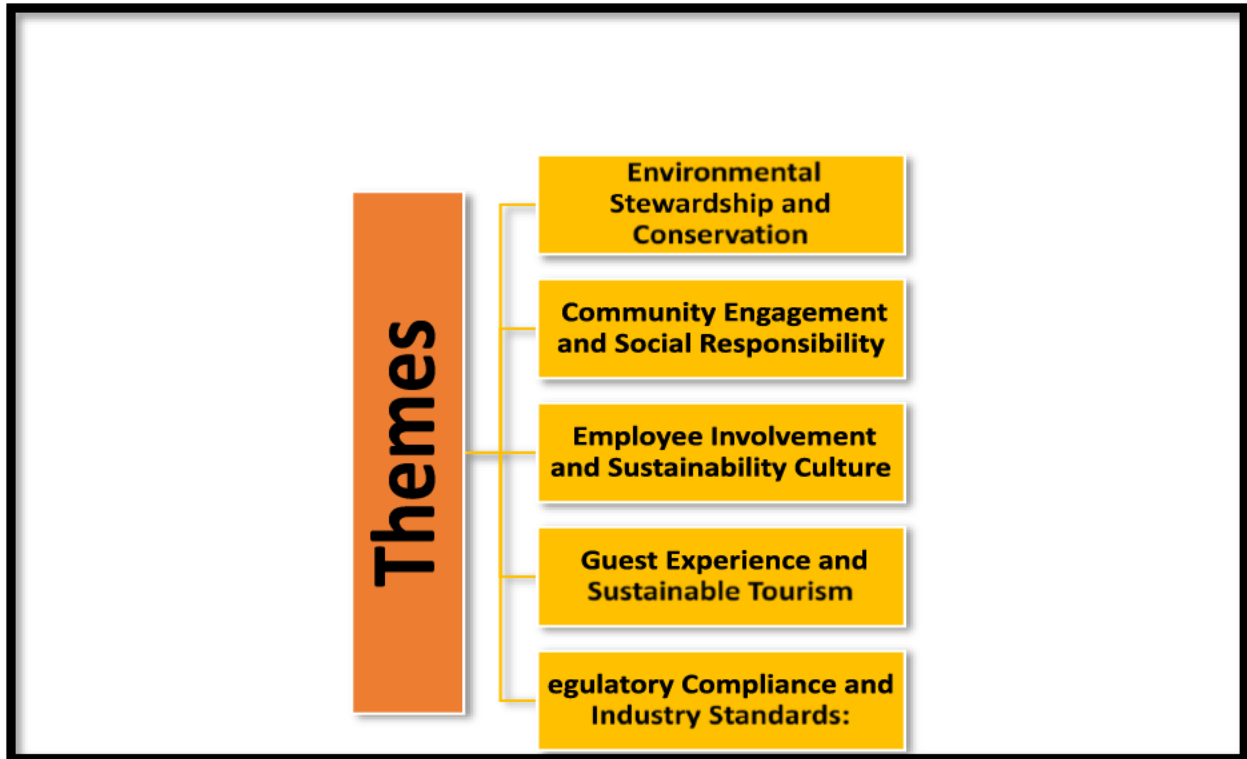


Figure 6.1: Themes

For the sake of convenient cross-referencing, the examination of data derived from the focus group discussions was framed within the context of the five primary themes outlined in Figure 6.1. The analysis involved the systematic categorisation and scrutiny of data, focusing on the subsequent thematic divisions:

6.4.1 Environmental Stewardship and Conservation

In respect of the environmental stewardship and conservation, the following are the extracted excerpts from the focus group participants:

As a hotel leader committed to environmental stewardship, our focus is on integrating sustainable practices throughout our operations. We actively engage in conservation efforts, from reducing single-use plastics to implementing energy-efficient technologies. By fostering a culture of environmental responsibility among our staff and guests, we strive to make a positive impact on the planet and contribute to a greener future.

At our hotel, environmental stewardship is not just a goal; it's a core value that guides our decisions and actions. We believe in preserving the beauty of our surroundings and minimizing our ecological footprint. Through initiatives like waste reduction, water conservation, and community involvement, we aim to be leaders in sustainable hospitality. Our commitment to the environment reflects our dedication to creating memorable experiences that go hand-in-hand with responsible, eco-friendly practices.

As a hotel leader passionate about environmental conservation, we recognize the urgency of addressing environmental challenges. Our approach involves collaboration with local communities and organizations to promote biodiversity and protect natural resources. From sourcing locally to implementing green building practices, we are on a mission to demonstrate that luxury and sustainability can coexist harmoniously. By fostering a sense of environmental responsibility, we hope to inspire both our industry and guests to contribute to a healthier planet.

The excerpts from hotel leaders in KwaZulu-Natal underscore a strong commitment to environmental stewardship and conservation within 5-star hotels, emphasizing the integration of sustainable practices throughout their operations. The first commonality across the excerpts is the dedication to reducing environmental impact through eco-friendly practices, such as waste reduction, energy efficiency, and water conservation. Existing literature supports the significance of these initiatives in the hospitality sector. Studies highlight how waste reduction not only minimizes environmental harm but also contributes to cost savings and enhances a hotel's overall efficiency (Chon & Zoltan, 2019). Additionally, energy-efficient technologies are recognized as essential for reducing the carbon footprint of hotels and improving long-term sustainability (Ojogiwa, 2021). The commitment to water conservation aligns with global concerns about water scarcity, reinforcing the hotels' responsibility to manage this critical resource responsibly (Vij, 2019).

Furthermore, the hotel leaders express a focus on initiatives beyond basic practices, incorporating renewable energy adoption and sustainable sourcing of materials. The adoption of renewable energy aligns with broader trends in the hospitality industry, where hotels are increasingly investing in renewable sources to reduce reliance on conventional energy and decrease their environmental impact (Lombardi et al., 2021). Sustainable sourcing of materials reflects a commitment to responsible supply chain management, acknowledging the interconnectedness of the hotel industry with various sectors. Literature suggests that responsible sourcing practices can positively influence a hotel's brand reputation and customer satisfaction (Knight et al., 2020).

Lastly, attitudes towards environmental certifications and green building standards are highlighted. Existing research emphasizes the role of certifications in signaling a hotel's commitment to sustainability and serving as a competitive advantage (Busulwa et al., 2022). The leaders' positive perceptions of these certifications align with the broader industry trend where consumers increasingly value and seek out eco-friendly accommodations (Arasli, et al., 2020). In short, the thematic analysis reveals a comprehensive commitment to environmental stewardship and conservation within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The incorporation of eco-friendly practices, renewable energy adoption, sustainable sourcing, and positive attitudes towards certifications align with established literature on sustainable practices in the hospitality sector, showcasing a strategic leadership framework for sustainability.

6.4.2 Community Engagement and Social Responsibility

In an era marked by interconnectedness and shared global challenges, the concepts of community engagement and social responsibility have emerged as pivotal forces driving positive change. As societies navigate complex issues ranging from environmental sustainability to social equity, the need for active participation and responsible action at the community level has become increasingly apparent. This theme looked into the dynamic interplay between community engagement and social responsibility, exploring how individuals, organizations, and communities can collaboratively contribute to building a more inclusive, sustainable, and compassionate world. By examining the principles, challenges, and tangible impacts associated with these concepts, we aim to unravel the intricate web that binds communities and their responsibility in shaping a brighter, more resilient future. This is confirmed by the following participants who stated:

As leaders in hospitality, our commitment extends beyond providing exceptional service. We see ourselves as integral members of the community. By actively engaging with local initiatives and supporting social causes, we aim to create a positive impact. Our guests aren't just visitors; they're part of a larger community, and we take pride in contributing to its well-being (P1, Manager, 2023).

Social responsibility is at the core of our operational philosophy. From eco-friendly practices to supporting local charities, our hotel strives to be a responsible corporate citizen. We believe that by investing in the community, we not only enhance the quality of life for residents but also enrich the overall guest experience. It's a win-win that goes beyond traditional hospitality boundaries (P2, Director, 2023).

Our brand isn't just about providing a comfortable stay; it's about fostering connections and making a positive impact. Through strategic community engagement, we're not only building brand loyalty but creating a narrative that resonates with socially conscious travellers. In today's world, guests want more than just a room; they want an experience that aligns with their values, and we're here to deliver (P1, Supervisor, 2023).

Community Engagement and Social Responsibility are pivotal themes in the context of a strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The excerpts provided underscore the commitment of hotel leaders to extend their role beyond providing exceptional service to actively engaging with local initiatives and supporting social causes. This commitment is aligned with the operational philosophy of making social responsibility core to the hotel's ethos, encompassing eco-friendly practices and support for local charities. The emphasis on community engagement is not just a business strategy but a fundamental aspect of building brand loyalty and resonating with socially conscious travellers who seek more than just a comfortable stay; they desire an experience that aligns with their values.

Existing literature supports the notion that community engagement is a key element for businesses operating in the hospitality sector, particularly in the context of sustainability. Research highlights the positive impact of hotels actively participating in local community development, enhancing the quality of life for residents (Cong & Thu, 2021). The strategic incorporation of social responsibility programs, such as supporting local businesses, aligns with studies emphasizing the

importance of sustainable practices in the hospitality industry (Sheldon and Park, 2011; Weaver and Lawton, 2014). Understanding community needs and expectations is crucial for the effective implementation of social responsibility initiatives, and this aligns with the principles of stakeholder theory in organizational management (Sanabria-Díaz et al., 2021; Filimonau, 2021).

Incorporating community engagement into the operational philosophy of 5-star hotels not only contributes to local well-being but also aligns with global trends in consumer behaviour. Modern guests, as emphasized in the literature, are increasingly seeking experiences that go beyond traditional hospitality boundaries and resonate with their values, including environmental and social responsibility (Rodríguez-Antón et al., 2020). The excerpts suggest that hotels in KwaZulu-Natal are recognizing this shift and positioning themselves as responsible corporate citizens, thus enriching the overall guest experience. In conclusion, the theme of Community Engagement and Social Responsibility is integral to the strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The provided excerpts highlight the commitment of hotel leaders to actively contribute to local community development, support social causes, and meet the evolving expectations of socially conscious guests. The existing literature supports these practices as essential for enhancing brand loyalty, positively impacting local communities, and aligning with the broader global trend towards sustainable and responsible tourism.

6.4.3 Employee Involvement and Sustainability Culture

In the contemporary landscape of corporate responsibility and environmental consciousness, the intersection of employee involvement and sustainability culture has emerged as a critical theme. Organizations worldwide are increasingly recognizing the pivotal role that their workforce plays in shaping and sustaining environmentally responsible practices. This synergy between employees and sustainability initiatives not only enhances the ecological footprint of businesses but also fosters a sense of collective responsibility among staff members. As businesses grapple with the imperative to address environmental challenges, the integration of sustainability into organizational culture is becoming a defining factor for success. Employee involvement goes beyond token gestures, inviting individuals at all levels to actively participate in the decision-making processes that shape a company's approach to sustainability. This discussion explores the symbiotic relationship between employee engagement and the establishment of a robust sustainability culture, shedding light on the tangible benefits for both the organization and its

workforce. From fostering innovation to enhancing corporate reputation, the nexus between employee involvement and sustainability underscores the transformative power of aligning business objectives with environmental stewardship. This is confirmed by the following participants:

At our luxury resort, we recognize that true excellence in hospitality goes beyond opulent amenities. Our commitment to sustainability is interwoven with the essence of our guest experience. We empower our staff to actively participate in eco-friendly initiatives, fostering a culture where every team member is a steward of our environment. Through employee involvement, we not only enhance our sustainability practices but also create a memorable and conscientious stay for our discerning guests **(Excerpt 1: General Manager - Luxury Resort).**

As a boutique hotel owner, we embrace a personalized approach to hospitality that extends to our sustainability efforts. Our small yet dedicated team understands the impact we can make on our local community and the planet. Employee involvement is at the core of our green initiatives. From minimizing waste to supporting local businesses, our staff actively contributes to the development of a sustainable culture that mirrors the uniqueness of our boutique experience **(Excerpt 2: Boutique Hotel Owner)**

At our international hotel chain, we recognize the global responsibility we bear in promoting sustainable practices. Employee involvement is not just a concept; it's a fundamental aspect of our operations. Our diverse team collaborates across borders to implement innovative sustainability solutions, reflecting the unique perspectives each member brings. Through comprehensive training and continuous engagement, we foster a sustainability culture that aligns with our brand values and contributes to a more responsible and resilient future **(Excerpt 3: Director of Operations - International Hotel Chain)**

The theme of employee involvement and sustainability culture is a central aspect of the strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The excerpts from the General Manager of a Luxury Resort, Boutique Hotel Owner, and the Director of Operations from an International Hotel Chain shed light on the significance of engaging employees in sustainable

practices. The theme of employee involvement and sustainability culture emerges strongly from the provided excerpts, showcasing the integral role of staff in fostering and perpetuating sustainability practices within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. This theme aligns with the growing recognition that sustainability in the hospitality sector is not solely a managerial concern but is significantly influenced by the active participation of employees.

Firstly, the General Manager emphasizes the integration of sustainability into the guest experience. By empowering staff to actively participate in eco-friendly initiatives, the luxury resort not only enhances its sustainability practices but also creates a memorable and conscientious stay for guests. This suggests that employee involvement is not just about implementing green initiatives but is integral to the overall guest satisfaction and brand image. In the luxury resort setting, the General Manager emphasizes that true hospitality excellence extends beyond luxurious amenities. The commitment to sustainability is woven into the fabric of the guest experience, with an emphasis on empowering staff to actively engage in eco-friendly initiatives. This approach not only enhances sustainability practices but also contributes to creating a memorable and conscientious stay for guests. Existing literature suggests that involving employees in sustainability initiatives fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, leading to more effective and enduring outcomes (Alseiari et al., 2019).

Secondly, the Boutique Hotel Owner stresses a personalized approach to hospitality that extends to sustainability efforts. In this context, the small yet dedicated team actively contributes to the development of a sustainable culture. This underlines the idea that even in smaller establishments, employee involvement plays a crucial role in minimizing waste, supporting local businesses, and fostering a unique boutique experience aligned with sustainable principles. The Boutique Hotel Owner, operating on a more personalized scale, underscores the significance of a small yet dedicated team in driving sustainability efforts. The emphasis on minimizing waste and supporting local businesses indicates a community-centric approach. Research by Burhan et al. (2021) highlights that smaller establishments often have a more direct and tangible impact on local communities, and involving employees in sustainability initiatives can enhance this impact.

Thirdly, the Director of Operations of an International Hotel Chain highlights the global responsibility of the chain in promoting sustainable practices. Here, employee involvement is not merely a concept but a fundamental aspect of operations. The diverse team collaborates across

borders to implement innovative sustainability solutions, showcasing the importance of inclusivity and the unique perspectives each team member brings to the table. The Director of Operations from the International Hotel Chain emphasizes the global responsibility of the organization in promoting sustainable practices. The mention of a diverse team collaborating across borders reflects a nuanced understanding of the role of employee involvement. Research by Elkhwesky, (2022) suggests that diversity in perspectives can lead to more innovative and comprehensive sustainability solutions. The commitment to comprehensive training aligns with literature indicating that ongoing education and engagement are vital for instilling a sustainability culture (e.g., Mousa et al., 2021).

These excerpts collectively suggest that employee involvement in sustainability is not a one-size-fits-all concept. Instead, it is tailored to the specific context and values of each hotel, whether it be a luxury resort, boutique hotel, or an international chain. The integration of sustainability into the core of operations, collaboration across diverse teams, and the alignment with brand values are recurring themes that underscore the strategic importance of employee involvement in fostering a sustainability culture in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.

6.4.4 Guest Experience and Sustainable Tourism

The symbiotic relationship between these two elements not only shapes the way guests engage with destinations but also holds the key to fostering responsible and enduring tourism practices. The convergence of guest experience and sustainability goes beyond the conventional parameters of travel; it embodies a commitment to environmental stewardship, community engagement, and the holistic well-being of both visitors and host communities. This thematic analysis aims to delve into the intricate dynamics that define the relationship between guest experience and sustainable tourism. As guests increasingly seek authentic and meaningful interactions with the places they visit, the industry is compelled to evolve, placing sustainability at the forefront of its agenda. From eco-friendly accommodations to culturally immersive activities, the evolving landscape of tourism is marked by a shift towards experiences that resonate with both the individual guests and the broader global community.

By examining the various dimensions of this symbiosis, this analysis seeks to unravel the ways in which guest experiences contribute to or detract from the principles of sustainable tourism. The following extracts emerged from the focus group discussions:

As a forward-thinking hotel leader, I am thrilled to champion a paradigm shift towards sustainable tourism. Our commitment to delivering an exceptional guest experience goes hand-in-hand with preserving the environment and local communities. By seamlessly integrating sustainable practices into every aspect of our operations, we not only enhance guest satisfaction but also contribute to the longevity of the destinations we serve. (Participant 12, Director, 2023).

"As a hotel leader deeply rooted in community values, our focus on guest experience extends beyond the walls of our establishment. We believe in creating experiences that not only delight our guests but also positively impact the communities we operate in. Through sustainable tourism initiatives, we aim to forge lasting connections, ensuring that every visitor leaves not just as a satisfied guest but as a conscious global citizen. (Participant 11, Director, 2023).

At the heart of our hospitality philosophy lies a commitment to crafting unforgettable guest experiences. Sustainable tourism is not just a responsibility but a cornerstone of our approach. By blending luxury with environmental consciousness, we offer guests an immersive experience that leaves them inspired and fulfilled. We believe in redefining hospitality to not only meet expectations but to exceed them while leaving a minimal footprint on our planet. (Participant 13, Director, 2023).

The theme is central to the strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The excerpts provided by hotel leaders emphasize the integral connection between guest satisfaction and sustainable practices. The participants express a commitment to a paradigm shift towards sustainable tourism, highlighting the importance of seamlessly integrating environmentally conscious actions into every aspect of hotel operations.

The hotel leadership recognize the correlation between an exceptional guest experience and the preservation of the environment and local communities. This perspective aligns with existing literature that underscores the positive impact of sustainable tourism on guest satisfaction. Research has shown that modern guests increasingly value eco-friendly practices, seeking

immersive experiences that align with their environmental and social values (Yang et al., 2021). Thus, the commitment expressed by the hotel leaders not only enhances guest satisfaction but also contributes to the long-term well-being of the destinations they serve.

Furthermore, the excerpts reveal a holistic approach to guest experience that extends beyond the hotel premises. Hotel leaders acknowledge the role of sustainable tourism initiatives in positively impacting the communities in which they operate. This aligns with literature emphasizing the potential for sustainable tourism to foster community engagement and support local economies (Darvishmotevali & Altinay, 2022). The leaders aim to create experiences that transform guests into conscious global citizens, highlighting the interconnectedness of guest satisfaction, sustainable practices, and community well-being. The hotel leadership articulate a unique hospitality philosophy that places sustainable tourism at its core. They view environmental consciousness not just as a responsibility but as a fundamental aspect of their approach to crafting unforgettable guest experiences. This aligns with literature suggesting that sustainability can be a source of competitive advantage in the hospitality industry (Dube, 2021). The leaders emphasize the blending of luxury with environmental consciousness, redefining hospitality to not only meet but exceed guest expectations while minimizing the ecological footprint.

6.4.5 Regulatory Compliance and Industry Standards

This theme sought to explore the regulatory compliance and industry standards in the hotel industry. It emerged that in the ever-evolving landscape of business and industry, the symbiotic relationship between Regulatory Compliance and Industry Standards plays a pivotal role in shaping organizational conduct and operational frameworks. This thematic analysis probes the interplay of these two critical elements, exploring the dynamic forces that drive businesses to adhere to established regulations and standards. Regulatory Compliance serves as the bedrock for ensuring ethical practices, legal conformity, and risk mitigation, while Industry Standards act as benchmarks that guide organizations towards achieving optimal performance, quality, and innovation. This is confirmed by the following participants:

Ensuring strict adherence to regulatory compliance and industry standards is not just a legal obligation but a commitment to excellence. By upholding these standards, we not only guarantee the safety and satisfaction of our guests but also contribute to the overall reputation and credibility of our establishment. It's a testament to our dedication to providing a top-notch hospitality experience (Participant 13, Director, 2023).

In an industry where trust is paramount, regulatory compliance is our guiding principle. It's the foundation upon which we build our operational strategies and quality assurance. By staying ahead of industry standards, we not only mitigate risks but also position ourselves as leaders in guest satisfaction. Compliance is not just a checkbox; it's a strategic advantage that sets us apart (Participant 13, Director, 2023).

As leaders in the hospitality sector, it's our responsibility to set the benchmark for regulatory compliance and industry standards. It's not about meeting the minimum requirements but surpassing them to exceed guest expectations. By doing so, we not only safeguard our business but create an environment where guests feel secure, valued, and confident in the quality of our services. It's a commitment to excellence that defines who we are (Participant 13, Director, 2023).

In the context of sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, the theme of regulatory compliance and industry standards emerges as a critical pillar in the strategic leadership framework. The excerpts highlight that adherence to these standards goes beyond mere legal obligations; it reflects a commitment to excellence and plays a pivotal role in shaping the reputation and credibility of the establishment.

The emphasis on regulatory compliance as a guiding principle is underscored in the literature. According to research by Hendren et al. (2023), strict adherence to regulations is crucial for maintaining trust in the hospitality industry. Trust is identified as a cornerstone, and regulatory compliance serves as the foundation upon which operational strategies and quality assurance are built. This aligns with the perspective that compliance is not merely a checkbox but a strategic advantage that positions hotels as leaders in guest satisfaction.

Leaders in the hospitality sector are expected to set the benchmark for regulatory compliance and industry standards, as noted in the excerpts. This resonates with the findings of Golensky and Hager (2020), who argue that industry leaders bear the responsibility of not only meeting but surpassing the minimum requirements. Such an approach is vital for exceeding guest expectations and creating an environment where guests feel secure, valued, and confident in the quality of services provided. This commitment to excellence becomes a defining characteristic of the hotel's identity.

The literature supports the idea that compliance with regulatory standards is intertwined with risk mitigation and strategic positioning. According to studies by Tuomi et al. (2021), staying ahead of industry standards not only helps in risk reduction but also provides hotels with a competitive edge. This strategic advantage reinforces the notion that compliance is an integral part of the overall strategy, setting hotels apart in a competitive market. In conclusion, the theme of regulatory compliance and industry standards in the strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal is not just about meeting legal requirements; it is a commitment to excellence and a strategic advantage. By adhering to these standards, hotels not only ensure the safety and satisfaction of guests but also shape their reputation and credibility. This commitment is a defining characteristic that positions these hotels as leaders in the hospitality sector, fostering trust, and exceeding guest expectations.

6.5 Proposed framework of resilience for the hospitality and tourism industry

The study proposes sustainable leadership as a shared responsibility. It does not unduly diminish human or financial resources, and cares for and avoids exerting negative damage on the surrounding educational and community environment. Sustainable leadership has futuristic commitments with the forces that affect it. It builds an educational environment of organizational diversity that promotes cross-fertilization of worthy ideas and successful practices in communities of shared learning and development. Sustainable leadership, according to the empirical results of this study, has seven characteristics, namely:

(1) sustainable leadership lasts as it pay serious attention to leadership succession,

- (2) sustainable leadership spreads as it ensures that vision is developed and shared with other school actor,
- (3) sustainable leadership is socially just and it aims to benefit all stakeholders,
- (4) sustainable leadership is resourceful and it provide certain intrinsic rewards while at the same time offering external incentives that attract the best and brightest in the leadership pool,
- (5) sustainable leadership promotes diversity,
- (6) sustainable leadership is an activist, and
- (7) systems must support sustainable leadership.

This study outlines the seven principles of sustainable leadership. The first one is that sustainable leadership matters meaning that sustainable leadership provides an all-inclusive and expressive environment that engages stakeholders intellectually, socially and emotionally. Business should focus on what is itself sustaining as an enrichment of life, the fundamental moral compass of lifelong existence for all in commitments to nurturing relationships with others. Secondly is that Sustainable Leadership Lasts ensuring that there is stable leadership, having a succession plan in place for leadership and other critical positions and functions in an organisation. Thirdly, Sustainable Leadership Spreads in a sense that leadership is shared and distributed as a means of talent management and multiple levels in the whole school capacity development, by promoting collective leadership.

The fourth characteristic is that Sustainable Leadership is Socially Just and safeguards that leadership decisions and actions are considerate of the impact it has on the large number of stakeholders, as well as on greater community. As the actions and outcomes of schools affect each other in webs of mutual influence, sustainable leadership should show concern for stakeholders and the environment they operate in. The fifth one is that Sustainable Leadership is Resourceful and strives to identify, attract, employ, and retain the best talent. Furthermore, sustainable leadership promotes knowledge sharing and networking among staff members and external professionals. The sixth one is that Sustainable Leadership Promotes Diversity, and thus creates an environment that recognizes and celebrates multiple best practices. The study outcome contend

that standardization tends to stifle sustainability and does not impose standardized templates on everyone.

The seventh characteristic is that Sustainable Leadership is Activist engaging individuals and the community in patterns of mutual influence and creating change through innovative ways of extended leadership. For the purpose of the study, these characteristics of sustainable leadership fit well with business leadership roles of departmental heads as part of business management teams. They afford them an opportunity of being more involved in implementation of policies and creating conducive environment for school stakeholders to ensure effective relationship and interactions within the school environment and in the society.

6.5 .1 Strategic leadership as a key driver and precedence

Leaders are responsible for making decisions for all levels of their organization (Lombardiet al., 2021); hence, leaders are pre-eminent and the key driver in the proposed organizational resilience framework. According to Samimi et al. (2020), strategic leadership has eight crucial functions, namely, to ‘create a vision,’ ‘strategic decision making,’ ‘stakeholder engagement,’ ‘resource management,’ ‘information management,’ ‘empowerment,’ motivating and influencing’ and ‘social and ethical issue management.

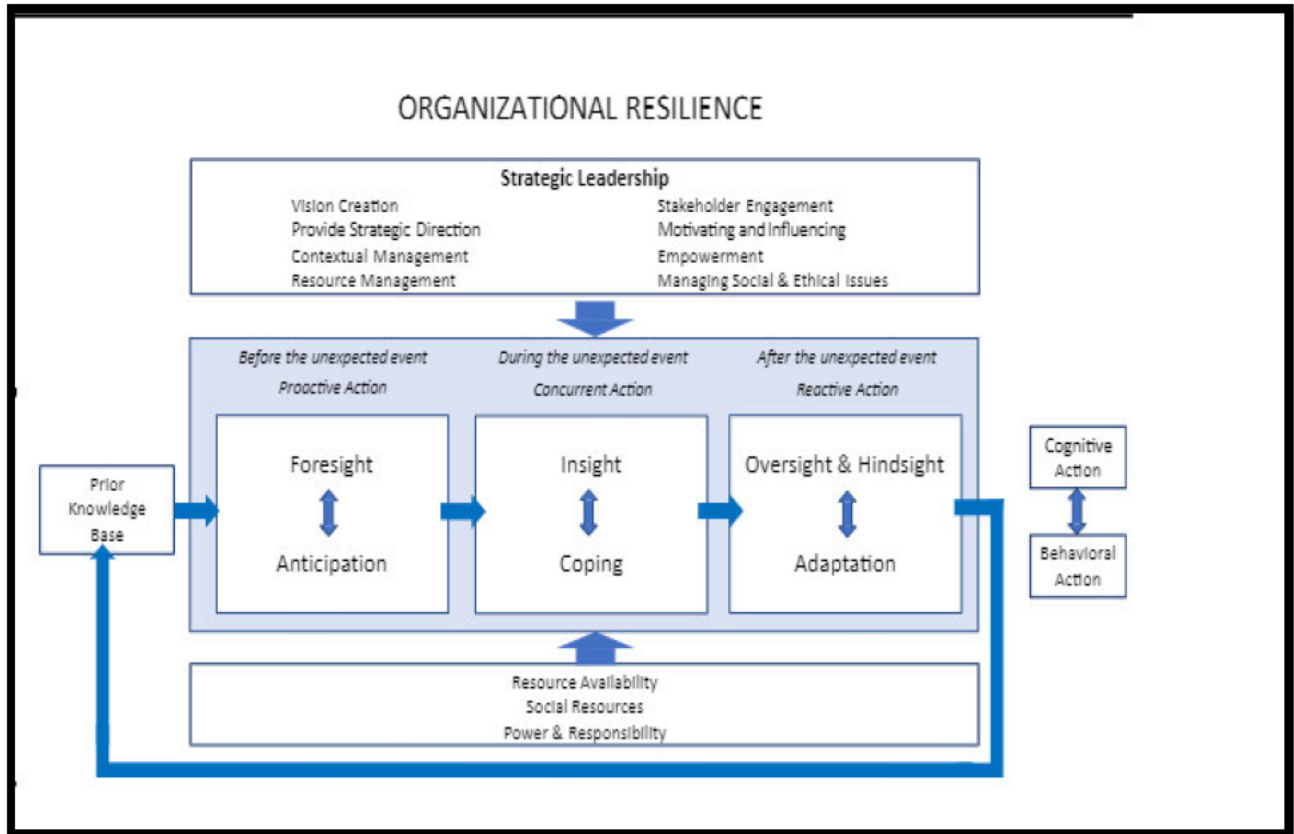


Figure 6.1: Organizational resilience (Author)

Strategic leaders determine their organization’s vision, build and maintain core competencies, nurture an effective organizational culture, highlight ethical practices, develop human capital and introduce balanced organizational controls. The study suggests that three components are involved in leaders’ crafting of their organization’s strategic vision: resource availability, environmental turbulence and susceptibility to change. Turbulence incites leaders to create a vision, and strategic leaders will discover opportunities and threats that emerge from turbulent conditions. The study proposes that strategic leaders who possess high cognitive complexity and a clear vision will have more significant absorptive capacity than those with no clear vision. In other words, strategic leaders review and analyse the changes in the organizational environment in the context of their vision. A clear vision allows leaders to clearly determine the ways in which such changes influence their envisioned future of the organization.

Collaboration among all industry stakeholders is important to navigate the current crisis and future disasters. Strategic leaders can act proactively, manage and communicate well with different

stakeholders and help the industry make sense of chaos by balancing the various stakeholders' interests (Shukla et al., 2022). Environmental uncertainty also presents opportunities and allows strategic leaders to flex and mobilize their organization's resources and identify and exploit such opportunities. Such leaders play a crucial role in configuring and leveraging social and human capital. Human capital involves a holistic strategic human resource system, as well as future management professions (Lee et al., 2021) for developing a capacity for resilience. Meanwhile, social capital comprises relationships between organizations and individuals that facilitate actions to create value. Social capital can be internal or external. Internal social capital is related to the relationships between strategic leaders and the people they lead and relationships across all organizational business units, whereas external social capital is related to people outside the organization with whom leaders interact to further the organization's benefits. Organization leaders should pay attention to bonding with and bridging social capital to achieve organizational goals.

Strategic leaders have to manage their resources effectively and shall not overlook the role of financial resources. According to study findings, managing the organization's financial capital is one of the main functions of top managers. Thus, leaders have to acquire, develop and integrate assets to add to their resource portfolio and create internal capabilities to gain competitive advantage. Hospitality and tourism leaders need to be adept and apply all the functions of strategic leadership, such as vision creation, strategic direction, information management, resource management, stakeholder engagement, motivating and influencing, empowerment, and ethical and social issue management. The top management of hotel and tourism companies must be able to handle uncertainty to achieve their vision, which requires purposeful planning and strategic execution. This study describes the role of strategic leadership to 'anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, think strategically, and work with others to initiate changes that will create a viable future for the organization'.

According to the study, having a 'prior knowledge base' means having knowledge on the environment, former crises and successful actions, which is important in the anticipation stage. A strong knowledge base within the company is important, with depth in not only financial but also human resources and a clear division and accounting of responsibilities. The staple system of standard operating procedures, manuals and templates can help ensure efficient internal

communication and knowledge transfer within a company. Documentation such as crisis communications and business continuity manuals should be updated regularly to be well prepared when a crisis occurs. Thus, when disaster strikes, operating units can leverage their knowledge base to strategize and reallocate resources to manage the situation.

Operating units can, then, leverage their social capital, step up communications with stakeholders and mobilize their networks to devise response plans. 'Resource availability' implies that organizations require spare resources for flexible usage for anticipatory capabilities. A company's financial position is a source of strength and assurance. Other resources include 'social resources,' such as shared goals, mutual respect and a trusting organizational culture, which are necessary for coping capabilities. Meanwhile, 'power and responsibility' involves decentralization, self-organization, shared decision making, organic structures, and employee involvement and empowerment, which are largely related to adaptation capabilities.

Hotel and travel organizations' management must balance opposing and contradictory forces with flexible and adaptive measures. Management should adopt specific combinations of cognitive and behavioural actions by combining the systematic action-oriented framework and cognitive mindset-driven experimentation and adaptive approach in the case of unexpected events to achieve resilience. The proposed framework accommodates the uniqueness of the hotel and tourism industry of being consistent and adaptable while being defensive and progressive. Organizations need to implement processes and actions with supporting mindsets and approaches.

6.5.2 Foresight and anticipation.

Anticipation is an action, and a leader needs the right mindset to develop foresight to enable it. Foresight implies anticipating, predicting and preparing for the future to deal with environmental uncertainties and crises (Denyer, 2017). In this stage, companies must take proactive action, such as observing, identifying unexpected events, and strengthening their preparation capability. Preparation capability is essential to resilience and can be achieved by developing a broad understanding and specialized facilities and controlling resources comprehensively (Wildavsky, 1991). Companies can conduct ongoing scenario planning to create foresight and anticipate the factors that could affect the organization's wellbeing (Walsh, 2005) beforehand during the crisis. Companies should anticipate and plan for the worst while hoping for the best. Companies can also tap and share their knowledge base from previous crises such as the Middle East Respiratory

Symptoms (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemics to support their portfolio to handle the current pandemic.4.3.2 Insight and coping. Insight involves interpreting and responding to present conditions (Denyer, 2017). To cope with the unexpected pandemic such as COVID-19, leaders should respond accordingly and opt for solutions that are consistent with the environment where they are embedded (Lombardi et al., 2021). The study argues that in this stage, companies should take concurrent actions, such as accept reality and failure, while developing and implementing crisis plans and ad hoc solutions. During the pandemic, company leaders must review their strategic development progress to make prompt decisions on what projects to continue, hold back or step-up. Companies also require freedom and openness for creative and flexible actions, as well as both formal and informal coordination to cope with adverse events (Faraj and Xiao, 2006).

6.5.3 Oversight and hindsight leading to adaptation.

Oversight requires monitoring and reviewing past events and assessing changes, and hindsight suggests learning lessons from experience (Denyer, 2017). Adaptation can be categorized as a reactive action, which means reflecting, learning and implementing organizational changes after the unexpected event. Actions such as systematic measurement, evaluation and learning are necessary in the post crisis stage (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2021). Company leaders can consider what else the company could do to rethink, recover, rebuild and develop stronger organizational resilience for the future. Companies may adopt different strategies to develop an optimal structure for a leaner and fitter organization that would be agile to survive and thrive in the long run. In terms of learning and adapting, company leaders should not stop learning, even during crisis situations (Lombardi et al., 2021). Leaders can pivot by rethinking and reviewing their crisis response to induce learning. Acting on generated knowledge to implement organizational changes is important for companies. To realize such changes, change management capabilities are essential and an organization's change management process is crucial to organizational resilience.

Company leaders have to make sure that while they are responding to external changes, they are also in the position to manoeuvre within context by baking resourcing agility into their structures to develop into a learning organization. Strengthening the foundation of a company can improve the overall health of the organization and enhance its long-term sustainability, making it more robust to withstand future uncertainties. Strengthened companies will be better prepared to face

new challenges to survive in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world if the roots for resilience and organizational health have been planted

6.6. Implications

6.6.1 Theoretical implications

This study attempts to conduct a timely and insightful research that can fill the present research gap, as hospitality and tourism qualitative frameworks for organizational strategic and directional responses to pandemics are lacking. Previous frameworks suggested for general businesses did not consider the special problems of the perishable service industry, such as hospitality and tourism that has little control over its supply chain and customers and provides highly discretionary products. As a result, typical resilience models overlook the need for extreme adaptability and flexibility. The proposed strategic leadership-enhanced organizational resilience framework integrates the strategic leadership functions identified with the 4Sight action approach and the process framework and discusses the relevant variables.

The framework starts with strategic leadership as the key driver and pre-eminent factor in the entire resilience procedure. The functions of strategic leaders, including ‘creating a vision,’ ‘strategic decision making,’ ‘stakeholder engagement,’ ‘resource management,’ ‘information management,’ ‘empowerment,’ ‘motivating and influencing’ and ‘social and ethical issue management’ are crucial for organizational resilience. Besides ‘strategic leadership’ as the key driver, other variables are identified and explained, such as ‘prior knowledge base,’ ‘resource availability,’ ‘social resources’ and ‘power and responsibility.’ The factors serve as prerequisite condition for a series of resilience actions. The framework developed highlights a series of processes that companies undergo during a crisis to increase their resilience. Key elements include anticipation as a proactive action before the unexpected event, coping as a concurrent action during the event and adaptation as a reactive action after the event.

The Sight approach proposed is similar to the developed framework but reframes cognitive actions as foresight, insight, hindsight and oversight and emphasizes the importance of leveraging crisis learnings for regeneration to rebuild the future. Thus, integrating the two frameworks incorporates mindset with action, taking the resilience level to a higher order to better handle extreme uncertainties. The holistic ‘strategic leadership-enhanced organizational resilience framework’ also fills the gap in the literature. This framework conforms to most of the components of the

organizational resilience framework developed, with additional enhanced elements of leadership. For instance, the role of strategic leadership is one of the key factors for achieving organizational resilience not included in the developed framework.

Moreover, the framework places ‘resource availability’ in the anticipation stage, ‘social resources’ in the coping stage and ‘power and responsibility’ in the adaptation stage. The new conceptual framework proposed in this study expects such elements to be in place as prerequisite conditions and valid in all stages for organizational resilience instead of only in a specific stage. The elements of ‘resource availability,’ ‘social resources’ and ‘power and responsibility’ in the framework should be relevant in all three stages, that is, before, during and after the event. The variables are comparable with the four categorical factors of organizational resilience identified, whose study also confirmed that such factors must be integrated and applied across all stages for resilience. The proposed framework also includes organizational resilience elements such as prior knowledge, resource availability and organization capability, which pinpoints the importance of strategic leadership attributes when dealing with environmental uncertainties.

6.6.2 Managerial implications

This study recommends strategic actions for hotel and travel companies in response to environmental uncertainties such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for long-term organizational health as a strategic imperative for the entire industry. The hospitality and tourism industry differ from other industries, as it was the hardest hit by the pandemic (Krishnan et al., 2020) and is currently confronting a highly turbulent environment (Sun, 2011). This study can be used as an effective orientation for the industry under adversity to not only focus on short-term profitability but also take the long view to create long-term organizational sustainability and competitiveness. The inevitability of uncertainties in the hospitality and tourism industry cannot be denied (Howe, 2022). Thus, applying an industry-adapted resilience framework is vital. The proposed framework includes several important elements for achieving organizational resilience, including eight functions of strategic leadership (ie. vision creation, strategic decision making, stakeholder engagement, resource management, information management, empowerment, motivating and influence, and social and ethical issue management) and four major antecedents (emperor knowledge base, resource availability, social resources and power and responsibility).

The unique coproduction and cocreation service nature of the hospitality and tourism industry requires highly flexible and responsive leaders. The proposed framework recommends organizations to begin by seeking effective strategic leaders who possess a resilience mindset and are capable of adaptive actions to anticipate, respond and react before, during and after an unexpected event of any magnitude. Leaders' crisis preparedness mindset is essential to develop effective strategies to survive a crisis. During good times, companies should prepare for the future and conduct proactive ongoing scenario planning to anticipate crises and develop their long-term organizational health. Thus, when disaster strikes, the organization will be ready to respond, apply its strategies and act to cope. After the unexpected event, the organization should focus on its recovery and review the event to learn from its experience. In the hospitality and tourism industry, many factors contribute to an organization's success.

Organizations need to walk a fine line between being defensive and progressive while staying consistent and yet retaining flexibility. In other words, organizations have to be consistent in their goals, processes and routines but flexible in their ideas, views and actions. In addition, they should be defensive in securing as much business as possible while developing new revenue streams. Prior knowledge base; human, financial and social resources; empowerment; and sense of responsibility are resilience conditions; thus, managers must manage and nurture such inputs, especially during good times in order to have them available when needed. Industry incumbents can embrace the eight leadership functions to empower employees, instil a sense of ownership and autonomy to create agile teams and be adaptable'. The desired outcome should be leaders who can create an environment for change, so frontline staff are encouraged to act and empowered to be agile and can pivot according to emergency and crisis situations.

6.7 Chapter summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive report on the findings derived from the conducted focus group discussions. The discussion was structured around five key themes, namely challenges and mechanisms in sustainable leadership, critical challenges in sustainable leadership and governance, enhancing fiscal resilience and resource management, a tailored sustainable leadership framework, and concludes with enhancing sustainable leadership and local empowerment. The following chapter will examine the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a comprehensive examination of the findings gathered from a series of focused group discussions. These discussions revolved around five core themes, systematically exploring the intricate landscape of sustainable leadership in the context of hospitality industry service delivery at KwaZulu Natal province. This chapter synthesises the rich tapestry of insights derived from the research, capturing the essence of this exploratory research. The conclusions and recommendations presented in this chapter are not merely the culmination of empirical findings from chapters five and six but also find their roots in the theoretical foundation established in chapters two and three. The study aimed to provide actionable insights and guidance for enhancing sustainable leadership and promoting local empowerment, thereby fostering improved organisational performances in the hospitality industry.

The study sort to explore sustainable leadership in hospitality industry service delivery within KwaZulu Natal province using the sustainable leadership framework. The introduction chapter began by providing an overview of the hospitality industry in KwaZulu-Natal, emphasizing its importance in the region. It underscored the unique context of 5-star hotels and introduced the concept of sustainability as a crucial aspect of contemporary hotel management. The discussion probed into global and local trends, emphasizing the growing importance of sustainable practices within the hospitality sector. This did set the stage for understanding the specific challenges and opportunities in implementing sustainability measures in 5-star hotels in the region.

The chapter clearly formulated the research problem, laying the foundation for the study's focus on developing a strategic leadership framework tailored to the sustainability needs of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The purpose and objectives of the study were then outlined, with a clear articulation of the research's overarching goal and the specific objectives it aims to achieve. The significance of the study was discussed, emphasizing its importance in contributing to the broader field of strategic leadership and sustainability, and highlighting potential benefits for both the hotels and the community. The introduction chapter also briefly touched on the research methodology, providing a concise overview of the research design and methods, alluding the data collection methods and analysis techniques that will be employed, setting the stage for the

subsequent chapters. Lastly, the structure of the paper was outlined, providing a brief overview of how the research would be organized, indicating the chapters or sections that will follow the introduction, thereby giving the reader a roadmap for navigating the rest of the study.

The literature review chapter extensively explored existing scholarly works related to strategic leadership and sustainability practices within the context of luxury hotels, specifically in the KwaZulu-Natal region. The review highlighted the critical role of leadership in driving sustainability initiatives and emphasized the unique challenges and opportunities faced by 5-star hotels in the pursuit of sustainable practices. Various theoretical frameworks and empirical studies were analysed to establish a foundation for understanding the interplay between leadership strategies and sustainable development in the hospitality industry. The literature also explored into specific aspects such as stakeholder engagement, corporate social responsibility, and environmental management practices within the hospitality sector. Moreover, it investigated the relevance of cultural and contextual factors in shaping strategic leadership approaches for sustainability in the unique context of KwaZulu-Natal. Overall, the literature review laid the groundwork for the subsequent development of a strategic leadership framework tailored to address the sustainability needs and challenges specific to 5-star hotels in this region.

In the methodology chapter, a qualitative research approach was employed to gain a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics within the selected hotels. The study utilized a purposive sampling technique to select key participants, such as senior managers and executives with expertise in strategic leadership and sustainability practices within the hospitality industry. Data collection involved in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, allowing for the exploration of participants' perspectives on the current state of sustainability initiatives, challenges faced, and potential strategic leadership frameworks for improvement. Rigorous thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns and themes in the qualitative data, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing sustainability practices in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.

Furthermore, the methodology chapter detailed the ethical considerations, ensuring the protection of participants' confidentiality and obtaining informed consent. It also acknowledged the potential biases and limitations associated with qualitative research, emphasizing the steps taken to enhance the study's validity and reliability. The strategic choice of qualitative methods in this research

aligns with the aim of capturing the nuanced experiences and insights of key stakeholders, laying the foundation for a robust exploration of strategic leadership frameworks for sustainability in the context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. This combination of an extensive literature review, a diverse sample size, purposive sampling, and rigorous data analysis techniques provides a robust and comprehensive research approach to delve into the intricacies of sustainable leadership and its impact on service delivery.

7.2 Summary of the key findings

The aim of this study was to explore critical factors affecting the business leadership in 5-star hotels, to what extent those factors impact on the business sustainability and also to propose the new strategies that can be used to improve business growth of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.

7.2.1 Objective One

To establish the sustainable leadership practices for 5-star hotels within Kwa-Zulu Natal province.

In pursuit of the first objective of establishing the sustainable leadership practices for 5-star hotels within KwaZulu-Natal province, the research delved into an extensive exploration of existing leadership frameworks and practices within the context of sustainability in the hospitality industry. Through a comprehensive review of relevant literature and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, the study identified key dimensions of sustainable leadership pertinent to 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The research uncovered that successful sustainable leadership in this sector involves a multifaceted approach, integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations. By analysing the leadership strategies implemented by 5-star hotels in the region, the research was able to distil a strategic leadership framework tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the local context.

The achievement of this objective was marked by a synthesis of empirical findings and theoretical insights, leading to the formulation of a strategic leadership framework specifically designed for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The framework encapsulates key principles and actionable strategies that hotel leaders can adopt to enhance sustainability practices, considering the ecological and socio-economic dynamics of the region. The research not only contributed to the academic understanding of sustainable leadership but also offered practical guidelines for hotel

executives and managers to implement sustainable practices effectively in their day-to-day operations.

7.2.2 Objective Two

To identify factors that contribute to sustainable leadership for Kwa-Zulu Natal province 5-star hotels from perspective of internal and external factors

In pursuit of the second objective, the research explored into a comprehensive analysis of factors influencing sustainable leadership within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, examining both internal and external dimensions. Internally, the study scrutinized organizational practices, managerial strategies, and employee engagement initiatives that contribute to sustainable leadership. This involved a meticulous exploration of leadership styles, corporate culture, and the integration of sustainability principles within the hotel management framework. External factors, on the other hand, encompassed the examination of the broader environmental, social, and economic landscape in KwaZulu-Natal, considering the region-specific challenges and opportunities that impact sustainable leadership in the hospitality sector. The research successfully employed a qualitative methods approach, combining key informant interviews and focus group interviews to gather insights from both hotel executives and external stakeholders, providing a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted factors shaping sustainable leadership in 5-star hotels in the province.

Through this approach, the research achieved a comprehensive clarification of the intricate interplay between internal and external elements influencing sustainable leadership in KwaZulu-Natal's 5-star hotels. By synthesizing data from various sources, the study not only identified key factors but also discerned the intricate relationships and dependencies among them. The findings offer valuable insights for hotel leaders, policymakers, and industry stakeholders, providing a strategic leadership framework tailored to the unique context of KwaZulu-Natal. Overall, the research successfully fulfilled Objective two (2) by providing a nuanced understanding of the factors shaping sustainable leadership and paving the way for informed and contextually relevant strategies for 5-star hotels in the province.

7.2.3 Objective Three

To evaluate the extent to which these factors influence business sustainability growth of 5 star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal province.

Objective 3 of the qualitative research aimed to assess the influence of identified factors on the business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in the KwaZulu-Natal province. The study employed a combination of key informant interviews and focus groups to gather insights from various stakeholders within the 5-star hotel industry. The qualitative data collected was analysed systematically to discern patterns and themes related to the factors impacting sustainability growth. Key informants, including executives and managers from the hotels, as well as other relevant industry experts, provided valuable perspectives on the dynamic interplay of factors such as leadership strategies, environmental initiatives, and community engagement.

The findings indicated a multifaceted relationship between these factors and the sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. Strategic leadership emerged as a pivotal element, influencing the integration of sustainable practices within the hotel operations. Additionally, the study highlighted the significance of aligning sustainability initiatives with local community needs and environmental concerns. The insights gained contribute to the development of a strategic leadership framework tailored to enhance sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal, providing practical implications for industry practitioners and valuable knowledge for future research in sustainable hospitality management.

7.2.4 Objective Four

To explore the challenges that hinder the effective implementation of sustainability practices in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal province.

Objective 4 aimed to probe the challenges impeding the successful implementation of sustainability practices within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. Through a combination of key informant interviews and focus group discussions, a comprehensive understanding of these obstacles emerged. The research identified multifaceted challenges, including but not limited to, resource constraints, insufficient employee awareness and engagement, regulatory ambiguities, and the need for a cultural shift in the industry. Key informants, consisting of industry experts and hotel executives, provided valuable insights into the specific nuances and complexities faced by 5-star hotels in the region. Additionally, focus groups involving diverse stakeholders such as hotel staff, local communities, and environmental activists enriched the qualitative data by capturing

varied perspectives on the challenges, highlighting the need for a holistic approach to address sustainability hurdles.

The objective was achieved through a triangulation approach, combining the perspectives of key informants and the broader community in focus group discussions. The qualitative data gathered allowed for a nuanced exploration of challenges, providing a foundation for the subsequent development of the strategic leadership framework. The findings underscored the importance of tailored strategies that consider the unique context of KwaZulu-Natal's 5-star hotels, emphasizing the significance of collaborative efforts, clear communication, and targeted interventions to overcome the identified challenges and enhance the sustainability practices within the luxury hotel sector in the region.

7.2.2 Objective Five

To recommend strategies that can improve the business sustainability growth of 5 star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal province.

This fifth objective intended to recommend strategies for enhancing the business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. To achieve this objective, a comprehensive analysis was conducted through a combination of key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Key informants, including top-level executives and industry experts, provided valuable insights into the current challenges faced by 5-star hotels in the province and identified potential areas for improvement. These insights were complemented by the rich discussions within the focus groups, where diverse perspectives from various stakeholders, including hotel managers, and staff were considered.

The outcome of this objective revealed a multifaceted set of strategies that can contribute to the sustainable growth of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. Recommendations encompassed environmental sustainability initiatives, community engagement programs, and innovative marketing approaches tailored to the unique characteristics of the region. Moreover, the study emphasized the importance of fostering strategic leadership within these hotels, promoting a holistic approach that aligns business practices with sustainability goals. By combining the perspectives of key informants and the collective wisdom from focus group discussions, the research not only identified actionable strategies but also provided a nuanced understanding of the

local context, offering a valuable roadmap for 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal to enhance their business sustainability.

7.3 Contributions to the body of knowledge

The research conducted on sustainable leadership practices for 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal province has made significant contributions to the body of knowledge in several key areas. Firstly, the establishment of a strategic leadership framework specifically tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities within the region addresses a critical gap in understanding. By synthesizing empirical findings and theoretical insights, the research not only advances academic knowledge but also provides practical guidelines for hotel executives and managers, contributing to the implementation of sustainable practices in day-to-day operations.

Secondly, the identification of internal and external factors influencing sustainable leadership in 5-star hotels offers a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between organizational practices, managerial strategies, and the broader environmental, social, and economic landscape. This comprehensive analysis provides valuable insights for hotel leaders, policymakers, and industry stakeholders, paving the way for informed and contextually relevant strategies. The study's qualitative methods approach, incorporating key informant interviews and focus group discussions, enriches the depth of understanding by capturing diverse perspectives from both internal and external stakeholders.

Thirdly, the evaluation of the factors' impact on business sustainability growth adds another layer of significance to the research. The findings reveal a multifaceted relationship between leadership strategies, environmental initiatives, and community engagement, emphasizing the pivotal role of strategic leadership in integrating sustainable practices within hotel operations. This insight contributes not only to the understanding of sustainable hospitality management but also provides practical implications for industry practitioners, aligning business strategies with the principles of sustainability.

Fourthly, the exploration of challenges hindering the effective implementation of sustainability practices in 5-star hotels offers a realistic perspective on the obstacles faced by the industry. By triangulating perspectives from key informants and the broader community, the research identifies resource constraints, employee awareness, regulatory ambiguities, and cultural shifts as

multifaceted challenges. This nuanced exploration forms the foundation for the subsequent development of the strategic leadership framework, highlighting the importance of tailored strategies for overcoming these challenges.

Finally, the recommendation of strategies to improve the business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal consolidates the research's practical implications. The multifaceted set of recommendations, encompassing environmental sustainability initiatives, community engagement programs, and strategic leadership promotion, serves as a valuable roadmap for hotels in the region. By combining insights from top-level executives, industry experts, and various stakeholders in focus group discussions, the study not only identifies actionable strategies but also provides a nuanced understanding of the local context, contributing to the enhancement of business sustainability in the luxury hotel sector.

7.4 Contributions to the body of knowledge

7.5 Study conclusion

The purpose of this research was to develop a resilience framework and outline its contributing factors for the hospitality and tourism industry to cope with uncertain environments. Based on a broad review of the literature on organizational resilience and strategic leadership, a 'strategic leadership-enhanced organizational resilience framework' was developed in the hospitality and tourism context. This study fills the research gap of the lack of strategic-level responses and provides practical implications for the hospitality industry by suggesting specific actions that companies can take to enhance their organizational health and resiliency under environmental uncertainty.

In conclusion, the comprehensive qualitative research undertaken to establish sustainable leadership practices for 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal has yielded valuable insights and strategic frameworks to enhance business sustainability in the luxury hotel sector. Sustainable leadership, in this context, involves a holistic approach that extends beyond profit margins, embracing a commitment to social and environmental responsibility.

Sustainable Leadership Practices in 5-Star Hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal:

In addressing the first research question, the study has successfully identified and elucidated the sustainable leadership practices employed by 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The investigation into sustainable leadership practices in 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal reveals a multifaceted approach adopted by these establishments. Through a comprehensive analysis of management strategies, it is evident that these hotels prioritize environmentally friendly practices, employee well-being, and community engagement. Sustainable leadership in this context is characterized by a commitment to responsible business practices that extend beyond profit-making, embracing a holistic approach that aligns with global sustainability goals.

Internal and External Factors Contributing to Sustainable Leadership:

Moving on to the second research question, the study has comprehensively explored both internal and external factors that significantly contribute to sustainable leadership within 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Internal and external factors significantly shape sustainable leadership in 5-star hotels within Kwa-Zulu Natal. Internally, leadership commitment and organizational culture play pivotal roles, fostering a sustainable mindset among staff. Externally, factors such as regulatory frameworks, consumer expectations, and community dynamics also influence sustainable leadership. This study highlights the interconnectedness of internal and external elements, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and adaptive leadership approach to navigate the dynamic landscape of sustainability.

Impact of Sustainable Leadership on Business Sustainability Growth:

Addressing the third research question, the research has provided valuable insights into the extent to which the identified factors influence the business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The identified sustainable leadership factors wield substantial influence on the business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The findings reveal that positive correlations emerge between sustainable practices, consumer loyalty, and financial performance, indicating that a holistic and well-integrated approach to sustainable leadership contributes significantly to the long-term growth and prosperity of these hotels. The study underscores that a genuine commitment to sustainability is not just a moral imperative but a strategic business decision, contributing significantly to long-term growth and resilience in the highly competitive hospitality industry.

Challenges in Implementing a Strategic Leadership Framework:

In relation to the fourth research question, the study sheds light on the primary challenges faced by 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal when implementing a strategic leadership framework for sustainability. Despite the evident benefits, 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal encounter challenges in effectively implementing a strategic leadership framework for sustainability. These challenges range from initial financial investments required for sustainable practices to the need for ongoing education and training of staff. Additionally, aligning sustainability initiatives with the diverse expectations of stakeholders presents a complex hurdle. Acknowledging these challenges is crucial for developing targeted solutions that enhance the feasibility and effectiveness of sustainable leadership frameworks.

Strategies for Enhancing Business Sustainability Growth:

Finally, the research concludes by offering strategic recommendations to enhance the business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal. To enhance the business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal, strategic recommendations emerge from the research findings. These include fostering collaborative networks with local communities, investing in technology for resource efficiency, and prioritizing continuous employee education on sustainable practices. Moreover, leveraging marketing and communication strategies to showcase the hotels' commitment to sustainability can strengthen consumer trust and loyalty. The study concludes by emphasizing the imperative for a holistic approach that integrates these strategies into the overall business model to ensure sustained growth while aligning with global sustainability imperatives.

7.6 Recommendations for implementation of the study model

The study's first key conclusion underscores the successful identification and elucidation of sustainable leadership practices adopted by 5-star hotels in Kwa-Zulu Natal. To build upon this achievement, it is recommended that hotel management continually integrate and expand these practices. This involves fostering a culture that not only prioritizes profit-making but also embraces a holistic approach aligning with global sustainability goals. By consistently incorporating environmentally friendly practices, promoting employee well-being, and engaging

with the local community, hotels can solidify their commitment to responsible business practices and further distinguish themselves in the competitive hospitality industry.

The second conclusion, examining internal and external factors contributing to sustainable leadership, highlights the interconnected nature of these elements. In light of this, the recommendation is to develop a comprehensive and adaptive leadership approach. Internally, leaders should emphasize commitment and foster an organizational culture that cultivates a sustainable mindset among staff. Externally, hotels must navigate regulatory frameworks, consumer expectations, and community dynamics. The study suggests that a leadership strategy that recognizes and responds to both internal and external factors is essential for navigating the dynamic landscape of sustainability successfully.

Regarding the impact of sustainable leadership on business sustainability growth, the study reveals positive correlations between sustainable practices, consumer loyalty, and financial performance. To capitalize on this, hotels are advised to integrate sustainable leadership practices deeply into their business models. By doing so, they can foster long-term growth and resilience in the face of industry competition. The study emphasizes that a genuine commitment to sustainability is not just a moral imperative but also a strategic business decision with significant implications for sustained growth and success.

The identification of challenges in implementing a strategic leadership framework constitutes a critical aspect of the study. To address these challenges, hotels are recommended to develop targeted solutions. These may include exploring financial incentives for sustainable initiatives, investing in comprehensive education and training programs for staff, and actively seeking alignment with diverse stakeholder expectations. Acknowledging and addressing these hurdles is essential for enhancing the feasibility and effectiveness of sustainable leadership frameworks, ultimately promoting long-term success in sustainability efforts.

The final conclusion of the study offers strategic recommendations for enhancing business sustainability growth. Hotels are encouraged to foster collaborative networks with local communities, invest in technology for resource efficiency, and prioritize continuous employee education on sustainable practices. Additionally, leveraging marketing and communication strategies to showcase the hotels' commitment to sustainability can strengthen consumer trust and loyalty. This holistic approach, integrating various strategies into the overall business model, is

emphasized as imperative for ensuring sustained growth while aligning with global sustainability imperatives.

7.7 Limitations of the study

The study's primary limitation is its focus on the KwaZulu Natal province, which stems from time and resource constraints. While this focus allowed for an in-depth exploration of sustainable leadership in this specific context, it significantly restricts the generalisability of the findings to other municipalities in South Africa or emerging economies worldwide. To overcome this limitation and enhance the transferability of the research, it would have been valuable to incorporate a more diverse sample of municipalities or districts in the study, even if at a smaller scale. Additionally, examining how different contextual factors in various regions affect sustainable leadership could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the broader landscape.

Another notable limitation is the reliance on qualitative data, which has inherent constraints in terms of generalisability. The findings from interviews and focus groups, while rich and insightful, cannot be broadly applied to larger populations. To mitigate this limitation, a complementary quantitative research component could have been integrated, allowing for a more representative sample and the potential for statistical generalisation. By combining qualitative and quantitative data, researchers could have provided a more holistic view of sustainable leadership in KwaZulu Natal province and increased the potential to draw broader conclusions.

Moreover, the study's participant selection process is a significant limitation. The participants, representing hospitality industry stakeholders, might have their own interests and biases, which could have influenced the findings. A more diverse and impartial sample, including representatives from various sectors and community members, would have provided a more balanced perspective on sustainable leadership. Therefore, the study could be criticised for not fully capturing the nuances of hospitality industry and sustainable leadership since it predominantly relied on the perspectives of those directly involved in the hospitality industry's operations. A broader range of participants would have contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with sustainable leadership. In order for the researcher to arrive at a

consensus at the end of the process, the study participants should be carefully picked as individuals who have all seen the occurrence in question (Baldwin, 2018).

Another limitation was that the study faced challenges in adhering to timelines due to the time-consuming nature of collecting and analysing both interview and focus group data. These time constraints may have impacted the depth of the research and the comprehensiveness of the data. Consequently, the study may not have fully explored all relevant aspects of sustainable leadership, leaving potential gaps in the findings and conclusions.

Lastly, the limitation of non-representative sampling could mean that certain perspectives, particularly those of marginalised or underrepresented groups, may not have been adequately included in the study. This limitation could affect the overall inclusivity and accuracy of the findings. Participants chosen for the study represented specific stakeholder groups within the hotel industry. While they provided valuable insights, participants may not fully represent the demographic and socio-economic diversity of the entire population within the hotel industry.

7.8 Recommendations for future research

This study has highlighted the challenges faced by KwaZulu Natal province and has made recommendations that can be used to address specific factors contributing to the challenges and successes of sustainable leadership. However, the focus of the study was narrowed to KwaZulu Natal province.

While this study relied primarily on qualitative data, future research can employ quantitative methods, including surveys and data analysis, to gather statistical evidence. A large-scale survey of residents or municipal employees could provide quantifiable insights into sustainable leadership issues, enhancing the research's depth and breadth.

Another relevant and interesting avenue for future research involves conducting a comparative analysis of sustainable leadership. Moreover, it is recommended to delve deeper into the role of technology in improving sustainable leadership. Future research can assess the effectiveness of e-governance platforms, digital communication tools, and data analytics in promoting transparency, accountability, and civic engagement within municipalities.

Lastly, research into alternative resource allocation models, such as performance-based budgeting or outcome-based funding, could offer fresh perspectives on sustainable leadership. Analysing the impact of different allocation models on the equitable distribution of resources and service delivery would be valuable.

These recommendations reflect the need for a multifaceted approach to research, addressing comparative analyses, data-driven assessments, localised case studies, and the evolving role of technology in sustainable leadership. They provide avenues for future research to further enrich the understanding of sustainable leadership and its implications for local governance and service delivery.

7.9 Final concluding remarks

In conclusion, this research has delved into the critical environment of strategic leadership within the context of sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal. The hospitality industry, particularly in the luxury segment, plays a pivotal role in the global tourism landscape, and as such, the need for a robust strategic leadership framework that prioritizes sustainability cannot be overstated. Through an extensive review of existing literature and empirical analysis, this study has sought to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by offering insights and recommendations tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities faced by 5-star hotels in the KwaZulu-Natal region. The multifaceted nature of sustainability in this context encompasses environmental, social, and economic dimensions, requiring a comprehensive and integrated approach to leadership.

The findings of this research underscore the importance of proactive leadership that goes beyond mere compliance with environmental regulations. Strategic leaders in 5-star hotels must embrace a transformative mindset, recognizing sustainability not only as a moral imperative but as a strategic necessity for long-term success. Balancing the triple bottom line—people, planet, and profit—requires innovative approaches and a commitment to continuous improvement. Furthermore, the study has highlighted the significance of stakeholder engagement and collaboration in the pursuit of sustainability goals. From local communities to guests, employees, and suppliers, fostering partnerships based on shared values and mutual benefits is essential. The development of a sustainable leadership framework must consider the interconnectedness of these stakeholders and their role in shaping the overall sustainability narrative of 5-star hotels in

KwaZulu-Natal. As the hospitality industry continues to evolve, the proposed strategic leadership framework serves as a guide for hotel executives and managers seeking to navigate the complexities of sustainability. It is not merely a theoretical construct but a practical roadmap that aligns with the unique characteristics of the KwaZulu-Natal region, considering its cultural, environmental, and economic nuances.

To sum up, the success of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal lies in the hands of visionary leaders who understand the imperative of sustainability and are willing to invest in initiatives that benefit not only their organizations but also the broader community and environment. This study encourages an ongoing dialogue and collaborative efforts among industry stakeholders, policymakers, and academia to further refine and implement the proposed strategic leadership framework, ultimately fostering a more sustainable and resilient future for luxury hospitality in the region.

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Appendices

Annexure A: Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
(HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

Date:

Greetings,

My name is **Angel Motsamai** from University of KwaZulu Natal, Westville campus. I am from the College of Law & Management Studies under the Graduate School of Business and Leadership.

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research on The duration of your participation if you choose to participate and remain in the study is expected to be 10 – 15 minutes.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details 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

Your participation in the study is voluntary and by participating, you are granting the researcher permission to use your responses. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequence. There will be no monetary gain from participating in the study. Your anonymity will be maintained by the researcher and your responses will not be used for any

purposes outside of this study. All data, both electronic and hard copy, will be securely stored during the study and archived for 5 years. After this time, all data will be destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in the study, please contact **Angel Motsamai**.

Sincerely

Angel Motsamai

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I.....(insert name & surname) hereby agree to participate in the research study on the strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.

I do understand that this is for study purposes and that participation is voluntary. I have been informed that the discussion will be audio recorded for the purpose of data collection and transcription only, codes will be used to identify the respondents and after that the audio record will be destroyed”.

I agree to be recorded during the interview.

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

Signature Date

Annexure B: Key Informants Interview Guide

Research Topic: A strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal

Section 1: Sustainable Leadership Practices

Introduction to Sustainable Leadership:

- Can you describe the current leadership practices in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal with a focus on sustainability?
- How do you define and perceive sustainable leadership within the context of 5-star hotels?

Leadership Initiatives for Sustainability:

- Could you share examples of specific leadership initiatives implemented to promote sustainability in your 5-star hotel?
- How are these sustainable leadership practices communicated and integrated into the overall hotel strategy?

Section 2: Factors Influencing Sustainable Leadership

Internal Factors:

- From an internal perspective, what organizational factors contribute to sustainable leadership in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal?
- How are employees involved in or affected by sustainable leadership practices within the hotel?

External Factors:

- What external factors, such as regulatory frameworks or community expectations, influence sustainable leadership in 5-star hotels?
- How do partnerships with local communities or external organizations contribute to sustainable leadership?

Section 3: Evaluation of Factors on Business Sustainability Growth

Impact Assessment:

- How do you assess the impact of sustainable leadership factors on the overall business sustainability growth of the 5-star hotel?
- Are there specific metrics or key performance indicators used to measure this impact?

Challenges and Opportunities:

- What challenges have you encountered in implementing sustainable leadership practices, and how have these been addressed?
- Are there untapped opportunities for further integrating sustainable leadership for business growth?

Section 4: Recommendations for Business Sustainability Growth**Strategic Recommendations:**

- Based on your experiences, what strategies or initiatives would you recommend to improve the business sustainability growth of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal?
- How can the identified factors be leveraged for sustained success?

Integration with Overall Strategy:

- How can the recommended strategies be seamlessly integrated into the overall business strategy of 5-star hotels?
- What role does leadership play in ensuring the successful implementation of these strategies?

General Closure:**Reflection and Future Outlook:**

- Looking ahead, how do you envision the role of sustainable leadership evolving in the context of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal?
- Are there emerging trends or areas of focus that you believe will become more critical for sustainability?

Closing Thoughts:

- Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experiences with sustainable leadership in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal?
- How do you see the findings of this research contributing to the broader field of sustainable leadership in the hospitality industry?

Thank you for participating!

Annexure C: Focus Group Interview Guide

Introduction:

- Can you provide a brief overview of your role and responsibilities within the 5-star hotel industry in KwaZulu-Natal?
- How would you define sustainable leadership within the context of 5-star hotels?

Objective 1: Establishing Sustainable Leadership Practices:

- From your experience, what leadership practices have been effective in promoting sustainability within 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal?
- Can you share specific examples of sustainable leadership initiatives implemented in 5-star hotels, and their impact on the organization?

Objective 2: Identifying Factors Contributing to Sustainable Leadership:

- What internal factors, such as organizational culture or employee engagement, contribute to sustainable leadership in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal?
- How do external factors, such as regulatory policies or community expectations, influence sustainable leadership within the industry?

Objective 3: Evaluating Factors' Influence on Business Sustainability Growth:

- In your opinion, to what extent do sustainable leadership practices contribute to the overall business sustainability and growth of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal?
- Have you observed any challenges or barriers associated with implementing sustainable leadership practices, and how do they impact business growth?

Objective 4: Recommending Strategies for Business Sustainability Growth:

- What strategies do you believe would enhance the business sustainability and growth of 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal?
- How can the collaboration between internal and external stakeholders be improved to support sustainable leadership and business growth?

General Reflections:

- From your perspective, what role does innovation play in driving sustainability within the 5-star hotel industry in KwaZulu-Natal?

- How do you envision the future of sustainable leadership in 5-star hotels, and what changes or improvements would you like to see?

Conclusion:

- Are there any additional insights or recommendations you would like to share regarding the development of a strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5-star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal?
- Thank you for your valuable input. Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss related to our research objectives?

Annexure E: Ethical Clearance



18 October 2016

Ms Ntombifuthi Angel Motsamai (214583903)
Graduate School of Business & Leadership
Westville Campus

Dear Ms Motsamai,

Protocol reference number: HSS/1638/016D

Project title: A strategic leadership framework for sustainability in 5 star hotels in KwaZulu-Natal

Full Approval — Expedited

In response to your application received on 29 September 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have 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.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Dr Emmanuel Mutambara
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Muhammad Hoque
Cc School Administrator: Ms Zarina Bullyraj

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

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