

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**The role of Theory U in developing leadership skills to navigate volatility,
uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity in the University of KwaZulu-Natal,
School of Accounting, Economics and Finance**

By

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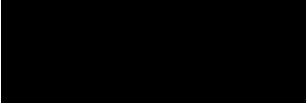
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ABSTRACT

The strain of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has challenged the status quo in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) of South Africa and pressurised academic leaders to rethink their models of engagement and to meet the demands of the changing environment. Academics were obliged to adjust and familiarise themselves and their students with remote teaching and learning, while maintaining the academic standards on assessments, mentoring, conducting research, and fulfilling other duties. The COVID-19 crisis presented volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), and academic leaders in HEIs were required to make decisions quickly in an environment where existing challenges already existed in terms of student protests and financial constraints. In the midst of all of this, there seems to be a scarcity of responses to the urgent need for effective leadership. The solution lies in a shift in the leaders' thinking approach and in a move towards conscious leadership. This study sought to identify the challenges faced by academic leaders at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), School of Accounting, Economics, and Finance (SAEF) during the COVID-19 VUCA situation. The study also set out to establish how Theory U can be incorporated into the decision-making process to assist leaders to navigate through the challenges. The study was analysed qualitatively using semi-structured interviews. A research instrument consisting of 17 open-ended questions was constructed and used. The purposive sampling method was utilised to identify the sample of the study. The study was conducted involving 10 leaders from SAEF. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data. The results of the study suggest that the pandemic presented a unique set of leadership challenges in the UKZN, SAEF including a crisis management dilemma, a digital transformation paradox, and demanding commitment. The issue of managing staff remotely and obtaining their 'buy-in' regarding the changes intensified the situation. The COVID-19 pandemic demanded quick decision-making and the results point out issues with delayed responses and inconsistent communication from the University's top executive. The transformation was almost immediate and that fuelled anxiety and chaos. The digital paradox lay in the fact that although the transformation heavily relied on technological systems and tools, the transformation, however, depended on people's willingness to accept and change. The intensity of the situation resulted in leaders expressing their professional commitment to an extent that discarded their personal life needs and jeopardised their health. The study should contribute to the literature of academic leadership by providing a better understanding of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the UKZN community. The study further highlighted how Theory U can be employed to assist leaders to address challenges during VUCA times. Shared leadership, collaboration, solid procedures to manage a crisis, and strategies to facilitate change could be employed to better manage the challenges presented during pandemics.

ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19 – Coronavirus disease 2019

HEIs – Higher Education Institutions

SAEF – School of Accounting, Economics and Finance, also referred to as ‘the School’

SAHEC – South African Higher Education Sector

UKZN – University of KwaZulu-Natal, also referred to as ‘the University’

VUCA – Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The aim of the study was to identify leadership challenges emanating from the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), School of Accounting, Economics and Finance (SAEF), and to examine how Theory U can be incorporated into the decision-making process in order to assist leaders to navigate through the challenges.

South African higher education institutions have been forced to adjust quickly to online learning and this entailed under-predicted financial expenses, technological advancement needs, and responses to the needs of students and staff. The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the status quo in the education sector and academic leaders are confronted with the challenge of continuing with academic programmes whilst adjusting to the changes in the midst of complexity. Given the novelty of the COVID-19 pandemic and the dramatic shifts which occurred in the UKZN, SAEF, the focus on leadership has been magnified and perceptions of the leadership role – the intricacy and the required skills and qualities have been altered. The situation calls for a change in the leaders' thinking approach and the decision-making process. It requires leaders to be conscious and to perceive the situation holistically and to be willing to unlearn traditional leadership behavioural patterns and learn how to adopt new, flexible and innovative ways.

This chapter provides the background, context and focus of this study together with the motivation, problem statement and significance of the study. The research aims, objectives, are explained and the research methodology employed is briefly described. Finally, this chapter describes the structure of the dissertation.

1.2 Background of the study

When President, Cyril Ramaphosa placed South Africa on hard lock-down in March 2020, the University of KwaZulu-Natal had just completed the first six weeks of the academic year. All academic institutions were shut-down in response to the COVID-19 pandemic management protocol (Mahlaba, 2020). As the understanding began that “it is not business as usual” and “things will never look the same”, plans were established to ensure firstly that the academic year was salvaged through redefined teaching and learning approaches (van Schalkwyk, 2021), and secondly, that all students from different social-economic backgrounds should be catered for and that the existing inequalities within the South

African society should be born in mind when determining immediate, intermediate and long-term resolutions (Hedding, Greve, Breetzke, Nel & Van Vuuren, 2020).

According to Kele & Mzilen (2021), as substitute provisions were made and teaching and learning were rapidly shifted to online platforms, a crisis pertaining to the planning, resources, and management necessary for the online transition developed. The provisions had to fit all functions and operations of the institution including research and academic administration. Freeman, Nguyen, Beliveau, Chung, Armstrong, Wolfe, Cholera & Wong (2021) elaborate that the higher education administrators together with the universities both locally and internationally, have collaborated to limit the impact of the COVID-19 situation on the higher education sector. However, Bihu (2021) points out that the higher education sector is still confronted with issues pertaining to effective leadership and management, insufficient funding, equitable learning, and academic opportunities, staff development and the widened social and digital divide. Amongst other concerns evident in the literature are the integrity of the online assessments, the calibre of students produced, and the sustainability of online teaching and learning (Toquero, 2021).

Higher education institutions internationally are confronted with volatility, uncertainty, complexity (chaos) and ambiguity emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation fuelled the existing issues in the field of higher education and required those in authority to lead under unstable circumstances (Le Grange, 2020). The pandemic has disturbed the traditional manner in which universities function which has an overflow effect on the leadership role, duties and responsibilities in various faculties/collages within an institution (Laufer, Leiser, Deacon, Perrin de Brichambaut, Fecher, Kobsda & Hesse, 2021). This situation not only put a sharp focus on leadership but also put it on the expectations and the intricacy of leadership as a vehicle to navigate through the presented challenges. Gigliotti (2021) stated that over and above the core duties of leading their organisations and employees, the results of his study revealed that agility, self-awareness, and empathy are qualities required when managing the problems presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis requires leaders to respond immediately and such demands question the value of information-driven and rational-based decision-making theories in times of crisis. These theories require time and information which were absent in case of the COVID-19 pandemic (Treurniet & Wolbers, 2021). The COVID-19 crisis calls for agility and highlights intuition in the decision-making process.

Freeman et al. (2021) emphasised that the COVID-19 pandemic represents a unique occasion for higher education institutions to examine the degree of readiness for change. Similarly, Almandeel, Abu-Ulbeh, Hatamleh, Thaher, Amayreh, Pande & El-Ebiary (2021) argue that as we are in the midst of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), the essence of leadership is the leaders' ability to manage change and to be

innovative in their thinking. Stoller (2020), suggests that the global COVID-19 crisis demands effective leadership and a collective change.

Theory U was first introduced by Scharmer (2007) and has received global recognition for being an exceptionally embracing, broad-minded school of thought that surpasses the conventional literature on leadership theories. Scharmer & von Ameln (2019) proposed that Theory U deals with issues of disruptive change from an individual-oriented approach. The theory encourages individuals to suspend their judgements which are informed by encounters and old mindsets and encourages them to be open for the newness that is emerging. That personal transition generates correlated and parallel change at the larger organisational or societal level.

Theory U can be described as a three-dimensional tool. Firstly, it is a *phenomenon* – it allows us to progress to a more profound level of consciousness, it looks at the leadership and management process from the source; not only what people do or how they do it but the deeper sources of excellence (the higher-self) (Arts, Baldini, Goodman, Hayashi, Jandernoa & Scharmer, 2021). Secondly, it is regarded as a *framework and language* – it empowers us to recognise the ‘blind spot’ of leadership and changes in systems, and allows us to evaluate and talk about the intensities of our experience; it airs at the deeper place from where we operate and from- our quality of attention and intention (Peschl, 2019). Thirdly, it is a *methodology* – it is a multi-stakeholder innovation narrative that promotes progressive social change enabling us to operate effectively from an innermost space (Fitch & Lynam, 2019).

According to Uhl-Bien (2021), traditional leadership strategies are now insufficient given the novelty and magnitude of the COVID-19 reality. Theory U produces a matrix for individuals to dissociate themselves from their habitual ways of thinking and it enables them to make their contribution to potential outcomes which are in tune with the needs of the organisation. Nullens (2019) advocates that Theory U is about personal leadership and a different way of thinking. It is a framework that looks at leadership and decision-making process from the deeper source of excellence which draws from the deeper source of the inner place that individuals operate from (Cashman, 2017). The crisis presents uncertainty and requires leaders to be fully engaged and to be attentive to how they perceive the situation and to their subsequent decision-making process (Uhl-Bien, 2021). This calls for a leaders’ paradigm shift in their thinking methods. This shift relies on self-awareness. It requires a profound understanding of one’s beliefs and purpose, powers and shortfalls, necessities and efforts, causes of obstructions, and responses to difficulties, and commitment to self-transformation, candidness to change, and the willingness to learn anew (Bowles & Bleich, 2021).

1.3 Context and focus of the study

The South African Higher Education Sector (SAHEC) consist of 26 public universities and 50 public training colleges. These institutions are owned and regulated by the South African government through the Department of Higher Education and Training (Moloi, Mkwanazi & Bojabotseha, 2014). In addition, there is a small group of different private institutions. Post-1994 democratic elections, the sector experienced a dramatic increase in enrolments due to the government's policies on equity access to education for all racial groups, especially those who were denied access due to the previous apartheid system (Badat, 2010). The environment of the sector has been characterised mainly by student protests due to inadequacies and disappointment in the lack of transformation (Morwe, Garcia-Espana & Luescher, 2018).

Between 2002-2005, the South African government implemented major reconstruction and mergers of universities in an attempt to redistribute resources, eradicate discrimination and streamline the fragmented education system (Mouton, Louw & Strydom, 2013). The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) was born from a merger between the University of Natal (which was well resourced) and the University of Durban-Westville (that accommodated mostly for students from the local African and Indian communities) (Rudwick, 2018). UKZN is organised around 4 Colleges consisting of 19 Schools overall. Each College is led by a Deputy-Vice Chancellor. The Colleges are, College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science, College of Health Sciences, College of Humanities and lastly, College of Law and Management Studies (Cebekhulu & Mantzaris, 2006).

The School of Accounting, Economics and Finance (SEAF) is housed under the College of Law and Management Studies together with another 3 Schools. The study focused on surveying a population from the SAEF. The SAEF is led by the Dean & Head of School and consists of 6 disciplines – Accounting, Auditing, Managerial Accounting, Taxation, Economics and Finance. The School management team consists of academic leaders, programme managers, and operations managers of various committees. The study focused on interviewing 10 individuals who are in leadership positions within the SAEF. The sample represented all disciplines, undergraduate and postgraduate level and the executive leadership of the SAEF.

1.4 Motivation of the study

For the first time post the 1994 democratic elections, the SAHEC encountered its first nation-wide crisis in 2015 with the #FeesMustFall students protest and campaign (Mutekwe, 2017). This crisis was also experienced the following year in 2016 as students felt that more challenges still needed to be addressed (Hodes, 2017). The main issue prompting the campaign was insufficient funding from the Government's National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS together with other secondary issues including a

demand for the decolonisation of South African education (Naicker, 2016). That encounter may have reframed leadership behaviour and styles in the academic environment by bringing to the surface the necessity for effective leadership during a crisis. The situation gave leaders first-hand exposure to crisis management and an opportunity to formulate and implement contingency plans to anticipate similar situations that involve the shut-down of universities.

It would be interesting to discover whether or not the lessons learnt from that crisis are useful in the management of challenges emanating the COVID-19 pandemic. During the #FeesMustFall crisis resolution, it was evident that leaders must recognise the significance of collaboration and that the solution for such situations relies on joint efforts from all stakeholders in the SAHEC involved including the private sector (Mutekwe, 2017). Secondly, the resolution involved the distribution of authority from both the Government and executive leaders of academic institutions (Hodes, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic presents a situation for leaders who are intentional, attentive, goal-oriented and focused, to re-invent their organisations and to take advantage of the vast technological/social advances that have been and are being made. How academic institutions respond to the crises at hand rests heavily the leader's ability to manage change effectively.

1.5 Problem statement

The COVID-19 pandemic presents unusual demands on leaders in the academic institutions globally and leaders in UKZN, SAEF are not immune to the turbulent effects the COVID-19 pandemic now being experienced in the higher education environment. Because the situation is extraordinary and unpredictable, it is challenging for leaders to respond while relying on the conventional decision-making processes and leadership styles. The situation calls for adaptation, innovative thinking and transformed leadership methods and improved leadership skills and competencies (Longmuir, 2021).

Current literature on the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on the SAHEC focuses on the impact and institutional responses (e.g., Ali, 2020; van Schalkwyk, 2021), with reference to challenges of transformation from contact teaching to online teaching and the need for comprehensive transformation plans (Subramaniam, Singh, Padmanabhan, Gulyás, Palakkeel & Sreedharan, 2021). In relation to leadership and the COVID-19 pandemic, most studies have characteristically identified and debated the role of leaders, skills requirements and various suitable leadership styles without in-depth discussion on how current leaders can be developed and be equipped to manage a crisis and change simultaneously. There is are no distinct strategies on how UKZN, SAEF leaders ought to strategise in order to navigate through the challenges presented by the pandemic whilst confronted with historical challenges. Despite the fact that the COVID-19 crisis calls for transformed thinking patterns at both the individual (leaders)

and collective (organisational) levels, existing research lacks focus on the innovative frameworks that enable leaders to perceive the future as it emerges and to promote elements of consciousness, empathy, humility, collaboration, and inclusive decision-making processes. This study taps into that void and explores how Theory U as a framework can be utilised to develop leaders by incorporating its fundamentals.

1.6 Aim and research objectives

The aim of this study is to examine how leaders in the UKZN, SAEF can incorporate Theory U into the decision-making process in order to assist leaders to navigate through the volatile, uncertain complex and complex environment (particularly, during the COVID-19 pandemic).

This research aims to accomplish the following objectives:

- To examine challenges facing leaders in the UKZN, SAEF from the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment;
- To identify leadership challenges that arose from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UKZN, SAEF and
- To explore how Theory U can assist leaders in the UKZN, SAEF to navigate the difficulties presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.7 Research questions

This research attempts to answers the following research questions:

- What are the challenges facing leaders in the UKZN, SAEF from the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment?
- What leadership challenges arose from the COVID-19 pandemic in the UKZN, SAEF?
- How can Theory U assist leaders in the UKZN, SAEF to navigate the difficulties presented to the leadership by the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.8 Significance of the study

This study is highly important in attempting to lay the foundation for a leadership transformation framework required meet the challenging demands of the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment which leaders operate in, particularly in the UKZN, SAEF. This study may assist the SAEF to establish its crisis management principles by identifying leadership challenges encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic, and by examining the leadership approaches used to navigate those challenges and underlining deficiencies and by proposing a framework for improvement.

The findings of the research should add to the body of leadership literature and redound to the benefit of society at large since leadership plays an vital role in how the global community mitigates the effects of the enormous bearing of the COVID-19 pandemic on all spheres of life. There is currently a sharp focus on and an urgent demand for leaders who are willing to step into the unknown and lead from the future as it emerges. This study explores how innovative leaders can be cultivated in the midst of a crisis.

1.9 Brief methodology

An interpretive paradigm was identified as being appropriate for this study and data were analysed through a qualitative method. Adopting an interpretive model empowered the researcher to explore the interviewees' insights from the context of their leadership roles within the UKZN, SAEF but also created a platform for the researcher to enquire into their personal beliefs and values. This study was conducted following the principle of phenomenological, qualitative research where the focus was placed on the participant's experiences and insights. The method of collecting data was through in- depth, semi-structured interviews. This technique was selected based on the nature of the study and the type of information required to answer the research questions. The study required a thorough understanding of the VUCA challenges experienced by leaders amid the COVID-19 pandemic and their responses towards the presented challenges.

A purposive sampling technique was selected for this research and participants were selected based on the significance of their work, experiences, knowledge, and their interactions with the challenges and with the developments of initiatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The sample consisted of 10 academic staff members who occupy leadership positions in the UKZN, SAEF. Although there is a variance in titles, the incumbents all share common leadership of key performance areas and partake in operations and academic affairs of the School. All disciplines from the SAEF were represented in the study. All data were collected from a primary source and semi-structured interviews were selected as the method of collection. A research instrument consisting of 17 research questions was developed and utilised. Data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Details on methodology are provided in Chapter three.

1.10 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is organised into 6 chapters. Chapter one provided an introduction to the study.

Chapter two contains the literature review. The chapter began by examining the concept of VUCA in the context of HEIs and the ongoing pandemic. The chapter further presented the VUCA model together with the VUCA action framework. Included in the chapter is the examination of the VUCA challenges

in the higher education environment and leadership challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, Theory U was introduced as a framework for change management and leadership development.

Chapter three describes the research methodology used in this study, together with the research paradigm and traditions, sampling methods and the technique used to analyse data. An explanation of how trustworthiness was maintained is provided.

The results of the interviews are presented in Chapter four. The chapter linked the results to the existing literature. A detailed explanation of the 4 stage processes involved in the thematic analysis was presented. Nine generated themes were presented, namely; Government's Contribution, Socio - Economics Issues, Internal Organisational Challenges, Crisis Management Dilemma, Digital Transformation Paradox, Demanding Commitment, Leadership Behaviour, Leadership Competencies and Leadership Styles.

Chapter five is the discussion chapter and included in this chapter is the discussion of main findings associated with literature on VUCA in the higher education environment, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on leadership. Included in the chapter is a proposed conceptual framework to develop leaders during a crisis.

Chapter six summarises the major findings of the research in relation to the objectives of the study. Recommendations derived from the study are discussed in this chapter. The chapter also presents the limitations of the study and recommendations of future research.

1.11 Chapter summary

This provided an overview of the research topic and provided the background, context and focus of the study. The motivation, problem statement and significance of the study was discussed. The research aims, objectives, were explained and the research methodology used in this study were described briefly. The limitations were articulated, and the structure of the dissertation was provided. The following chapter offers a background to this study and examines existing literature on the topic.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter introduced the background and context of the study and presented the research aim and objectives. The subject of leadership is gaining greater momentum in the trying times of the COVID-19 pandemic when the global community is battling unfamiliar challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic presents volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity in the higher education sector environment and raises challenges which demand effective solutions from the leadership and new innovative thinking approaches. The conventional leadership method is insufficient to deal with the uniqueness of the challenges emerging during the pandemic.

This chapter investigates the concept of VUCA in the context of HEIs and the ongoing pandemic. This chapter presents the VUCA model together with the VUCA action framework. Included in this chapter are the examination of the VUCA challenges in the higher education environment and leadership challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter also introduces Theory U as a framework for change management and leadership development.

2.2 Defining VUCA

The VUCA world was popularised at the end of the cold war to articulate the turbulent geopolitical conditions. VUCA is an acronym that is commonly used to define disordered and unstable environments and stands for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (Laukkonen, Biddel & Gallagher, 2019). The notion of 'VUCA' was extensively applied in the business environment from the upsurge of the Fourth Industrial Revolution which introduced artificial intelligence and digitalisation (Sinha & Sinha, 2020). Other specific incidents of VUCA environments include the 911 terrorist attacks and the 2008-2009 financial crisis. Worley & Jules (2020) are certain that VUCA accurately describe the emerging environment created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this study, the VUCA acronym is used in the context of the continuing pandemic to analyse the impact and the actions taken to respond to the challenges experienced when the normal operations were consequently disrupted in the higher education sector.

2.2.1 Volatility

According to Laukkonen et al. (2019), volatility refers to the fast and substantial changes occurring over a time period. The COVID-19 situation is recognised as volatile and is characterised by unanticipated

and sensitive events occur over an indefinite period and where limited knowledge is available and where the results of this are not readily predictable (Murugan, Rajavel, Aggarwal & Singh, 2020). For example, in the case of the late 1990s where higher education institutions in South African experienced a huge increase of student intake following government policies broadening access to post-school education. The tactic followed to address the consequent high dropout rate due to historic inequalities included strategies to enhance educational quality at school level as well as providing additional academic support for previously disadvantage students. Although the new policies brought volatility, Martinez-Vargas, Walker & Mkwanzani (2020) claim that the adverse outcomes were predictable and could be stabilised over a specified period. And as a result, higher education institutions introduced specific access programmes for various qualifications.

The volatility caused by the COVID-19 pandemic however, came with the rapidly growing number of cases which were accompanied by diminished time for due planning and execution (Worley & Jules, 2020). In the mist of existing challenges in the higher education sector in South Africa, Tamrat & Teferra (2020) wrote that the key decisions on how to resume teaching and learning were paramount and that there was an urgent need for the government to include the education sector in its COVID-19 immediate response.

2.2.2 Uncertainty

Uncertainty arises from difficulties in predicting the future impact of the situation that an organisation is confronted with, and this makes it challenging to identify the essence of the situation (Sinha & Sinha, 2020). Consequently, it is problematic to make any solid resolutions and unsure which action plan is more effective and under which circumstance. Based on evidence from Mhlanga & Moloji (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has created a situation of uncertainty and under normal circumstances, the tactic to address uncertainty involves capitalising on collecting information at ground level and sharing it with other stakeholders to increase the possibility of predictions. The existing forecast models for disease transmission seemed futile and no one can predict with scientific confidence when the pandemic will end, how long it's impact will last nor its depth or its magnitude. Nobody can tell if a cure will be developed in future or not. There is uncertainty as to what the future will look like if and when the pandemic has passed and what would be considered the norm then.

According to Mhlanga & Moloji (2020), uncertainty is the most significant lingering consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education. Crawford, Butler-Henderson, Rudolph, Malkawi, Glowatz, Burton, Magni & Lam (2020) wrote that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education was straightforward - it disturbed regular operations of universities globally, with normal classes initially deferred and later replaced with virtual learning, examinations rearranged and mid-year

admission put on hold. Tamrat & Teferra (2020) suggest that the initial idea was that effects of the lockdown would be short-lived and that the pandemic would be passing, and that ‘business as usual’ ought to recommence promptly. Whilst academic institutions were battling to grapple with these issues, the medium-term effects started to arise, as the pandemic appeared to persist much longer than anticipated. (Crawford et al., 2020). The impact of the pandemic in the intermediate term was registered when students’ and academics’ day-to-day routines were disrupted, and the operational and administrative formalities began to be impractical.

Institutionally, the unprepared leadership of the universities applied a reactive approach as the situation unfolded while wrestling to meet the demands of their stakeholders and financial restraints (Bajaba, Mandurah & Yamin, 2021). In the long run, the impact of the pandemic on the individual academic institutions and the higher education systems collectively is foreseeable (Chan, 2020), and the pandemic has created a platform for universities to re-examine their purpose as institutions, given that the education systems in most countries, including South Africa are highly influenced by socioeconomic factors (Walwyn, 2020).

2.2.3 Complexity

Complexity in a situation is emphasised by numerous interconnected and intertwined variables with only some of the information obtainable regarding how they connect to one another and their level of inter-dependence (Murugan et al., 2020). This complicates the prediction of the outcomes process and therefore overwhelms the decision-making process. The inter-connectedness of components requires decision makers to analyse the individual components in order to interpret the situation as a whole (Sahin, Salim, Suprun, Richards, MacAskill, Heilgeist, Rutherford, Stewart & Beal, 2020).

The essence of the VUCA world is the diversity of related components that form a web of pieces of data, processes and activities. These individual components can be multilayered and interwoven. They collectively form a system (Hynes, Trump, Kirman, Latini & Linkov, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the systems interconnectedness intensely and has brought this to the attention of our rational thinking (Svetec & Divjak, 2021). Although COVID-19 is predominantly a health issue, its unique impact is evident on other spheres of life such as on livelihoods, business, transportation, showbusiness, and education. Given the connectedness and the interdependency of these components, the COVID-19 pandemic can be recognised as a systems thinking phenomenon (Sahin et al., 2020). Systems thinking is understood as a change in thinking patterns. The purpose of systems thinking is to assist us to be clear about assumptions, to surface them, make them unequivocal, examine them and improve them so that we become less incorrect and subsequently more effective in future (Hassan, Obaid, Ahmed, Abdelrahman, Adam, Adam, Yousif, Mohammed & Kashif, 2020). Systems thinking

shapes the way we perceive the situations around us. It attempts to advance understanding of an entity through the context of its relations to the whole that it is part of, it allows us to change our paradigm and to focus on interrelations amongst the entities (Jackson, 2020b).

Hassan et al. (2020) submit that in addition to complexity born from numerous interrelated components, the COVID-19 has emphasised an additional serious facet in the systems thinking – the mindset. Our mindsets are recognised as structures which determine our thinking and actions (Bradley, Mansouri, Kee & Garcia, 2020). They depict the reality that individuals use to comprehend specific situations. Many University students and staff experienced psychological problems due to social seclusion and anxiety (Raaper & Brown, 2020). The mindset played a critical role in each individual's willingness to adhere to the enforced COVID-19 regulations.

The complexities in the higher education landscape were heightened as the COVID-19 pandemic came at a time when most higher education institutions in South Africa were battling to resume the academic year and to catch-up for the time lost during student protests due to dissatisfaction with funding, housing, historical debts and academic exclusions (Motala & Menon, 2020). Since March 2015, higher education institutions in South Africa have been characterised by political unrest and in the past couple of years, the protests turned violent and students resorted to burning University property, which led to some of students being arrested (Hedding et al., 2020). Indisputably, the COVID-19 has created a complex situation. The complexity was associated with vagueness regarding the changing aspects of the disease and the efficiency of the control mechanisms required (Du Preez & Le Grange, 2020). Information about the signs and symptoms and scientific evidence has changed over time. The complexity of the COVID-19 pandemic has carried enormous costs at the individual, societal and economic levels, thus it is critically important that effective regulatory approaches are employed to alleviate the impact of the pandemic (Sá & Serpa, 2020).

2.2.4 Ambiguity

Ambiguity rises from the growing number of pioneering solutions - technologically, scientifically and from general 'world views' (Raghuramapatruni & Kosuri, 2017). For the older generation, knowledge was constructed on information collected and transferred from previous generations. However, nowadays the world faces unprecedented events and situations which were never witnessed in the past, thus trying to draw conclusions from the past seems fruitless (Sinha & Sinha, 2020).

In the VUCA world there is a lack of facts and familiarity (Cousins, 2018). Events and situations present many 'unknowns' and deficiency of information about the rules of the game is of ultimate concern. Horstmeyer (2019) claims that efforts to address current challenges whilst depending on understanding and insight drawn from former generations is be in-effective. Researchers, (Carbonaro, 2021) and

(Millar, Groth & Mahon, 2018) agree that during these VUCA times, information-sharing and knowledge-creation is based on a reverse paradigm where the younger generation teach the older generation how to operate in today’s world of technological advancement and social media.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an extremely ambiguous situation. Many countries - both well established and developing, were uncertain about the obligation of lockdown (Davidovitz, Cohen & Gofen, 2021). Different countries employed various strategies including only lockdown or lockdown combined with a major focus on testing, curbing international travel, and quarantine regulations. Karami & Parra-Martinez (2021) claim that there were various perceptions and interpretations of how to move forward; there was no distinct and solid strategy amongst the government, corporate leaders, economists, healthcare specialists and media on how to handle this crisis and often the suggested campaigns opposed one another; the causal relationship amongst different components was unclear. The COVID-19 situation has clearly demonstrated that the rules of the game have changed or at least are changing (Singh, Javaid, Kataria, Tyagi, Haleem & Suman, 2020).

2.3 The VUCA Model

According to Zinkin (2020), it is vital for leaders and organisations to adopt a proactive approach to confront VUCA challenges. The VUCA model too can be employed to improve the understanding of the VUCA world. The model consists of four quadrants – each representing one of the VUCA elements. The quadrants rest on two axes – the vertical axis stands for capability to predict results and the horizontal axis stands for the available knowledge about the situation. Figure 2.1 below illustrates the four quadrants of the VUCA model.

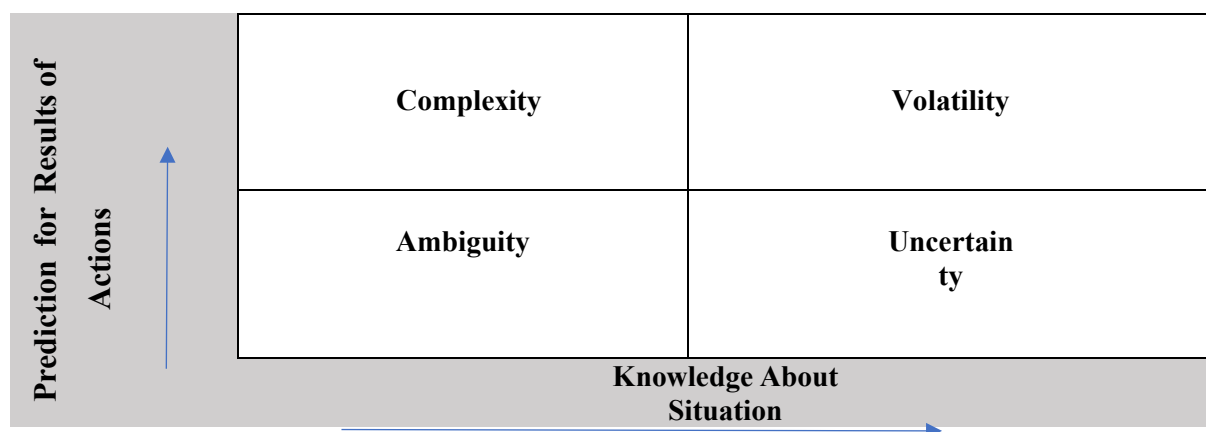


Figure 2.1: VUCA Model
Source: Murugan et al., 2020, p.14

The volatility element is situated on the top right quadrant with sensible knowledge about the circumstance a reasonable forecast of the results can be calculated. Uncertainty on the bottom right




quadrant, detects that reasonable knowledge is available despite a low estimate of the results of action. Complexity is located on the top left quadrant, where little knowledge regarding the situation is available. Ambiguity is at the bottom left quadrant, with both minimal knowledge available and minimal predictions possible.

2.4 VUCA action framework

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the whole of humanity to experience VUCA at the same time and every individual or organisation can testify to the disturbance experienced during the pandemic (Singhal, 2021). How we responded to the problems presented, instigated resilience. Yoder-Wise (2021) encourages us to focus on the resolution to the VUCA world, using the identical abbreviation VUCA 2.0 meaning, Vision, Understanding, Clarity (Courage), Agility (Adaptability).

2.4.1 Vision

Singhal (2021) explained that a strong observable vision can be used to address volatility by making informed decisions. A solid vision enables the organisation to see beyond the current chaos and allows leaders to reassess and to strategise, presumably an extended period of chaos is not anticipated (Oprean, 2020). The COVID-19 generated disorder will ultimately calm down and organisations should be anticipating the new normal and should be ready to accommodate the changes brought forward and their demands. Hedding et al. (2020) wrote that South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training formulated strategic plans to address the consequences emanating from the pandemic and highlighted the following actions to be taken:

-  The revised vision of higher education institutions post-COVID-19 pandemic should include striving to reduce the 'digital divide' and to democratise digitalisation. Leaders of the institutions should ensure that technology is incorporated into educational plans by providing access to the internet and devices;
-  The higher education system overall, ought to be receptive to diversity and to creating an open space for interchange and for values like compassion, respect and solidarity that need to be central in their missions; and
-  Institutions of higher learning must prioritise and lead in problematic and urgent situations affecting nations.

2.4.2 Understanding

The challenges of uncertainty in the VUCA world can be addressed efficiently by gaining a better insight into the event or situation; an improved understanding of different aspects which influence the outcome becomes a necessity (Murugan et al., 2020). Tamrat & Teferra (2020) suggest that leaders are required to acquire this insight from a diverse group which includes employees, the clientele and other external stakeholders.

The COVID-19 pandemic has uncovered the urgent need for international collaboration in research, innovation and for improving scientific competencies, supported by principles of honesty and impartial access (Ali, 2020). Mahlaba (2020) agrees and further states that similar resolutions should also be evident in both the leadership and government of higher education institutions. Badat (2020) suggests the following responses to obtain better understanding and to eliminate uncertainty:

- 📌 Higher education system can be conceptualised as an interrelated ecosystem and consequently increase collaboration with other ecosystems with which its entwined, such as the information sector, public institutions and the economy;
- 📌 Education needs to be fashioned within the public good model to support the change in worldwide and national development patterns, consequently integrating higher education as a key factor in societal and economic improvement; and
- 📌 Incorporation of disciplines for the purpose of creating new knowledge.

2.4.3 Courage and Clarity

Courage could be defined as the boldness to act swiftly and to make decisions based on premeditated risks in problematic times (Yeo, 2021). However, Goniewicz, Khorram-Manesh, Hertelendy, Goniewicz, Naylor & Burkle (2020) warn us that, a thin line exists between failure and success from the fast decision-making process. The VUCA world requires leaders to be courageous to manage challenges of complexity, equally in their manner of thinking and in their decision-making approach (Taylor, 2021). This balance of reliability and receptiveness is characteristic of a leader in the VUCA world.

One of the major challenges for a leader who functions in the midst of complexities is to retain the ability to evaluate the wholeness of the situation and its individual components instantaneously, to consolidate the information and to make sound decisions (Dirani, Abadi, Alizadeh, Barhate, Garza, Gunasekara, Ibrahim & Majzun, 2020). Goniewicz et al. (2020) advocates that complexity can be overcome by having clarity on the situation before deciding on a plan of action and they further claim

that clarity allows the leader to identify and adjust to the changes and requirements of the situation quickly.

Because of existing complexities in the higher education systems in South Africa and across the globe, handling change during the COVID-19 pandemic becomes a weighty challenge. Marshall, Roache & Moody-Marshall (2020) believe that these challenges require leaders in academic institutions to respond to the crisis by means of:

- ✚ Promoting and participating in a shared leadership approach in order to find solutions and to increase responsibility and accountability at all organisational levels;
- ✚ Disturbing organisational standards through changeover from normal in-contact classes to online learning; and
- ✚ Adopting a servant-leadership approach. The servant-leadership style highlights teamwork and compassion and acknowledges the followers' physiological needs and belonging.

The COVID-19 pandemic requires the government and leaders in higher academic institutions to learn continuously from VUCA and to accept innovation as an on-going drive. This requires all leaders to be skilled with managing change (Dirani et al., 2020).

2.4.4 Adaptability and Agility

Nissim & Simon (2021) propose that ambiguity can be addressed by developing agility and the ability to adapt. Agile and adaptive leaders focus on experiential learning, reflect on and apply the lessons to new situations, consequently, are capable of quickly adapting to new challenges and continue to learn from different circumstances. Fernandez & Shaw (2020) share the same sentiments and state that the culture of making meaning through learning reinforces the leader's acceptance for ambiguity. Agility refers to the capacity of the organisation to endure with flexibility in a turbulent environment (Elali, 2021). It demands speed and requires leaders to reconsider the organisational structures, management roles, policies and measures.

The VUCA world requires leaders to be ready with variable plans that can be implemented as change occurs. To survive the substantial shift instigated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary for leaders to re-evaluate the environments in which they operate in and to reformulate their strategies to meet their objectives (Nissim & Simon, 2021). Prompt action needs to be taken to navigate the challenges and regular foresight developments that need to be imbedded into the new strategic plans (Elali, 2021). Higher education institutions have demonstrated their agility through instant and mass adoption of remote learning with little or no preparation for the switch. In order for Higher education institutions to

endure the unceasing turbulence, Fernandez & Shaw (2020) propose the following changes:

- ✚ Expand existing infrastructure and other arrangements of technology-enhanced education;
- ✚ Recognise agility as a feature for competitive advantage and relevance; and adopt a transformative approach as and when required. Foster agile behaviour within the organisation.; and
- ✚ Exploit emerging opportunities and reassess administrative responsibilities by adopting digital technologies to change incompetent inherited practices.

Although volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity might define the present world, a new boldness and renewed mindset can assist in navigating and leading into the VUCA world (Buffone & Blais, 2021). VUCA offers leadership practitioners an exceptional set of problems. Volatility requires flexibility, uncertainty requires wholistic understanding and quick action, complexity demands that leaders apply their investigative and integrative expertise mutually to make sound decisions (Cousins, 2018).

2.5 Challenges in South Africa's higher education environment

The landscape of South African higher education system is large and complex. Similarly, higher education institutions all over the world continuously adjust and respond to universal challenges such as internationalisation, global engagement, altered status, accreditation, student retention, corruption and maladministration (Garretson, McCormack, Waller, Lemoine & Richardson, 2021).

Du Plessis (2021) highlights that the higher education system in South Africa is confronted with various significant challenges which are influenced by the socio-economic political background of the country, institutional governance and administration, and academic policies. These challenges are multi-faceted and interrelated (Musundire & Mumanyi, 2020). This section examines the challenges which are persistent in the higher education sector in South Africa.

2.5.1 Insufficient government funding

According to Musundire & Mumanyi (2020), insufficient funding is identified as the major issue facing higher education institutions in South Africa. Universities and colleges are not adequately subsidised by the government. The shortages in funds hamper the development of the sector. Ritzen (2021) suggests that the insufficient contribution of government funding poses a threat to the sustainability of

the higher education sector. Despite the financial inadequacy, however, the significance of HEIs in human and societal advancement remains unchanged. These problems are intensified by the desire to be internationally recognised and relevant over and above the national needs (Eaton & Stevens, 2020).

The shortfalls in funding disturb work performance and development of institutions. HEIs are unable to perform at their level best without sufficient financial support. Improved financial initiatives are required from the government, universities stakeholders and potential external investors (Kwasi-Agyeman, Langa & Swanzy, 2020). The South African government spends a minimal amount on education. Figure 1-2 below illustrates consolidated government spending on education as a percentage of total expenditure on GDP. Literature reveals that South Africa is spending less on education than the worldwide benchmark.

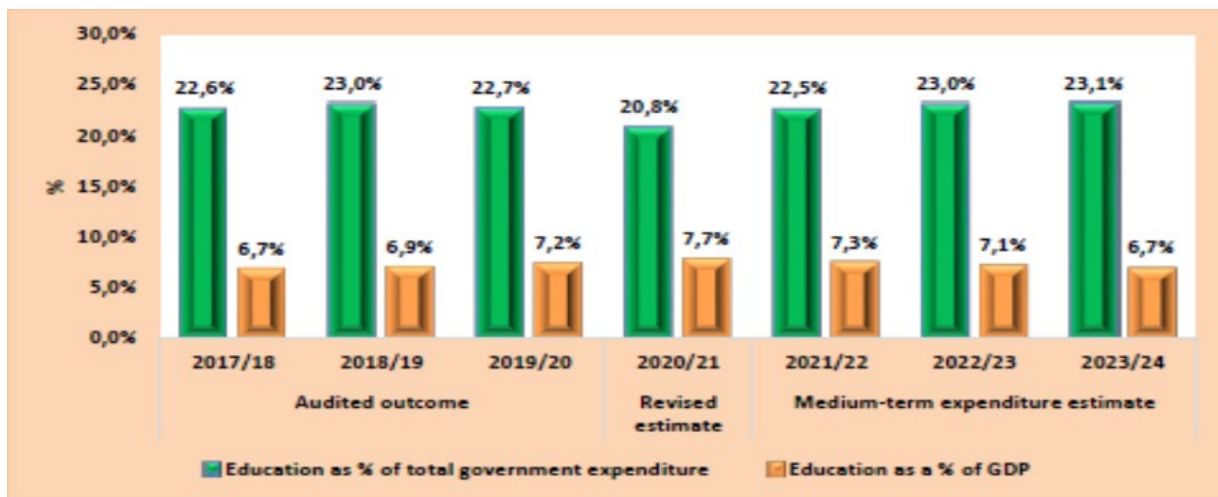


Figure 2.2: Government Spending on Education as a Total of Government Expenditure

Source: Department of Higher Education and Training (2021, p.11)

Kwasi-Agyeman et al. (2020) suggest that the South African’s government failure to accept and implement the 26 per cent of government’s expenditure funding method quantitatively for education as suggested by United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), has a destructive influence on the sustainability and development of the higher education sector. Heleta & Bagus (2021) highlights the following implications of insufficient funding:

- ✚ High student-staff ratio, institutions have to cut-back on employing more staff whilst the class sizes are increasing;
- ✚ Increased pressure on academic staff and workload;
- ✚ Low research productivity due to minimal research grants – stagnant knowledge generation;
- ✚ Lack of opportunities for staff development; and

- High staff turnover due to low salaries.

2.5.2 Staffing difficulties - brain drain

Similar to other African countries, South Africa faces a challenge of professionals relocating to advanced nations (Barkhuizen, Lesenyeho & Schutte, 2020). This movement contributes to a knowledge and skill shortage in South Africa's higher education sector, particularly in the mathematics and science fields. Factors such as socio-economics and political instability, increasing workload, low remuneration issues, declining attraction of University as an employment choice contributed to the brain drain (Anees, Heidler, Cavaliere & Nordin, 2021).

Another staffing issue facing the higher education sector is the aggressive clash between universities to poach the best professors from one another, creating competition instead of cooperation (Mlambo, 2020). This affects collaboration on public issues which involve human and social development. Academic institutions operate in a competitive environment and the goal is to advance the institution and to improve the ranking (Mlambo, Mlambo & Adetiba, 2021).

Abe & Mugobo (2021) raise the issue that even though institutions habitually indicate in their mission statements that they intend to contribute to national development, there is no clear indication on how the contribution will be made or measured. Saurombe & Barkhuizen (2020) concurs with Abe & Mugobo's statement and they maintain that universities are perceived as being responsive to the existing agenda rather than being the custodians of social and human development. On the contrary, transformation strategies in the institutions focus mainly on attracting more students and generating more income (Papadimitriou & Boboc, 2021). Boughey & McKenna (2021) conclude that the staffing challenges have an impact on the institutions in the following ways:

- Institutional instability due to high use of temporary staff members and frequent changes in executive positions;
- Role of higher education institutions in terms of human and social development is unfulfilled and a serious threat to economic growth; and
- Loss on return on investment.

2.5.3 Unequal social backgrounds and academic integration

The higher education system in South Africa remains unstable as universities have to adjust their procedures to meet governments objective of social, financial and political justice in the country. This meant that academic institutions were seen as accountable for social justice, for fashioning fairness and for creating reasonable conditions to undo the destructive impact of apartheid (Lee & Schoole, 2020). Although government's actions to increase access to higher education for all South Africans was well

received, a list of hidden challenges arising from social and academic integration were overlooked. Students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds were socially and academically unprepared for previously 'white dominant' tertiary institutions, and they were presented with adaptive challenges to University environments and lifestyles (Badat, 2020).

The language of teaching was English and the majority of students were not coping with the high standards and the pace at which lectures were delivered nor have they the skill to express themselves fluently as English was a second language throughout their school lives. Besides the language barrier, students particularly from rural area areas had limited exposure to multiracial society (Darquennes, Du Plessis & Soler, 2020). These authors further explain that integration is problematic and as a result the following consequences were perceptible:

- 📖 Fluctuations in student numbers, a high influx of student admissions and a high dropout rate;
- 📖 A low throughput rate and qualifications are completed over an extended period;
- 📖 Diminished potential of students' individual educational success;
- 📖 Production of low calibre graduates; and
- 📖 A widening gap of racial inequality.

2.5.4 Persistent student unrest

The environment in the higher education sector in South Africa is characterised by violent student protests and the consequent unstable academic calendar. Students regularly engaged in protest action because of disagreement with the executive leaders in the institutions for reasons including, limited residences, recognition of student leadership, academic exclusion and financial exclusion (Mbewu & Adebayo, 2020).

In 2015, however, the *#FEES MUST FALL* campaign was initiated by students at the University of Witwatersrand and quickly spread to all HEIs in South Africa. The objective of the movement was to intensify efforts to bring government's attention to student's financial needs and to derail attempts by academic institutions to raise the tuition fees. Although the demand for funding was the main subject behind the protests, a number of factors contributed to the strikes, namely, lack of social transformation in racial discrimination, and lack of socio-economic interest (Uleanya, 2020).

The challenge of student protests has become a recurring issue in the higher education landscape in South Africa and in Africa as a continent. Nigeria is well known for student protests, in 2009 all institutions of higher learning were involved in a mass student action due to differences in security matters, non-accreditation of some qualifications and production of low calibre graduates (Uleanya, 2020).

Student riots pose a threat to personal safety and they have different drawbacks for various stakeholders in the community and the following were noted by (Ocholla, 2020):

- ✚ Loss of teaching time due to University closure and conducting examinations without sufficient time for revision –resulting in a high failure rate;
- ✚ An unstable academic calendar and a prolonged academic year;
- ✚ Destruction of academic and social activities which affects the scope and curriculum taught, this results in lower educational standards; and
- ✚ Increase in financial burden for the institution due to damaged property.

2.5.5 Inadequate technological infrastructure and facilities

García-Peñalvo (2021) states that effective teaching and learning may only be achieved through good technological infrastructure and facilities. Inadequate technological infrastructure and facilities will hinder teaching and result in poor education. The majority of HEIs in South Africa suffer due to inadequate technological infrastructure and facilities (Lembani, Gunter, Breines & Dalu, 2020). These include lecture theatres, staff workspace, computer LANS, science LABS, libraries, sport and recreation centers, a good communication network, a stable water and electricity supply.

The following factors contribute to inadequate technological infrastructure:

- ✚ Affordability – absence of funding allocated for technological advancement;
- ✚ Regional divide – unequal access based on geographical location; and
- ✚ Capacity building – skills and competencies to integrate ICT into curricula.

2.6 The nature of the COVID-19 Pandemic problem

It is imperative to comprehend the nature of problems that organisations deal with and equally to understand the challenges of leadership. Organisations are presented with two kinds of problem namely, technical problems and adaptive problems. According to Fernandez & Shaw (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic characterises a serious adaptive problem which needs to be addressed collectively by communities at local level, by government and private sector at national level and by international institutions at a global level.

The difference between the technical and adaptive problems are summarised in Figure 2.3 below. These are the two types of problem that organisations can be confronted with.

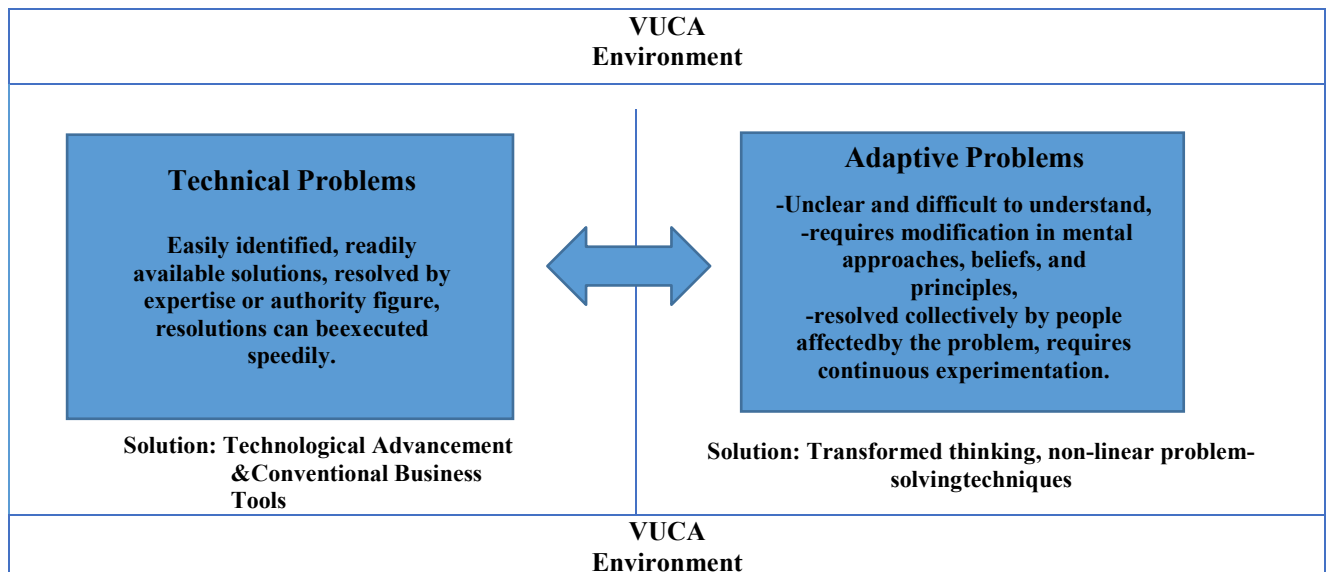


Figure 2.3: Two Types of Organizational Problems

Source: Adapted from Yamauchi 2014, p.5

Dunn (2020) explains that the technical problems, on the left side of the figure, can be simply identified and addressed by adopting relevant technological and business tools. Their resolutions are distinguished as they require suitable knowledge and resources to resolve. The outmoded styles of autocratic leadership are only tolerable when dealing with technical challenges but, when confronted with complications, doubts and fears of the COVID-19 pandemic which requires the challenges to be addressed immediately, they are insufficient and dangerous. He further explains that the problems illustrated on the right of the figure require engagement further than technical knowledge and traditional business techniques. These problems require a paradigm shift in the leader's thinking methods. These problems are complex and unclear; thus, answers cannot be predicted easily (McAuley, 2020).

Adaptive situations have no identified solutions, and thus, they have to be naturally adaptive. This means that they transform with changing conditions. According to Nelson & Squires (2017), these types of problem require leaders to acquire new methods of operating, an alteration in their attitudes, ideals and customs and the capacity to implement a new untried mindset. Scharmer & von Ameln (2019) agree with Nelson & Squire's statement and suggest that leaders should rethink how leadership is endorsed and, understanding these complex problems, they should require a practical approach which enables leaders to interrogate their thinking patterns and to lead from the future as it emerges.

Bouffard (2020) argued that leadership failures frequently transpire when leaders manage adaptive problems as technical problems. He further states that adaptive problems necessitate adaptive leadership. This type of leadership is founded on the value of joint responsibilities and constant learning. In addressing adaptive problems, an experimental mentality is binding as leaders need to work efficiently with their teams. Potsangbam (2017) emphasises that the old idea of leaders performing the

same functions better and where they are perceived as the only individual with potential to solve problems will not address the adaptive problems because of their complexity and ambiguous nature. Nelson & Squires (2017) detailed that these problems are multifaceted and require leadership approaches which impact on institutions in a manner that stimulates a collective response to the problem. Kukreja (2019) Suggests that the extent of change and variability in the environment should inspire the choice of leadership approach. The COVID-19 pandemic demands the transition from a rigid controlling leader-follower leadership approach to a new collective leadership model.

2.7 The impact of COVID-19 on the higher education sector in South Africa







Universities were given autonomy to govern their own tactics in response to the COVID-19 pandemic subject to adherence to the national COVID-19 protocols. The overall response of universities was dominated by changes in the teaching delivery mode to students and having to adapt the managing and administrative roles to run on a work-from-home basis (Mahlaba, 2020). Although no staff downsizing has been announced from the universities, there are fears, however, about a foreseeable decrease in staff spending in the forthcoming years. This will be influenced by changes in the government subsidy, student enrolment figures and the general economic recovery.

2.7.1 Impact on teaching and learning

The impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning is extensive and has affected not only the 2020 academic year but also the future. It has, however, presented an opening to facilitate digital learning (Dhawan, 2020). Academic institutions were required to suspend face-to-face teaching and devise alternative teaching and assessment strategies. Agarwal & Kaushik (2020) report that the pandemic has resulted in a paradigm shift in the manner which teaching is delivered- through several internet portals. The online culture has become a solution for the higher education system, regardless of the challenges presented to both students and the educators (Irawan, Dwisona & Lestari, 2020).

It is undeniable that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted immensely on the teaching and learning in universities. From shutting in-class contact learning, the attention in HEIs has essentially shifted to online learning as a means to ensure continuance and to salvage the academic year (Hoobler, Dowdeswell & Mahlatji, 2021). This was of importance as most HEIs lost time due to student protests at the beginning of the 2020 academic year.

Researchers Mhlanga & Moloi (2020), and Motala & Menon (2020) have identified various teaching and learning challenges centered around availability, affordability and teaching instruction and these are summarised as follows:

-  Some nations have extensive problems with consistent internet connection and access to digital devices. Moreover, students from developing and economically deprived backgrounds find it difficult to afford the required devices and have poor access to the internet;
-  Students with static mindsets find it challenging to become accustomed to the online learning environment, and some subjects require a contact approach and are not suited for the online approach;
-  Lecturers are forced to revise their teaching methods and to initiate the means to address the limitations of online teaching and to produce formative assessments and to give timely feedback to students in spite of inadequate skills development, large student classes, lack of students' readiness and lack of proper infrastructure;
-  Both staff and students were impacted psychologically and emotionally and some are unable to engage productively due to an uncondusive home environment as the normal University environment and schedule is disturbed;
-  As the assessments are conducted on online platforms, the approach and systems used varied from one institution to the next depending on convenience, expertise of the lecturers, technological infrastructure of universities and the competence of students. The trial and error approach used to conduct assessment creates confusion and raises uncertainty in the education system;
-  Lack of procedures and systems to detect plagiarism. This raises concerns regarding the integrity of the assessments and of students' results. As the assessments are conducted from home, it is difficult for lecturers to have assurance of the authenticity of the effort and the genuine learning process happening.

2.7.2 Impact on research

The bulk of the investigations on the impact of COVID-19 on academic institutions were fixated on the teaching and learning aspect and where research was considered, emphasis was on the funding aspect or those research projects that were halted due to COVID-19 regulations (Badat, 2020).

With regard to imminent funding, van Schalkwyk (2021) suggest that there is alarming news of an anticipated cut of 96 million Rands in the budget of the National Research Foundation (NRF). This will negatively impact on the postgrad and PhD developmental opportunities.

van Schalkwyk (2021) further claim that the lockdown period presented challenges to researchers in terms of data collection, particularly those who depended on experimental trials or on undertaking fieldwork. This resulted in delays and loss of some research grants. Research productivity fell by a considerable extent.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an upsurge in the quantity of research funding applications for projects related to various aspect of disease (Motala & Menon, 2020). Academic institutions in South Africa have commenced research in the search for an effective treatment of the disease and they currently participate in international scientific trials for the COVID-19 vaccine. In addition, academics from various appropriate academic disciplines in South Africa are sufficiently represented on the advisory committee for the Minister of Health.

2.7.3 The digital divide impact

The term digital divide represents the gap concerning access to and practice of computer technology among people from diverse geographic, political and socio-economic backgrounds. According to Du Preez & Le Grange (2020) digital disparity is apparent between societies residing in urban areas and people residing in rural settlements, amid socioeconomic clusters, amongst developing and more developed nations, between learned and less learned individuals. These authors further suggest that even people with access to an internet connection can be digitally divided.

In developing nations, the socio-economic background of individuals and communities has been identified as the main reason behind the digital gap. Digital divide in higher education is exaggerated due to variable access to reliable and equitable internet access, data provision, practical skills, diversified teaching methods and stakeholder engagement (Lembani et al., 2020).

Since not all countries or academic institutions were equally prepared for online learning, the different levels of readiness of institutions varied. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the disparities that exist in South African higher education and across the world. (Czerniewicz, Agherdien, Badenhorst, Belluigi, Chambers, Chili, de Villiers, Felix, Gachago & Gokhale, 2020). In Tunisia, the shift towards online learning was rejected on the grounds that not all learners had equivalent access to technology and the bandwidth needed to back up such learning. Louis, Ingabire, Isano, Eugene & Blanc (2020) state that in Rwanda, there were disparities in individual University's capability to deliver virtual teaching. In the UK, HEIs experienced a loss of income due to a substantial decrease in international students and suspensions of local students due to the pandemic (Andrew, Cattan, Costa Dias, Farquharson, Kraftman, Krutikova, Phimister & Sevilla, 2020). Black, Spreen & Vally (2020) concluded that HEIs in South Africa experienced problems parallel to other global institutions, however, the main difference is that South Africa is attempting to handle these challenges amid the depth of inequalities.

Virtual learning is problematic for Africa as a continent, where less than a quarter of the residents have access to an internet connection (Faturoti, 2022). In a study conducted by Clement (2020) it was revealed that in South Africa 65 per cent of the population have access to the internet, however, only 9 per cent of the population have internet access at home. The majority of South Africans have mobile internet access as opposed to unlimited broadband access. The digital divide is also evident between provinces; in Limpopo only, 42.4 per cent of the population have some sort of access to the internet compared to Gauteng and Cape Town provinces where 80 per cent of population has fair access to the internet. Therefore, it is clear that South Africa leaves a lot to be desired in terms of technological advancement and a long way to go to close the digital divide gap (Lubinga, Sitto & Molebatsi, 2021).

2.7.4 Emergency remote learning impact

The shift away from traditional face-to-face instruction can be a demanding for all stakeholders in the higher education sector as it requires all parties to adapt to a demanding situation quickly with no other alternatives available (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). The higher education sector assumed an 'Education in Emergency' approach which implied that universities were bound to accept an arrangement which they had neither anticipated nor prepared for at that given point in time (Du Preez & Le Grange, 2020).

This has been a daunting task for higher education institutions who principally provided for on-campus, contact teaching. Immediate and short-term plans had to be established and actioned to accommodate students with reasonable access to technological infrastructure and at the same time for those students with no access to internet and technological devices (Mpungose, 2020).

The institutional responses were to produce practical solutions quickly for the compound challenges presented to the students and in the short-run, the education administration structures were used merely for information depositories. Issues of how mere exchange of information relates to teaching and learning were heightened (Mpungose, 2020). Concerns were raised that this amounted to an instrumentalist approach to learning as it refutes the socially entrenched nature of the individual (Chisango & Marongwe, 2021).

2.8 Academic leadership

Leadership is recognised as a main characteristic of outstanding organisations including educational institutions. Hemakumar (2021) proclaims that the pre-eminence of any institution is dependent on leadership quality and that the quality of leadership determines effectiveness of leaders in their leadership roles. HEIs are overseen by various regulatory entities and management bodies from Chancellors to vice chancellors to Directors and Deans, and to academic and administrative committees

depending on each institution's organisational structure (Dewi, Meydianawathi, Purnami & Puspitawati, 2020).

Academic leadership encompasses various management roles changeable from strategic and administrative roles to transmuted and introspective functions. According to Dewi et al. (2020) there are three different levels in academic leadership. The first level is associated with teaching. Effective leaders ought to motivate their followers to make sound decisions regarding educational procedure. The second level is related to research productivity. Effective leaders accentuate the need for knowledge generation and distribution through research and publication. The third level relates to planning, formulating a vision for the organisation and determining specific goals.

In addition to the three elements of academic leadership, Hemakumar (2021) further highlights other critical aspects of leadership namely the motivational aspect, and acknowledgement and relational abilities. He notes that an effective leader should be able to lead from both ends; leading from the anterior (lead by example) and from the posterior (through acknowledgement and support).

2.9 Effective leadership

Various definitions of leadership exist within the literature. Cherkowski, Kutsyuruba, Walker & Crawford (2021) described leadership as the means of inducing others to achieve a specific objective. Truninger, Ruderman, Clerkin, Fernandez & Cancro (2021) defined a leader as an individual who concentrates on the mission, acts virtuously, and keeps an eye on the future. Another description from Monzani, Seijts & Crossan (2021) identifies a leader as a person who possesses a vision and strategy to effect a necessary change. Leaders must possess the capacity to motivate and deploy people and to allocate and use resources to achieve the vision of change.

Effective leadership is commonly acknowledged as being a key component in attaining development in higher education (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). Globally, research studies emphasise the powerful impact of leadership in driving improvements in higher education institutions and in facilitating change in the sector presented with dynamic challenges. Marshall et al. (2020) defined effective leadership as the process of expediting personal and joint efforts to understand and influence others to appreciate what needs to be done and how to comprehend the common goal.

2.9.1 Characteristics of effective leadership

Current research on leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic emphasises the most crucial leadership characteristic as being effective leadership during challenging periods. With respect to leadership in higher education institutions, one critical characteristic that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic

is shared (distributed) leadership (Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021).

Because of the nature of the institutions, leaders working in silos cannot gain effectiveness in times of crisis. Leaders should formulate the strategy and communicate the priorities but at the same time give autonomy to their teams to accept accountability for their decisions based on the distinctiveness of their departments (Megheirkouni & Mejheirkouni, 2020). A shared leadership approach is effective in cultivating the excellence and speed of decision-making whilst encouraging the sense of authorisation and enthusiasm for the teams (Herbst, 2020). Herbst further claims that the shared leadership approach assisted universities to 1) adjust to the crisis at hand, 2) find effective solutions, 3) profit from institutional agility, and 4) harvest relationships and to gain support.

A summary for characteristics of effective leadership is presented in the table below. These characteristics have been gathered from existing literature.

Table 2.1: Summary of characteristics of effective leadership

Author	Characteristics
Koehn (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a critical central function. • Concentrates on the learning experience. • Emotional intelligence. • Acknowledges fear.
Fernandez & Shaw (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptability. • Emotional Intelligent. • Considerate to various perspectives. • Creativity and Innovation.
Dirani et al. (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be a sense maker. • Promotes technological advancement. • Emotional stability. • Focuses on employee well-being and innovative communication.
Verawati & Hartono (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to believe in oneself, maturity and self-esteem. • Be honest, epitomise integrity and beaccountable.. • Strong sense of commitment and passion towards their goals. • Delegation of duties and authority and empowerment of employees.
Grimm (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must possess a clear purpose and sense of direction. • Must be courageous and be willing to take calculated risks and to make difficult decisions. • Must be ethically fit and possess an intuitive sense of ethical morality. • Must be able to establish priorities.

Source: Developed by the Author

2.10 Crisis leadership

Crises generate uncertain, complex, dynamic conditions characterized by an overload of incomplete and sometimes contradictory information. Leadership in these uncertain and dynamic crisis environments necessitates rapid comprehension of risk, information selection and processing, the ability to anticipate potential risk, and the capacity to make appropriate decisions during crisis response (Sadiq, Kapucu & Hu, 2020). Leaders must also consider how to explain and construe what is happening, and what needs to be done to alleviate the crisis (Gigliotti, 2019). Wu, Shao, Newman & Schwarz (2021) caution that during a crisis, poor leadership can exacerbate the situation and make the crisis uncontrollable. Moreover, Firestone (2020) highlights that crisis leadership necessitates having contingencies in place to mitigate the impact of a crisis, formulate an effective response, and return to the status quo timely.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders were required to define the internal state of affairs within their organisations as well as the reality of the exterior environment, and rapidly advance a plan of action with primacies. In higher education institutions, the objective was to salvage the academic year through online teaching and learning (Nugroho, Paramita, Mengistie & Krupskyi, 2021). Kaul, Shah & El-Serag (2020) identified guiding principles which assist in crisis leadership. These include situational awareness, adaptive decision making, communication, collaboration and learning.

2.10.1 Situational awareness

Leaders must develop situational awareness in order to make informed decisions and communicate effectively when developing action plans, ideas, and priorities (Lemoine & Richardson, 2020). Situational awareness in higher education institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic should include the institution's operational capacity and infrastructure, health and staff of staff and students, students' needs and their socio-economic backgrounds, the actions of other universities, and the societal and political contexts in which public health is practiced (Yokuş, 2022).

2.10.2 Adaptive decision making

During a crisis, even the most well-functioning institutions and leaders acknowledge that their standard procedures often fail to meet the new demands of the crisis (Marshall, Roache & Moody-Marshall, 2020). Leaders must be willing to adapt and alter their decision-making processes before making critical decisions in order to succeed. Making decisions quickly, without complete knowledge and information, is critical, but it must be balanced with an ongoing course of sharing information, verifying facts, and challenging norms (Hurtado, 2021).

2.10.3 Communication

Crisis communication is essential not only for sharing information and knowledge amongst those involved in crisis response efforts, but also for providing relevant information to all stakeholders within the organisation (Menon & Motala, 2021). Effective crisis communication relies on evidence-based approaches that are organised in a manner that all stakeholders of the organisation can easily understand, and that are offered and distributed in numerous ways and channels to ease uncertainty and promote confidence (Nugroho et al., 2021).

2.10.4 Collaboration

Collaboration abilities are also required for effective leadership when dealing with crises. The degree to which partaking institutions share their resources and align main tasks and functions to achieve a common goal determines the effectiveness of collaboration (Laufer, Leiser, Deacon, Perrin de Brichambaut, Fecher, Kobsda & Hesse, 2021). Effective crisis response efforts necessitate collaboration among various organisations from both the public and private sector. Khamis, Naseem, Khamis & Petrucka (2021) assert that in complex and uncertain crisis situations, leaders must effectively facilitate collaboration across organisations from different sectors in order to make timely decisions and effectively implement strategies and guidelines to accomplish a shared goal.

2.10.5 Learning

Leaders who are immersed in a crisis all often fail to take stock of daily leadership lessons (Yang & Huang, 2021). To avoid this trap, academic leaders professionals have a unique opportunity to serve as "contributor observers" by documenting and disseminating the numerous lessons learned from the COVID pandemic response (Gigliotti, 2020). It is imperative for leaders to integrate learning processes and best practices in order to predict or reduce the likelihood and impact of future crises. As a result, the leader can provide strategic reactions to an ongoing crisis while also developing strategic long-term capability (Marshall et al., 2020).

2.11 Theory U

Theory U can be recognised as a method of generating change. It provides a means to respond to the global challenges concerning environmental, societal and spiritual divides (Nullens, 2019). Theory U uses a personal, individual approach to address these issues. The evolution, however, is not limited to individual transformation but subsequently creates change at the meso and macro (Bartunek & Jones, 2017).

Theory U is identified as a model of learning and managing. It can be used as a technique to facilitate change management and it is often employed to assist leaders and managers to interrogate past uncreative patterns of behaviour which hampered effective decision-making (Ewest, 2021). This involves breaking blockades that barred leaders from empathising with their counter-parts. The Theory U framework demonstrates the gradual movement from traditional linear ways of governance and management to operating from a center of awareness (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2015). This process is called the journey of the U. Scharmer (2009) identifies three major enemies that impede transformation in the thinking process; the voice of judgement, the voice of cynicism and the voice of fear. Theory U emphasises the need to suspend these voices by keeping an open mind, heart and will.

2.11.1 The U process

The U process, illustrated in Figure 2.4 below, comprises seven movements presented in a generic U shape arrangement (Scharmer and Kaufer 2013, p.18). This model comprises of a set of concepts and practices which are intended to promote mutual creation of the future that is emerging, namely;

1. Downloading – suspending mental models;
2. Seeing – building common intent;
3. Sensing – observe, observe, observe;
4. Presencing – connect to the source;
5. Crystallising – vision and intention;
6. Prototyping – connecting the mind, heart and will;
7. Performing – operating from the whole.



Figure 2.4: The U process

Source: Scharmer and Kaufer 2013, p.18.

The downward movement along the left-hand side of the U process takes us through a practice of self-introspection and allows us to cross-examine and suspend our mental models. The bottom center of the U process illustrates the fundamental point in the model where one is connected to their higher inner being which is consciously present. By travelling upwards along the right-hand side of the U journey, the individual is able to merge the 'higher-self' with new possibilities and to begin to lead from within (Scharmer, 2009).

2.11.2 Theory U and leadership development

The VUCA presented by the COVID-19 pandemic necessitates new consciousness and an innovative collective leadership capacity, for the purpose of confronting challenges in a more mindful, intentional and tactical manner. Such evolution permits leaders to be more effective in times of adversity (Sanyal & Rigg, 2021).

Theory U: Leading from the Emerging Future, based on systems theory, provides a theoretical format that is concise, cohesive, and clear. It involves providing leadership development and changes meditation, which recognizes various mental states (Vardaman, 2020). This theory of leadership revitalizes faith and provides willpower to the leadership. Developing leadership abilities will shift leaders' mental attitudes from one of self-knowledge to one of community adaptation. Theory U offer leaders new core qualities, including decisiveness, openness and flexibility. Theory U teaches leaders new core competencies such as flexibility, openness, and decisiveness (Scharmer, 2020).

Lantu, Ginting, Permana & Ramdlany (2018) assert that in any given situation, leaders are exposed to a variety of information and to baffling choices and they often fail because they are stuck in the traditional ways of decision-making. Failure emerges from a lack of comprehensive knowledge and skill from transformational leadership. Leaders as well as humanity at large, are blind to the foundation upon which effective leadership develops. Scharmer & von Ameln (2019) claim that connecting to the prospect of someone's best future and creating robust innovation ideas involves an edification process of the mindset which goes beyond brain intelligence. They contend that effective leadership is independent on the quality of one's attention and intention.

Theory U enables an in-depth exploration of the true modern centers of leadership as a process arising from inner knowing and social innovation. This theory provides several tried-and-true leadership activities drawn from a context of various disciplines (Keith, 2022). Theory U provides leaders with the willpower and assistance they need to learn and stay on the path to mastery on their own leadership journey (Nullens, 2019). The preceding motivates current leadership wisdom and invites them to investigate the most robust leadership tool available.

Theory U and the U methodology contribute to the never-ending effort to improve the nature of leadership in organizations, particularly in the leadership of massive turbulence and institutional change initiatives and transformation (Scharmer, 2020).

2.11.3 Understanding Theory U as a conceptual framework

According to Theory U, the quality of the results that people produce in some kind of social system is a function of the level of understanding, attention, or conscious experience with which the employees in the system operate. The theory is understood as 1) an organisational learning framework, 2) a method of leading reflective transformation, and 3) a method of connecting to the more true and developed features of ourselves (Selamat, 2021).

Practically, three methods are incorporated into Theory U; phenomenology, dialogue and collaborative active research (Pavey, 2021). Scharmer (2020) highlights that the main aspect focus of the U methodology is on organisational learning. This study employs Theory U methodology as a conceptual framework to see how the COVID-19 pandemic as a VUCA phenomenon was perceived by leaders in UKZN, SAEF based on their actions and responses and to learn how Theory U can be used as a leadership development tool to assist leaders to navigate the challenges emanating from the phenomenon by moving from reacting to regenerating new knowledge and processes. Theory U is used as a learning tool to bring together leadership, organisational change and individual transformation by formulating a framework that assist leaders in UKZN, SAEF to navigate the crisis and manage change.

2.12 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the term VUCA in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implications of this pandemic for the higher education sector in South Africa. The VUCA model together with the VUCA action framework was presented and four principles were discussed - 1. vision, 2. understanding, 3. courage and clarity and 4. Agility and adaptability. The chapter further examined existing challenges in the higher education environment and lastly it identified leadership challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter also introduced the concept of Theory U as a management and leadership development tool. Seven principles underpinning the theory were presented. The research methodology used in the study is presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter investigated current literature on the study matter. Bairagi & Munot (2019) defined research as an investigation that involves the collection, examination, and interpretation of data to understand, define, forecast, or control a phenomenon. Dźwigoł (2018) simply describes research as a systematic study; in the sense that, the process of research is methodical from the initial defining of the intentions to the data management and presentation of the findings, all happening within recognised frameworks and in accordance with prevailing guidelines. The nature and the method of data collection depend on the researcher's philosophical view (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018). This view can be clarified as a specific perspective through which the researcher views the world. All methodical studies are founded on some underlying philosophical assumptions about the rationality of the research and the selection of the appropriate research methods used to advance knowledge (Bairagi & Munot, 2019).

An interpretive paradigm was identified as being appropriate for this study and data were analysed through the qualitative method. Further details on these methods are discussed in this chapter. This chapter discusses the methodology and the design behind the research process. This chapter defines research philosophy, methods, and strategies, the data collection method, and the method of analysis of data generated by this study.

3.2 Research paradigms, traditions and methodology

According to Kivunja & Kuyini (2017), the research process consists of three fundamental aspects: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. They suggest that a research paradigm is an all-embracing system of interconnected practices and rationale that outlines the nature of the investigation (Mkansi, 2018). These scholars share the view that research paradigms echo our views about the world we operate in.

Similarly, Blaikie & Priest (2017) proposed that a research investigation should be based on the concepts of ontology; the manner in which the researcher defines the truth and reality, epistemology; which is the process employed by the researcher to discover the truth and reality and methodology; the technique used in conducting the investigation. Kivunja & Kuyini (2017) further maintain that research paradigms play an important role in determining which problems are worthy of investigation and which are the necessary procedures required to address questions presented in a research study (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021) identified three distinguishing paradigms within social and management research,

namely, positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory. These paradigms each have three dimensions; ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021).

3.2.1 Positivism

Positivists accept a scientific approach and create the knowledge production process by quantifying the data and thus, enhance the relationship among the variables (Pham, 2018). On the other hand, Williams, Boylan & Nunan (2020) argue that positivism views human behaviour as submissive, measured, and determined by the external environment and that the knowledge may only be efficiently generated through real-world reflection. Alharahsheh & Pius (2020) believe that this tradition was contested by interpretive constructionism and critical postmodernism because of its absence of partiality in interpreting reality.

3.2.2 Critical Theory

According to Hammer (2017), critical investigators believe that societal reality is established by history and that it is shaped and reshaped by humans. Dimock (2021) highlights that although humans can intentionally transform their social and economic conditions, critical researchers bring to our attention the fact that their ability to change is hampered by certain cultural and political norms. Therefore, critical scholars attempt to surpass the beliefs and standards, and social constraints by producing research that identifies the underlying problems in societies and encourages self-conscious criticism, and develops awareness (Pham, 2018).

3.2.3 Interpretivism

Pham (2018) suggested that Interpretive scholars advocate that reality includes an individual's experiences of the real world and recognise an inner aspect of individuals and believe that reality is communally created. As stated by Turyahikayo (2021), interpretive investigators are more inclined to depend on the participants' interpretations of the situation being investigated and recognise the impact of their background and experiences on the study. Interpretivism accepts that there are various paths to knowledge creation and that knowledge encapsulates intellect and insights, therefore, knowledge is an act of interpretation (Pulla & Carter, 2018).

Interpretive researchers seek to obtain their constructs from the field through a comprehensive investigation of the phenomenon concerned (Turyahikayo, 2021). He further maintains that the foundation of interpretivist investigators is that reality can only be examined through social constructions much like mindfulness and collective meanings. Van der Walt (2020) agrees with Turyahikayo's statement and proposes that the Interpretive model is supported by observation and

interpretation where information is collected through observation and knowledge is created through the interpretation of information collected and through appraising it. According to Shisanya (2019), Interpretivism seeks to comprehend a phenomenon through the implications that humans give to it. This paradigm emphasises the need to analyse the situation and focuses on seeing the world from the perspective of a persons’ particular experiences (Pham, 2018).

The theoretical foundation of interpretive research is hermeneutics and phenomenology (Miller, Chan & Farmer, 2018). The hermeneutics principles support the view that, all human understanding is attained by seeing the independent meaning of parts and the meaning of the whole that they form (Van der Walt, 2020). In this study, interpretivism was used as a means of analysis to understand challenges through an individuals’ experience amid the COVID-19 pandemic and to gain insight into its impact on the leadership roles within the UKZN institution.

Although this study is not principally phenomenological, certain aspects of it are reinforced however, by the values of phenomenology. These include learning and articulating important characteristics of a certain phenomenon. Frechette, Bitzas, Aubry, Kilpatrick & Lavoie-Tremblay (2020) emphasise that phenomenological studies attempt to narrate the meaning of people’s involvement in the phenomenon. In this study, this aspect was demonstrated by collecting significant information and understandings via the inductive qualitative research technique.

The data examination process for this study was influenced by the interpretive paradigm. The study intended to receive the narrative against the background in which it was set and in the context of the personal perspective of participants. Adopting an interpretive model empowered the researcher to explore the interviewees’ insights from the context of their leadership roles within the UKZN, SAEF but also created a platform for the researcher to enquire into their personal beliefs and values.

The table below illustrates the features of interpretivism and demonstrates how this paradigm was applied in this study.

Table 3.1: Features of Interpretivism applied in this study

<p>Research Objective</p>	<p>The aim of this study was to identify leadership challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic in UKZN, SAEF, and to examine how Theory U can be incorporated into the decision-making process in order to assist leaders to navigate through the challenges.</p>
<p>Concept</p>	<p>Explanation</p>

Ontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diverse social realities exist due to different individual experiences. ▪ Realities are discovered and created through meaningful acts and human communication. ▪ Learn how individuals make sense of their communal world.
Epistemology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Personal, interactive engagement. ▪ Events are understood through intellectual processes. ▪ Research participants constructed knowledge socially through real-life experience.
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data collection process included in-depth interviews ▪ Research challenges standardised assumptions.

Source: Developed by the Author

3.3 Research Methodologies

The selection of the appropriate method depends on the kind of research topic since it determines the boundaries and the hypothetical standards that inform the research study (Dźwigoł, 2018). Kumar (2020) raises an argument that research methodology is a strategic investigation that is based on a plan and information gatherings but not on assumptions. Nayak & Singh (2021) agree with Kumar's statement by pointing out that research proceeds to find facts that are scientific by employing unbiased methods and practices.

Khalidi (2017) reminds us that the most popular methods of conducting research include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The researcher evaluates the type of data necessary to answer the research questions which the study aims to address and upon that evaluation, the researcher chooses one of the approaches to conduct the research. According to Dźwigoł (2018), the quantitative method is employed to reply to research questions demanding arithmetical data, while the qualitative style is used for research questions that require textual data, and the technique of the mixed method is adopted if research questions necessitate the use of both numerical and textual data.

3.3.1 Quantitative Research Method

Quantitative exploration methods were established in the natural sciences to learn about natural phenomena while qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to acquire knowledge about social and cultural phenomena (Disman, Ali & Barliana, 2017).

According to Bullock, Little & Millham (2017), quantitative investigations consist of a relationship existing between a dependent and an independent variable. Such studies estimate variables on a trial basis and reveal the relationship amongst the variables using statistics (Disman et al., 2017). These authors confirm that quantitative research adopts questionnaires, surveys, and experiments to collect data that is reviewed and presented in numbers that allow for statistical analysis. Results from quantitative research can be depicted easily as charts, graphs, and diagrams.

3.3.2 Qualitative Research Methods

Gerring (2017) suggests that qualitative research methods are mainly employed in the human sciences to discover communal relations, systems, and procedures. This research approach offers a comprehensive insight into how individuals and groups interpret, behave and manage situations in a particular environment (Mohajan, 2018). Allan (2020), defines it as an unravelling model which aids the researcher to instigate a degree of detail from high participation in natural occurrences. He extends his statement and admits that qualitative research acknowledges investigations of social phenomena from the participants' perspective.

Aspers & Corte (2019) contend that qualitative research attempts to learn about current problems since little is known and more is to be learned about the problem. Edwards (2020) shares the same sentiments and asserts that uncertainty is normally present as the feature and the extent of the problem is identified. Therefore, qualitative research assists investigators to understand humans, and the societal background within which they are living. Allan (2020) highlights that qualitative researchers employ soft data to gain rich information and to allow the complications and changes of the world being investigated to be discovered and signified.

According to Gerring (2017), qualitative research is inductive as it allows for the design to advance as the research progresses. It uses inductive data evaluation to obtain an understanding of the connections of equally influential effects and to explain the interrelating realities, and experiences of the investigator and participants. Qualitative research includes significant use of description, explanation, and interpretation of data collected. Stenfors, Kajamaa & Bennett (2020) believe that qualitative data is less controlled in the description since it articulates and develops new models.

Kawamura (2020) claims that Qualitative research is commonly used as a theoretical arrangement to help make a judgment of reality by demonstrating explicit processes of management research. This method allows the grouping of some aspects of existing experiences (Stenfors et al., 2020). These definitions imply that qualitative research plays a significant role in understanding and interrogating experiences. This study employed a qualitative method to conduct research. (Morse, 2020) agrees that human learning is studied effectively through qualitative research. This research aimed to examine the

impact on the work environment and to identify the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. It sought the opinions of leaders within SAEF regarding the sudden change in the work environment.

To achieve the objectives of the study, a qualitative methodology was utilised . The key characteristic of qualitative research stems from its suitability for small samples. Qualitative studies present comprehensive explanations and scrutiny of a research topic without prescribing the scope of the research or the form of the partaker’s responses (Edwards, 2020). On the other hand, Hennink, Hutter & Bailey (2020) caution that the efficacy of qualitative research depends on the researcher’s skills and capabilities, secondly, the results are subject to his or her biasness. The small sample size also poses a problem for the results not being considered as a genuine reflection of the wider population.

The characteristics of qualitative and quantitative data are compared in the table below. The qualitative methodology deemed suitable for this study was based on the identified characteristics.

Table 3.2: Characteristics of Qualitative vs Quantitative Research

Qualitative	Quantitative
The objective is to be comprehensive and expressive	The objective is to categorise and tally features, and to formulate statistical models.
Research design develops whilst the study is undertaken	All features are cautiously identified before the data collection proceeds.
The researcher becomes personally absorbed in the subject investigated	There is a separation between the researcher and the study matter.
The researcher is part and parcel of the data collection process and is considered a gathering tool.	Data is collected using instruments such as equipment, surveys, and questionnaires.

Source: Adopted from Basias and Pollalisi 2018, p.61

3.3.3 Mixed Methods

Qualitative and quantitative techniques can be joined to form a mixed method of collecting and analysing data. The mixed-method approach offers an alternative to the assumption that qualitative and quantitative techniques are inharmonious. According to Anguera, Portell, Hernández-Mendo, Sánchez-Algarra & Jonsson (2021), the researcher can emphasise either direction of the qualitative or quantitative technique or may employ both techniques equally, based on the nature of the issues being examined. Researchers use the mixed method approach to gain from the strengths and to lessen the weaknesses of either the qualitative or quantitative research method (Ramírez-Montoya & Lugo-Ocando, 2020). This method also allows the researchers to design a research study that addresses

questions regarding the intricate nature of the problem and the connections amongst the measurable variables (Almeida, 2018).

3.4 Population and Sampling Method

Edwards (2020) describes the population as all essentials including individuals, items, and events that meet the sample standards for the involvement in the study. The population of this study comprised academic and administrative leaders at the University of KwaZulu-Natal within the School of Accounting, Economics & Finance.

Qualitative research examines comprehensive and extensive information; thus, qualitative researchers often use diverse sampling methods to reduce the large collection of data to a manageable size. A sample is accepted as an acceptable representation of the population in the study. Generally, there are two types of sampling approaches; probability and non-probability. (Moser & Korstjens, 2018) The nature of the study and the research questions guide which sampling method is appropriate.

Quantitative research often utilises probability sampling means, whilst qualitative research largely employs the non-probability sampling method (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Probability sampling implies that every item in the population stands an identical chance of being selected as a sample. Rahi (2017) argues that this technique involves freedom from biasness however, it is costlier in terms of time and resources. Probability sampling involves picking a sample according to either knowledge or recommendation but which still meets the population parameters (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019).

Non-probability sampling encompasses four sampling strategies namely; quota, snowball, convenience, and purposive (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019). A purposive sampling technique was selected for this research and participants were selected based on the significance of their work, experiences and knowledge, and interactions with the challenges and developments of initiatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Taherdoost (2018) confirms that purposive sampling is a method where specific persons are nominated intentionally to obtain important information that cannot be provided by a different group. Etikan, Musa & Alkassim (2016) also agree that participants in a purposive sample are elected judgementally based on their knowledge, associations, and proficiency regarding a research matter.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants for this study. Ten participants were interviewed. This sampling method was suitable because the study focused on particular characteristics of the population. By choosing a sample based on their expertise, knowledge and experience, this allowed the researcher to collect rich meaningful data which led to improved insight and accurate results. The sample consists of academics who occupy leadership positions in the UKZN,

SAEF. Although there is variance in titles, the incumbents share common leadership expertise in key performance areas and partake in the operation and academic affairs of the School. All academic disciplines from the SAEF were represented in the study. This equitable representation promotes the credibility of the study.

The table below illustrates the sample demographics for the study. 10 participants were interviewed.

Table 3.3: Designations of the Sample

Participant	Designation	Interview Date
P1	Academic Leader	20 September 2021
P2	Academic Leader	20 September 2021
P3	Programme Manager	20 September 2021
P4	Executive Leader	22 September 2021
P5	Academic Leader	22 September 2021
P6	Programme Manager	28 September 2021
P7	Executive Leader	29 September 2021
P8	Academic Leader	04 October 2021
P9	Executive Leader	04 October 2021
P10	Academic Leader	06 October 2021

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Draper, Young Thomas & Fenich (2018) stated that, in any form of research, data collection is regarded as a critical aspect, thus researchers are to be conscious of the data collected. Therefore, data need to be collected truthfully and adequately as they impact on the results of the investigation. Mkandawire (2019) confirms that there are two forms of data collection; specifically primary and secondary data. Given the nature of the study, primary data were used to answer the research questions.

3.5.1 Primary Data

Data is classified as primary when it is derived directly from the research participants. Moser & Korstjens (2018), define primary data as non-existent data since they ought to be created from the study conducted. Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey & Lawless (2019) concluded that primary data are collected by the researcher for an explicit purpose and from the individuals who are informed about the subject matter being investigated. The objectives of the research determine the method of primary data collection and the depth of the information pursued. Primary data can be collected from various sources

including interviews, observations, questionnaires, and focus groups (Flick, 2018). In this study, all data were collected from a primary source and interviews were selected as the method of collection. Moser & Korstjens (2018) claim that research studies transform the views and sentiments shared during the interview into a creative foundation of knowledge.

3.5.2 Research Interviews

Mkandawire (2019) indicated that depending on the study aim, a researcher can opt to utilise unstructured, structured, or semi-structured interviews with individuals or with a focus group. According to Clark & Vealé (2018), semi-structured interviews are used to collect data from key informers who have personal involvements, perceptions, and beliefs connected to the matter of the investigation. Semi-structured interviews were the most suitable method for this study as they created a platform upon which to assemble open-ended data, to delve into interviewees' thinking, to ascertain the principles and feelings about the leadership challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and to dig deeper into their leadership approaches which informed their reactions.

The openness of this interview style allows the researcher and the participant to deviate from the schedule of questions to substantiate a response, despite the predetermined area or topic of investigation. The predetermined questions, however, guide the direction of the interview but also allow for the discovery of related information which the researcher might not have recognised at the early stages of the research process.

Researchers play a critical role in the data collection process. In the semi-structured interview, the researcher ensures that the participants understand what each question requires and that they have the freedom to substantiate their answers (Mahat-Shamir, Neimeyer & Picho-Prelorentzos, 2021). This characteristic of semi-structured interviews inspires participants to share their perceptions about the topic of conversation easily. This is beneficial as it avails new profound knowledge to the researcher.

3.5.3 Data Collection Instrument and Procedure

The development of the data collection instrument was done in conjunction with the selection of the research method. Once the research concept was formulated, a preliminary literature review was conducted to gain understanding of the nature of the environment in the higher education sector and how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on higher education institutions. Both the literature review and the objective of the study were used to guide the development of the interview questions. These were used to outline all the important topics and issues which informed the research questions.

The interview schedule (Appendix B) contained 17 questions constructed to probe participants on their

perception of the higher education environment in South Africa and the prevailing VUCA problems, how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the UKZN, SAEF, what leadership challenges arose from the pandemic and how these challenges were responded to. The interviews were designed carefully bearing in mind the objectives of the study.

Because of the purposive sampling technique selected for this study, a request to participate in the study was sent to 12 potential participants who met the criteria of the study's sample. Invitation emails accompanied with the study's abstract, approved ethical clearance letter and consent and information sheet were sent to the identified potential sample members. Six participants responded quickly with enthusiasm. 4 more participants agreed to participate after a follow-up email was sent. The interview process with each participant was easily manageable and the conversations between the researcher and the participants were well-balanced and the participants expressed themselves clearly. The average duration of each interview was 45 minutes.

An audio-visual communication approach was used to conduct interviews. Participants were interviewed individually through an online platform, namely, Zoom. Participants were asked a series of predetermined open-ended questions, including supplementary questions depending on the participants' answers and taking redundancy into account. The semi-structured interview allowed the participants to communicate their personal experiences in-depth. After each interview, an audio recording file was downloaded from Zoom, followed by the transcription process at a later stage.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data analysis process intends to make effective interpretations from a large amount of data (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020). In this study, the thematic analysis method was selected to analyse primary data gathered from the interviews. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research technique that aims to discover and comprehend the connotations individuals attach to their experiences and it is valuable in investigating subjects that are complex, uncertain, and emotionally charged (Smith, 2017). Thematic analysis was chosen for this study because it permits elasticity which results in a rich, comprehensive explanation of data and recognises the implicit and explicit concepts within the data.

The process of analysing data involves changing data into results by organising it and giving it meaning and structure. The study shadowed the thematic analysis procedure as utilised by Herzog, Handke & Hitters (2019) and Kiger & Varpio (2020). Four vital steps were involved in the data analysis process are discussed below:

Step 1: Critical Reading

Familiarisation is the first step involved in the data analysis process. Each transcript was readthoroughly

and repeatedly to obtain a clear understanding of each interview as a whole before identifying specific segments.

Step 2: Open Coding

The transcripts were initially coded manually using Microsoft Word. The transcripts were analysed in sets of two, allowing for a reflection period before working on the next set of transcripts. Each set of transcripts was coded and analysed for categories and themes.

All transcripts were submitted to NVivo software and coded again with the intention of comparing the new codes with the codes established manually using Microsoft Word. This promoted a continuous comparative technique which supports thematic analysis.

Step 3: Selective Coding

In the selective coding process, the investigator examined the findings to find categories developing from the open codes' similarities. A further in-depth analysis was conducted and open codes were grouped into categories. An interrelationship diagram was used to facilitate the process. An interrelationship diagram can be regarded as a managing instrument that illustrates the relationship between influencers in a complex situation (Margolis & Providência, 2021). For the purpose of the study, interrelated codes were identified and grouped into categories.

Step 4: Thematic Coding

The final stage involved reviewing the emerged categories and developing them into themes using an inductive approach. Since it would be unjustified to present the results of the study as a mere collection of particularised cases, the idea of generalising plays a critical role in preserving the richness of each participant's contribution and also it allows for general interpretation which goes beyond a single particular case.

This understanding validates the interpretive paradigm and the thematic methodology selected for the study. Themes were developed with the intention of deriving broader meanings. Recurring patterns that linked participants' perspectives were reviewed and common themes were generated. Mind maps were used to facilitate this process.

The figure below illustrates a summary of the data analysis process used in this study.

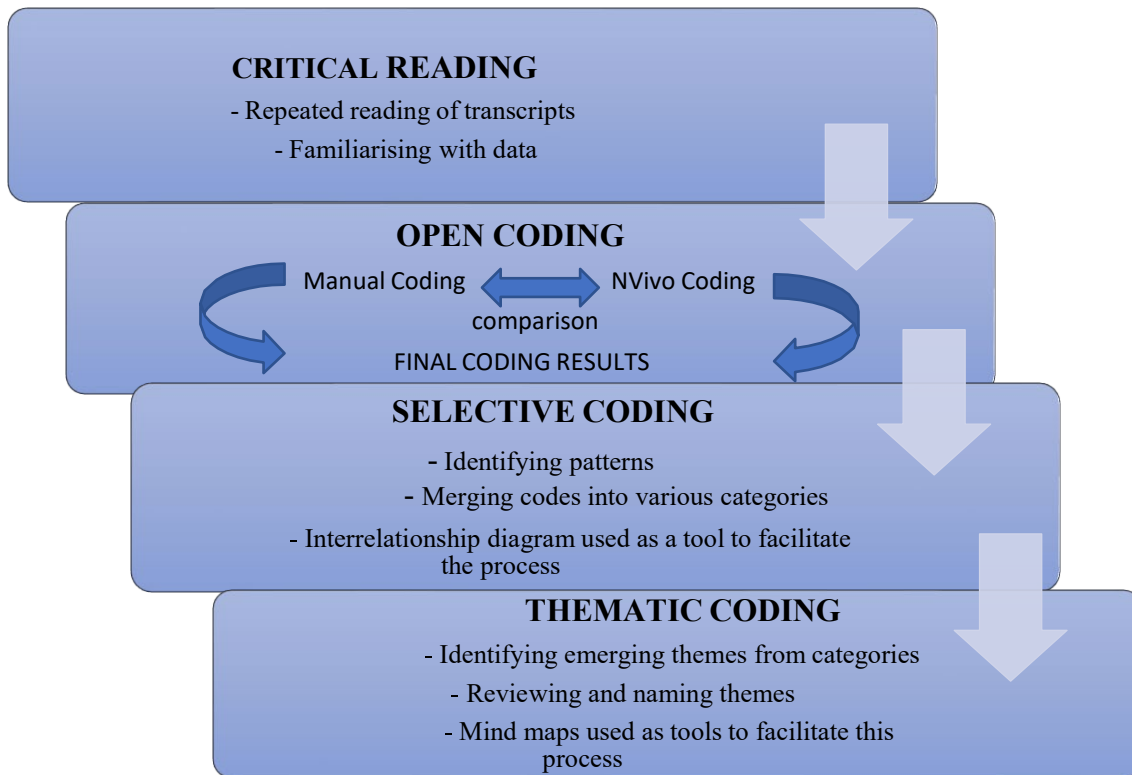


Figure 3.1: Summary of Data Analysis Process

Source: Developed by the Author

3.7 Trustworthiness

Positivists often argue that in qualitative research, trustworthiness is subjected to what the investigator hears and sees (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). According to Lincoln & Guba (1982), trustworthiness in qualitative studies can be achieved by maintaining four principles, namely; credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. These principles were also applied as guidelines to maintain trustworthiness in this study. The following section discusses how the researcher upheld trustworthiness in this study.

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility examines the issue of ‘fit’ between the responses (utterances) by the interviewees and the representation of perceptions by the investigator. Credibility can be used as a benchmark for quality in a study (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2007). For the purpose of maintaining credibility, the researcher used reflection as a self-awareness tool to remain objective and to separate personal assumptions, beliefs and emotions from the study. As proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1982), another means of maintaining credibility is to ensure that the interviewees are knowledgeable and

experienced enough to deliberate on the subject being investigated. The participants in this study are qualified and currently hold leadership positions in the UKZN, SAEF. They have sufficient experience in the South African higher education environment and have been exposed to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.7.2 Transferability

Transferability questions the extent to which the results of the study are applicable to other comparable situations, individuals or groups (Liamputtong, 2020). With the intention of promoting transferability, the researcher used direct quotations from the in-depth interviews to reveal main themes and also to support the findings of the study. Kuper, Lingard & Levinson (2008) argued that to support transferability, research must be available. Due to the distinctiveness of the topic and the ethics approval condition which stipulated that research data should be stored for 5 years, the transferability in this study is limited.

3.7.3 Dependability

Dependability relates to the fit between research results produced and the data from which they were derived. Munthe-Kaas, Nøkleby & Nguyen (2019) noted that dependability is necessary to confirm consistency and reproducibility of the study's results. The researcher used continuous proportional analysis which is aligned to thematic methodology. A proportional analysis is a systematic approach to comparative analysis which involves two or more data sets (Thomann, 2020). Systematic examination was applied throughout and in-between all four stages of the analysis process. The systematic examination included familiarising with data, followed by extracting relevant information and identifying meaning and accessing it for inclusion/exclusion and for quality. From that rigorous process of comparison, the researcher was able to classify the codes and categories which informed the themes that emerged from the study and to link the results from the data. At the open coding stage, coding was done manually using Microsoft Word and the process was repeated using NVivo software and codes resulting from the both approaches were compared and weighed to ensure consistency.

3.7.4 Conformability

Conformability questions how impartial the results are and it is concerned with the correctness of interpretation of data (Liamputtong, 2020). To promote conformability in this study, the researcher read over the interview transcripts to ensure that the interview content was well understood and that the interviewees' perspectives were adequately recognised and presented. All participants were asked similar questions. The use of online electronic recording and verification of the transcript ensured that

all data from the interview were captured accurately and limited the risk of eliminating data.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Over and above the expertise and meticulousness required for research, honesty and integrity also play a critical role. It is imperative for the researcher to acknowledge and guard the rights of participants. Given the nature of this study, few ethical issues had to be addressed in order to render it ethical. The researcher warranted the right to self-government, to confidentiality and to anonymity in this study.

A gatekeeper's letter; permitting the researcher to conduct research was attained from the UKZN's registrar (Appendix C). Secondly, an ethical clearance letter was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee to conduct this research (Appendix D). A verbal go-ahead was obtained from Dean and Head of School for SAEF.

Participants furnished their written agreement regarding their involvement in the study prior to the interviews, in a signed consent form sent with an information letter. According to Nusbaum, Douglas, Damus, Paasche-Orlow & Estrella-Luna (2017), informed consent can be described as the potential participant's agreement to voluntarily partake in research, which is reached once the important information about the study has been conveyed. Participants were advised about their rights willingly to agree or to refuse to partake or to withdraw at any given stage of the process without any consequences. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study. The details of the researcher, the supervisor and UKZN ethics committee were issued to participants for further clarity or complaints. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, information collected from the interviews will not be conveyed openly in a way that identifies the participants. Participants names will not be disclosed and the information will be kept namelessly and data will be presented collectively

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the research paradigms, traditions, and methodology chosen for this study. The study follows an interpretive approach that was analysed qualitatively. It further defined the population of the study and how the sample was determined. Participants in the study were selected using a purposive sampling technique which falls under non-random selection. The sample was composed of 10 leaders in the UKZN, SAEF. This chapter further explained the employed data collection and analysis techniques.

The in-depth interviews were used to collect data, this allowed the researcher to obtain comprehensive information from the participants. Observing the COVID-19 safety regulations, the interviews were conducted online via Zoom and each participant was interviewed individually. Thematic analysis was

used to examine the data collected from the interviews. To maintain trustworthiness, the researcher applied four principles - creditability, transferability, dependability and conformability. The results of the study are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter three discussed the research paradigm, tradition, and methodology chosen for this study. This chapter covers the analysis of the results of the interpretive study analyzed through the qualitative method, conducted to identify leadership challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic in the UKZN, SAEF, and to evaluate how consciousness, presencing, and intuition can be incorporated into leadership through the Theory U application model.

This chapter contains a discussion of the assessment that was consistent with thematic analysis methodology. The results are presented bearing in mind the research questions and existing results from previous research and the literature, where appropriate, with the intention of detecting similarities and differences. This chapter further discusses the method used to examine the transcripts from the ten (10) individual interviews to identify codes, categories, and themes. The four-stage analysis application involved continuous comparison and cleaning of data. This chapter uses tables and illustrations to present sample demographics, codes, and theme data, together with graphics and textual excerpts from the individual interviews that highlight main themes.

4.2 Themes

The thematic analysis method was selected to analyse primary data gathered from the interviews. Thematic analysis was chosen for this study because it permits elasticity which results in a rich, comprehensive explanation of data and recognises the implicit and explicit concepts within the data. The thematic analysis processes involved four vital steps; critical reading, open coding, selective coding, and thematic coding. Prior to the coding and theme identifying process, the researcher familiarised herself with the data through the critical reading process. The open coding step involved classifying pertinent chunks of data from the whole dataset which relates to the research questions of the study and the academic outline. During the selective coding process, the researcher detects patterns and categorises them according to distinct data features. The final step, thematic coding, involved reviewing and merging categories and developing them into themes.

The thematic analysis process revealed nine major themes that arose from the individual interviews. These themes provide meaning to the data collected and they were developed deductively in line with the research objective. The summary of themes that emerged from the in-depth analysis process of the individual interviews is presented in the table below.

Table 4-1 Summary of Themes

	Themes
1	Government’s Contribution
2	Socio-Economic Issues
3	Internal Organisational Challenges
4	Crisis Management Dilemma
5	Digital Transformation Paradox
6	Demanding Commitment
7	Leadership Behaviour
8	Leadership Competencies
9	Leadership Styles

Challenges under the developed themes together with the sample quotations from the responses are presented in the next section.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Government’s Contribution

Participants shared the view that government has a powerful influence on the higher education sector in South Africa and that complexity and volatility in the environment are underpinned by governmental factors. These include aspects such as inadequate state funding and tricky education policies.

Although universities generate income through student fees, donations, and other sources, they depend greatly on the government for financial stability. The participants perceived that the revenue received from the government in terms of grants via the Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET) is not sufficient to meet the financial demands of the institutions. When institutions suffer from financial instability, the teaching and learning, and research aspect are affected including the general operations. The issue of inadequate funding is manifested in persistent student protests.

Two participants captured the essence of the views on funding matters:

“Government funds are not enough...it doesn’t equate the increased enrolments and overall education costs. Universities are running at a constant loss, as students fail to honour their tuition fee obligation and the national financial aid scheme is problematic itself.” (P5)

The higher education system in South Africa is expanding, and parallel to that, UKZN is also growing, however, the government financial support system is not aligned to these radical changes and the realities faced by the institutions. Universities cannot respond with student fee increments or financial exclusions without taking the risk of strikes which brings chaos into the institution.” (P3)

One other critical aspect brought forward in the analysis was that these challenges are historical and participants felt that the government is not giving the issue the urgent attention it deserves and usually

responds with short-term solutions which are fruitless in the long run.

One of the participants expressed their frustration when was asked about their perceptions of the South Africa's higher education sector environment:

“Way before the pandemic, the problems in South African higher education system or should I say in Africa for that matter, were quite evident and repetitive but very little efforts and resources were invested in them. The pandemic simply highlighted them and hopefully gave all of a us a serious wake up call.” (P4)

In addition to government funding, participants were of the view that education policies were a causal factor in issues prevailing in the higher education sector. Policies promoting expanded access to higher education in South Africa were seen as challenging and difficult to sustain because they involved students from previously disadvantage backgrounds.

“Government’s plan to increase access to higher education brought a new variant of challenges. Yes, the plan worked and many students participated but the remainder of student’s underlying issues (for example: prior schooling education, academic readiness, social background) were not considered. The policies seemed to only address the financial aspect.” (P9)

“The current education policies lack specifics on how universities should action the governments proposed plans, there is no clear distinction on principles and value to guide transformation” (P2)

It was further highlighted that the impact of the policies could not achieve what it initially intended to and its shortfalls manifested in a significant drop in student numbers.

“The students were thrown into the deep end and the majority of them could not cope...as a result many of them dropped out eventually.” (P4)

However, the analysis suggests that the participants supported the idea behind the policies but disagree with how it was implemented. These views were expressed briefly and frankly by the participants:

“I think the government misunderstood the complexity around tertiary education and accessibility. Nonetheless, they must be credited for their intention which I believe was to correct previous political injustices of our country. The situation required thorough consideration and deeper understanding of the students’ needs, consultation with academic institutions and proper planning” (P7)

Lack of collegiality between government departments was mentioned as an important governmental factor perceived as a contributing element to the VUCA challenges existing in the higher education sector.

“The unemployment rate is over 40 per cent in South Africa and qualified graduates are also included in this. We have a problem where students have completed their undergraduate and postgraduate degrees but are not employed. There seems to be a mismatch between the skills demanded in the economy and the qualifications offered by the universities. Something needs to be done to align the skills, qualifications, and the corporate sector. If not, we will continue to produce graduates who will sit at home.” (P10)

Participants were of the view that lack of collegiality also exists between the DoHET and the Department of Basic Education. This is evidenced by lack of student readiness for tertiary education.

“There is huge gap between high school education and University education. As a lecturer I feel that most students are not academically prepared for tertiary learning. This makes the transition more difficult and the first year at University is a challenging one. The method and pace of teaching is too different and some students fail to adapt quickly enough.” (P5)

“Government needs to focus on the quality of teachers in high schools as they play an important role in developing learners for their next phase in education” (P1)

The data results identified government as the custodian of the higher education sector in South Africa and a significant instigator of the challenges existing. The coding hierarchy for theme 1 is presented in the figure below. This figure illustrates how government contributes to the vitality, ambiguity complexity, and uncertainty in the higher education sector.

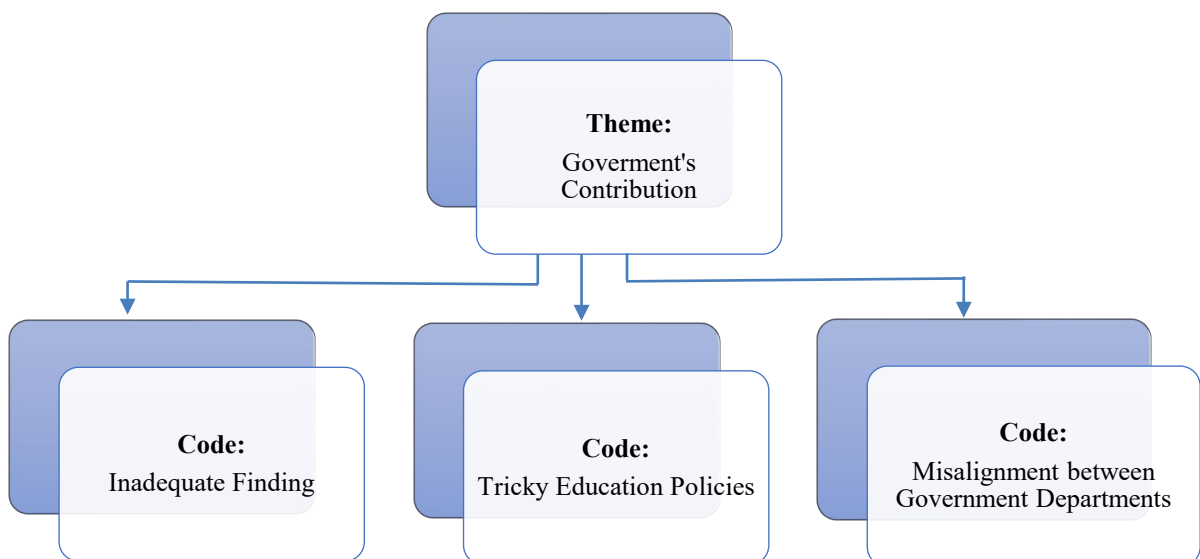


Figure4.1: Summary of Coding Hierarchy for Theme 1

4.2.2 Theme 2: Socio-Economic Issues

Participants acknowledged the adverse impact of the nation’s socio-economic issues on the higher

education sector. Participants identified matters including the social inequality, poor infrastructure and lack of resources, students' social background and home language as challenges in the higher education environment.

The analysis indicated the existence of the social division in the higher education sector despite government's noticeable attempts to rectify previous apartheid systems. Some participant discussed their views on social inequality.

"The education system in South Africa is divided, although not based on racial segregation as it was the case in the past but it is divided in terms of socio-economic statuses." (P3)

"Even though most universities merged in 2004, we are not all in the same boat. Most economically stable universities for example University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch in the Western Cape, are thriving and gaining international recognition, compared to universities in Limpopo like University of Venda that are overwhelmed with bread and butter issues from the communities in which it operates in. UKZN is very competent in terms of research productivity but it is battling its own management issues." (P7)

Lack of affordability for good infrastructure and resources surfaced as a socio-economic factor hampering progress in the high education sector.

"Under resourced institutions cannot make a significant contribution to the economy let alone meet its goals. Academic performance is supported by good internet systems and teaching and learning resources." (P8)

"In one of my module evaluations, a number of students indicated that they didn't perform well because they didn't have the prescribed textbook and relied on the copies available at the reserve section in the library which they can only borrow for a couple of hours at a time and were not allowed to take home." (P3)

Students' social background also came up as an issue that causes challenges in the higher education sector in South Africa. Participants felt that social disadvantage hindered students' progress.

"Students should be the main beneficiaries of education, but sometimes you find that their upbringing, home environment and the quality of their school life affects how they perform at varsity level. Some home environments are not conducive for studying" (P10)

"Our first-year tutor was bilingual, she was fluent in Zulu and English. She was able to explain the main concepts to students in their home language so that they can understand better. We have learnt that a great number of our students perform poorly due to language barrier." (P6)

The analysis pointed out how the prevailing socio-economic factors contribute to the challenges in the higher education sector. The summary of coding hierarchy of the socio-economic factors is depicted below in figure 4.2.

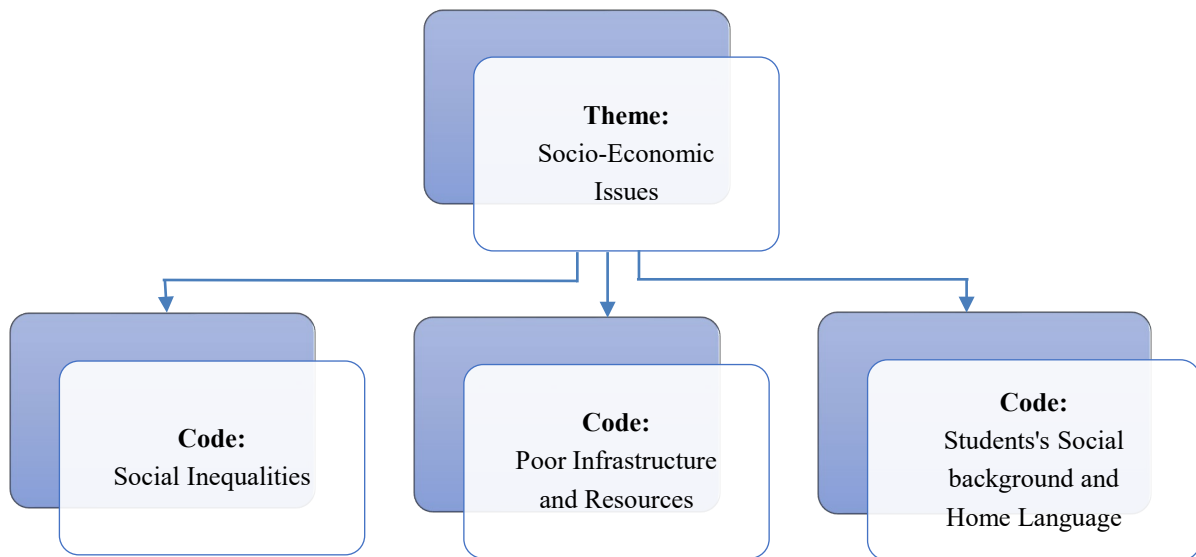


Figure 4.2 Summary Coding Hierarchy for Theme 2

4.2.3 Theme 3: Internal Organisational Challenges

Academic leaders at the SAEF shared a common understanding that although most of the VUCA challenges presented in the higher education sector are instigated by nationwide problems, universities as autonomous organisations further contribute to the challenges through their own internal policies and procedures.

Each University determines its admission target and entry requirements for each qualification, depending on their resources and various other factors. However, participants felt that policies that govern students' admission can cause volatility and complexity in the sector.

“In some years, we were unable meet our admissions target for the undergraduate degrees, most applicants did not meet our entry requirement. So, we had to adjusted our resource allocations plans and future projections as the admissions feed into throughput projections” (P4)

“Compared to other universities UKZN entry points are steep. For a B. Com Accounting degree, a student needs 32 points whereas UJ and UniZulu require at least 30 points if I am not mistaken” (P2)

One participant mentioned that even the University's human resource policies can be unsettling in the higher education sector.

“Universities are not divorced from the higher education environment and some rules can cause havoc...One of UKZN's former Vice Chancellor, was adamant that all academics required a PhD. A lot of well experienced academics left the institutions, others went to other institutions, other immigrated and others left the academic field. Now, we've seen lectures being retrenched at DUT because they don't have the required qualifications” (P6)

Another participant expressed her concerns with UKZN’s academic promotions policy and highlighted how they create a negative impression of limited potential growth in the academic industry

“Academics are able to move from lecturer to senior lecturer positions comfortably by submitting to the stipulated requirements, but the requirements for promotion to professor level are very stringent and rigid. It’s almost impossible to progress to that level without focusing your entire career on publications” (P5)

One other interesting perspective brought forward by a participant relates to the University’s goals and mission. The participant discussed how universities in South Africa tend to lose focus on local matters as they are subjected to globalisation. This causes ambiguity and misalignment in the sector.

“the realities faced by South Africans are distinct, our political history, current economy and social circumstances shape our education environment and we have to accept that. We need to progress collectively as a nation in all spheres. But I have noted that most universities want to compete abroad and be globally accepted. This shifts their focus from pursuing goals which fit the national context to focusing on attempting to meet international standards” (P7)

The results revealed how academic institutions in their individual capacity contribute to the dynamics of the higher education sector and what challenges arise as a result. The summary coding for organisational factors is shown below:

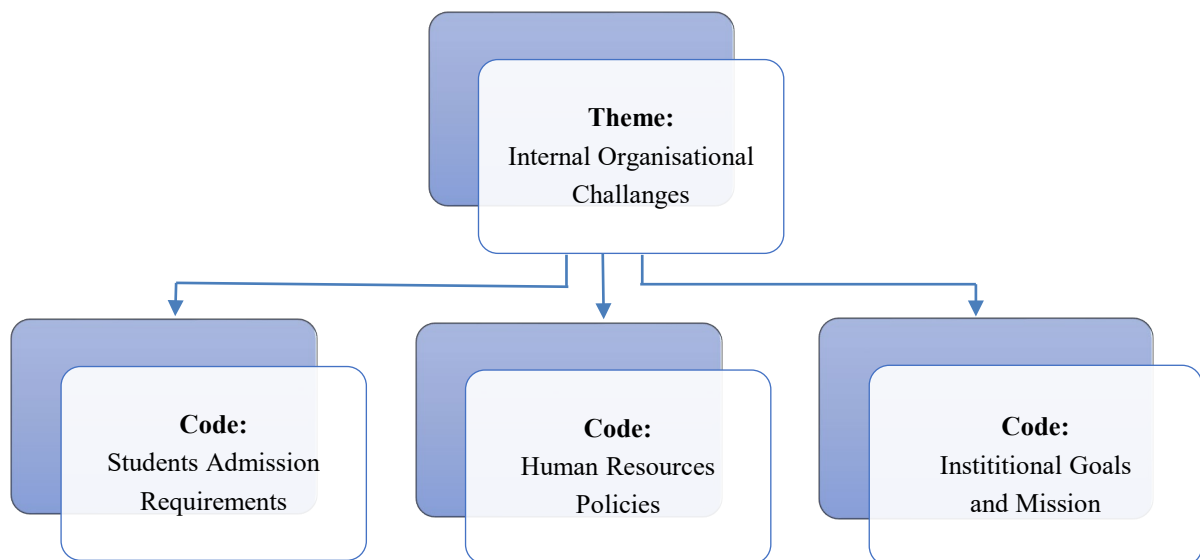


Figure 4.3: Summary of Coding Hierarchy for Theme 3

4.2.4 Theme 4: Crisis Management Dilemma

The data analysis indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has initiated a significant transformation in the School and leaders were confronted with the challenge of managing the crisis and adapting to the

change. The academic leaders highlighted challenges on how to manage transformation in the middle of chaos. There were mixed emotions about the consequences of the pandemic.

“Listen, I support the digital changes that we are experiencing as the School and collectively as UKZN. The digital transformation that is happening now, under normal circumstances would have taken years to unfold because of the bureaucracy, however, the conditions under which all of this happening is ill-fated, there was a lot of unknowns and anxiety in the midst of this.” (P9)

“The pandemic grew into a push factor for us to be flexible and change from our normal conducts. I think one of the major challenges is the know-how...how do we implement the changes? How do we bring everyone on board?” (P6)

“I’m content with how the School responded to the effects of the pandemic, together we pulled through” (P1)

The participants highlighted lack of agility and decisiveness as a leadership challenge. Participants raised concerns over UKZN executive management’s decision-making process during the lockdown. They felt that reactions were delayed and not communicated properly and timeously.

“The absence of a clear directive from the University’s executive, in my view, made things difficult. It brought a sense of failure because we didn’t know what the plan was and couldn’t give solid direction to our discipline members and the concerned students and parents.” (P10)

“There were periods where the executive went quiet, especially in the early stages of the lockdown. We followed the news and eaves dropped on what other institutions were tempting to do” (P3)

The participants conveyed issues with the decision turn-around time from the University’s executive management team

“The University was very casual in their reaction...the rollout of data and equipment for staff and students was delayed. The School had to organise data and laptops for a few of their staff members who are in strategic positions before the University provided them.” (P8)

Other opinion that surfaced highlights the challenges in the flow of decisions made in response to the ongoing changes and proposed plans.

“There is a huge gap between the executive leadership of the University and academic leaders at Schools, so you find that the information is either not filtered quickly enough or the incomplete information gets sent through.” (P7)

The data analysis identifies crisis management as a significant challenge emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic. The coding hierarchy for the crisis management category is illustrated below.

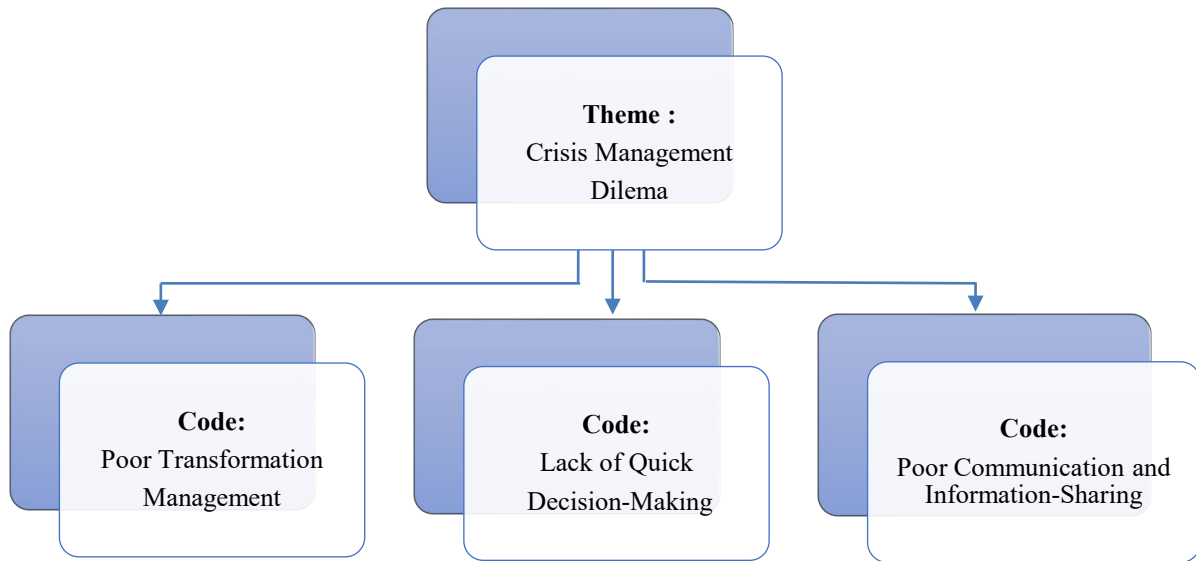


Figure 4.4: Summary Coding Hierarchy for Theme 4

4.2.5 Theme 5: Digital Revolution Paradox

Leaders in the SAEF shared the same view on the challenges relating to the transition from face-to-face classes to online platforms as a response to the COVID-19 crisis. Issues of resistance, capacity building, and concerns about the integrity of the assessment were identified and discussed. Because the transition was unexpected and unprecedented, some students and staff showed signs of disengagement towards online teaching and learning.

“One of the challenges I experienced in my discipline was a disconnection from staff. Many of them, could not resonate with the idea of working from home. They wouldn’t respond to emails or participate in discussions brought forward nor comment on suggestions tabled within the School.” (P2)

“Many students withdrew from the University and others suspended their studies the following semester because they were uncertain how learning will unfold and whether they will be able to cope with it” (P4)

The leaders noted how fear and uncertainty reinforced resistance. The results highlighted how staff resisted change and feared the adjustments in the status quo. There were disagreements on which aspects of their work took priority at any given moment and how certain objects should be met. Results also revealed that trust and open relationships between a leader and a subordinate eased the tension from resistance.

“I think there were unspoken doubts and fears on how we were to keep the School functional... since what we had planned and invested in was clearly taking a different trajectory. Things changed instantly, the rules, processes that we had put in place were irrelevant in the online environment.” (P10)

“Managing staff outside of the normal working environment can be tricky, the level of control that you have as a leader is somehow minimised and so you rely on the trust that you already have for one another and the professional relationship that has been built to sustain operations of the School” (P6)

The results show that changes associated with online teaching and learning were not only behavioral but also technical. Leaders were obliged to make provisions and to prepare staff technically with systems and tools with the intention of supporting remote working.

“We had to respond to concerns and reservations from our teams...identifying the School’s urgent needs, determining what was feasible, looking for funds, and providing support for both staff and students was very complex and demanding” (P9)

“We had no choice but to amend our procedures and modify our internal systems to accommodate the new situation. Workshops for staff development that focused on student engagement, virtual consultation, and stress management were facilitated. Technical know-how training on the student management systems, different functions of Moodle, how to develop online assessment plans and how-to set-up online assessments were provided.” (P4)

Although these attempts were welcomed and made a significant impact on the operations of the School, the participants acknowledged that the absence of benefits from face-to-face interaction was noticeable. The online environment disturbed an important social aspect of professional relationships.

“We had to depend on Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and WhatsApp for social interactions. The meet and greet corridor culture and the tea and cake on birthdays were no longer possible. And those little informal interactions created unity in the School and promoted social well-being.” (P6)

Leaders in the SAEF raised concerns about the integrity of the academic assessments due to the hastened migration to online platforms. Managing student misconduct caused by cheating and plagiarisms was highlighted as a major challenge. Because the transition was immediate, there was no protocol in place to mitigate against online cheating. Participants added that the number of plagiarism cases increased. Two participants captured the essence

“The integrity of the academic assessment is compromised under the online environment. Students were afforded re-submission attempts for assignments that are not practiced under normal circumstances. Our pass rate at the end of semester one was extremely high, especially at the undergraduate level.” (P3)

“We received information that students formed WhatsApp groups and they were sharing test questions and possible answers during assessments.” (P5)

The analysis revealed that although adaptability is encouraged, changing things quickly bears unwanted consequences. A sufficient period is necessary to easy transition. The figure below shows a summary of coding for theme 5.

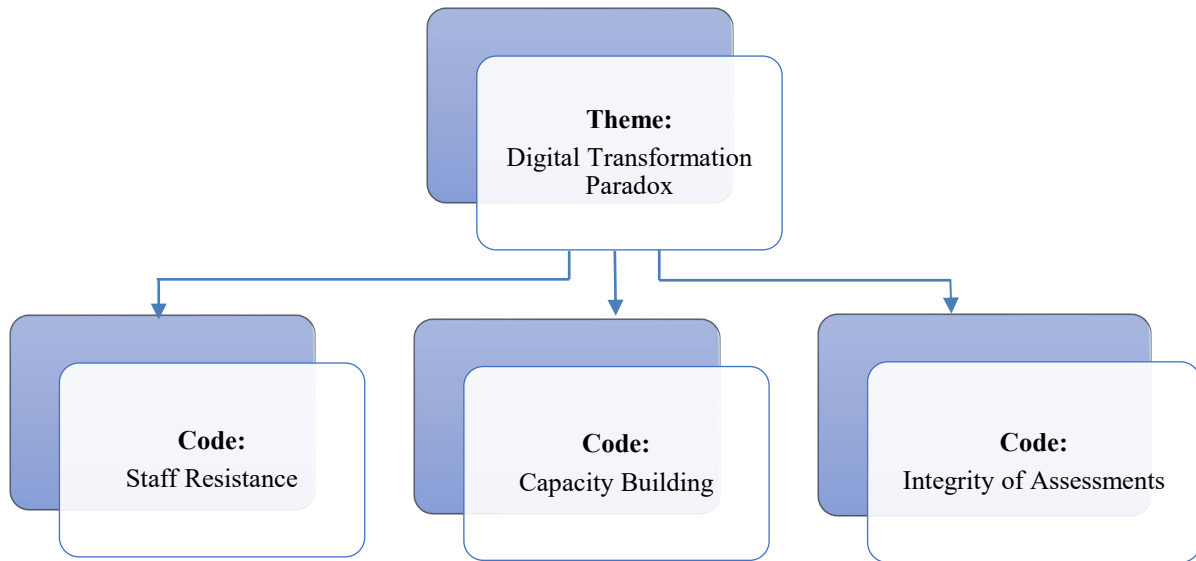


Figure 4.5: Summary of Coding Hierarchy for Theme 5

4.2.6 Theme 6: Demanding Commitment

The participants shared a general awareness of how the COVID-19 pandemic disturbed the original teaching and learning plans of the School. Moreover, they discussed how the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic impact demanded added commitment. This requirement presented challenges related to time and energy consumption and increased workload and staff burnout results emphasise that the pandemic has imposed transitions that are challenging to navigate. Successful navigation means that leaders must be committed to learning anew and be committed to the action plan adopted. This translates to leaders taking ownership and being part of the solution. Taking ownership meant leaders had to devote additional time and effort.

“As a leader, I had to be a realist and optimistic about the situation we were in... I have to model a way and influence my colleagues... by recognising the progressive changes that the School has made and positively pave a way for what our future operations will look like beyond the crisis.” (P8)

“As leaders we are always at the forefront of the solutions, since 2020 we are re-inventing the wheel. The opportunity cost of not doing so is greater than otherwise.” (P4)

Participants unanimously agreed that the impact of COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a high-stress environment and academic staff were subjected to an increased number of demands which manifested in unreasonable workload. The increased workload caused a disturbance in the balance between working environment and personal life. Occupational stress was highlighted as the byproduct thereof.

“This entire ordeal was stressful and I was constantly exhausted. Preparations for teaching, recording of lectures videos, attending to staff and student’s concerns whilst also attending

various training workshops and special meeting was challenging” (P6)

“There is misconception that working online is a time saver but I often actually found working longer hours and not taking proper breaks...sometimes our meetings will finish after 6pm” (P1)

“As a professional and a mother, juggling endless work and helping my daughter with her school work while attending to other domestic duties [was a challenge]. Finding a balance was a mission” (P3)

The results reveal that the increased Covid demands, not only impacted negatively on the workloads but changed the characteristics of the work profile. Academic leaders were expected to play the individual and academic counselors’ roles for their disciplines because staff members were consumed with anxiety and misperception about the COVID-19 pandemic and the implications it potentially had for academia.

“I was personally infected by the Coronavirus and including some academics and support staff in my discipline. I experienced a challenge with reorienting staff once they resumed work, although they had received medical attention physically somehow, they became stagnant and lost focus” (P1)

“One of my colleagues reported mental health issues arising from the pandemic. She couldn’t perform her duties and as a line manager you have to seek relevant support for them” (P4)

The results revealed the cost of the pandemic and the sacrifices that academic leaders had to make to continue the operations of the School. The figure below illustrates the coding hierarchy for the demanding commitment category.

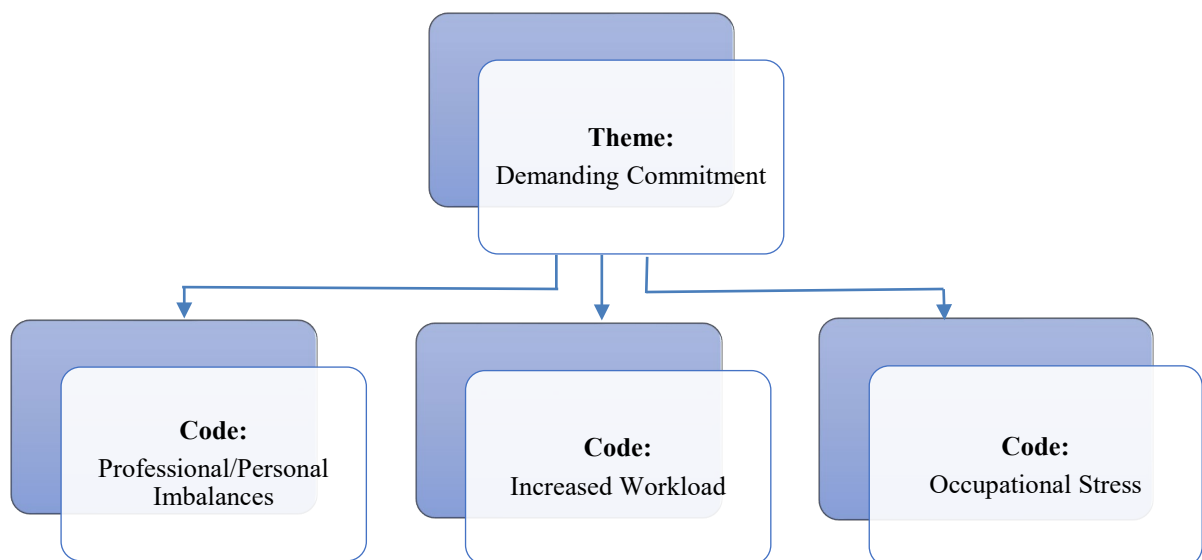


Figure 4.6: Summary of Coding Hierarchy for Theme 6

4.2.7 Theme 7: Leadership Behaviour

Academics in the SAEF understood leadership as vital in instilling a sense of optimism and in providing direction towards and in apprehending the future. The results revealed that the problems presented by the COVID-19 pandemic are unique whilst the processes of solving them are not yet established. There was consensus that new and better ways of leading were necessary under unstable and volatile conditions.

Because the COVID-19 pandemic presented a higher level of ambiguity and affected continuing activities and relations the results show that essential leadership behaviour determines a leader's ability to perform under a crisis. Results further suggest that essential leadership behaviour involves responsible leadership, learning through experience, and the aligning of the interests of all stakeholders. Academic leaders at the SAEF were mindful of their behavioural consequences. This supports the idea of responsible leadership. Two academic leaders expressed their understandings as follows:

“The role of a leader bears a lot of responsibilities and these responsibilities may change from time to time, depending on the situation at hand and the working environment. What is important in times like these, is to remain open-minded and to be concerned about how the decisions made will affect the rest of the parties involved.” (P2)

“Our processes at the School are interdependent with those of the College office and other Schools both within and outside of Law and Management Studies so our remedial plans had to be feasible and suitable for both the School and others...on many occasions, we had to collaborate with colleagues outside of our Schools regarding assessment plans.” (P9)

When academics were asked to elaborate on how they dealt with the challenges they experienced during the pandemic, the researcher was able to analyse their behaviour by identifying their leadership qualities that promote responsible leadership. The SAEF leaders highlighted the importance of working on the individual self, working as a team, and adopting a culture of learning from experience as the key components.

“I think it's important for us as leaders to reflect on our own perceptions, on how we present and communicate the situation to those whom we lead, and correspondingly looking at the possibility of changing our perceptions. This is important as we learn and try to overcome the pandemic challenges we are faced with.” (P7)

“As a School, we learn as the pandemic unfolds, we learn from each other's experiences. We keep a close eye on other academic institutions and also learn from them” (P3)

“Every leader is influenced by their own beliefs and assumptions but what makes a difference is the leader's willingness to accommodate views which may differ from their own school of thought. I have learned that sometimes great learning comes from divergence” (P5)

One other critical aspect that surfaced from the interviews was the importance of aligning individual

and communal interests. The remedial plans adopted by the academic leaders on behalf of the School ought to emphasise how they benefit other stakeholders involved and how they would protect all stakeholders from being infected with the virus and most importantly how these remedies align with the moral values of all individuals involved and acceptable social norms.

“The School’s decision to provide special funding for needy students and letting elderly staff strictly work from home and rearrange their workload carries a sense of morality and genuine care for both our staff and students” (P6)

“A different assessment plan schedule was considered for first-year students and additional support was provided for online learning and a special concession was made for those who registered late” (P4)

Leadership behaviour played an important role in how the academic leaders in the SAEF navigated the challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders survived by practicing responsible leadership, willingness to learn through their experiences, and aligning their interests to those of the entire School members. The Summary of coding for Leadership behaviour is illustrated in the figure below.

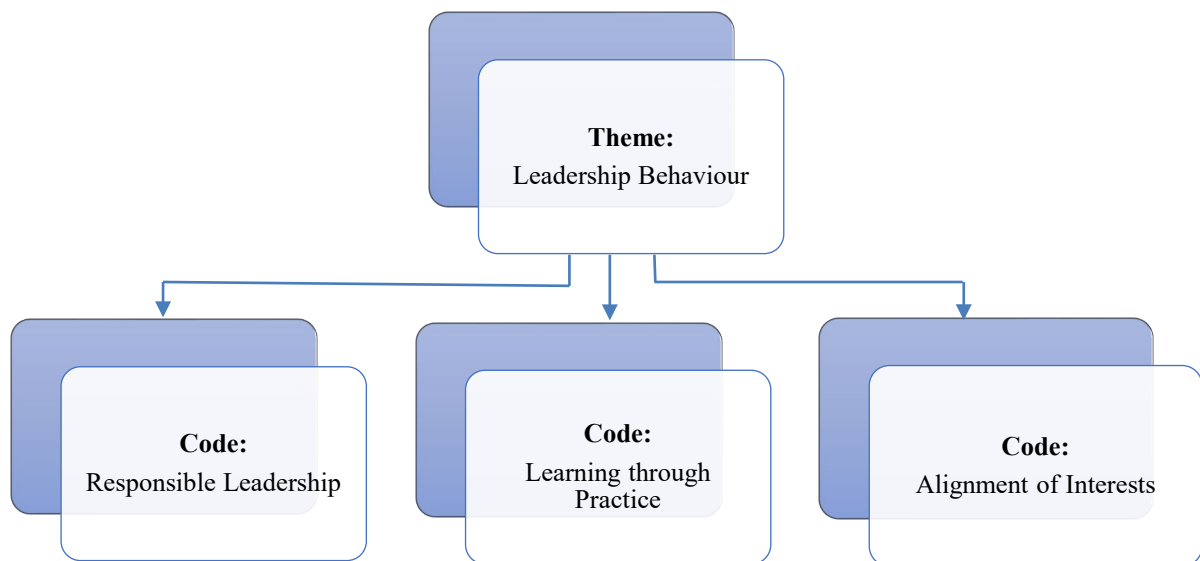


Figure 4.7: Summary of Coding Hierarchy for Theme 7

4.2.8 Theme 8: Leadership Competencies

The results revealed the need and importance of leadership competency during these unprecedented times. The COVID-19 pandemic presented uncertainty that demanded specific qualities and aptitudes in order to manage. The academic leaders at the SEAF identified three major groups of leadership competencies; self-awareness, willingness to transform individually, and mental characteristics as the driving forces for the development of supplementary capabilities.

The participants emphasised the need for each individual leader to have a profound understanding of their feelings, strengths and shortfalls, needs and desires, and how they react to challenges. There was a common view that self-awareness assists leaders to regulate their ego and promotes the value of openness and diversity. Self-awareness is evident in the leader's confidence and courage to make hard decisions.

"It was important for me to understand myself and my role" (P6)

"I practice meditation regularly, so it helps me to be attentive of my own defensiveness and limitations, and by doing that I am able to assess issues realistically and deal with my colleagues fairly." (P7)

"You have to conceptualise your views internally first and only share them once you have processed them well" (P8)

Participants further acknowledged that personal strengths and weaknesses persuaded them to engage in individual transformation and improvement consciously. The willingness to transform promotes personal improvement through gaining new knowledge and skills.

"The COVID-19 situation meant that we learn new ways of operation and how to be creative in our solutions... I had to adopt a positive attitude and be proactive" (P10)

"Initially, I had serious reservations regarding online learning but I had to put them aside and move along with the new plans and be supportive. Knowing the problems we encounter with students under normal circumstances, I honestly saw a huge hurdle ahead" (P3)

"The pandemic created a platform for learning. Overall, it was a good opportunity for us to change" (P7)

The participants highlighted the role of mental models in decision-making. They agree that their thinking patterns affect the way they perceive a situation, how they influence their followers and how they meet set objectives. The result suggests that leaders showed empathy when interacting with other staff members. Empathy allowed leaders to be sensitive to their followers' circumstances and specific needs.

"Our School consist of staff from different racial groups and cultural background so as a leader I have to accept and accommodate our differences; differences in gender and differences in the way of doing things and different opinions" (P5)

"We have worked together for years and have established professional relationships and emotional connections with one another, so I know how to connect with my staff, I know what kind of challenges they battle with and I know how to motivate them. That makes it easier to find solutions together." (P6)

The participants demonstrated an attitude of acceptance of the complex and ambiguous situation. They used cognitive skills to interpret the situation and learn from the interpretation. These leaders were able to diversify their thinking patterns and to create new knowledge. They highlighted the benefit of being proactive and of maintaining a positive attitude in the midst of a complex and ambiguous situation. Their success was based on their ability to adjust their focus speedily, multitask, critically analyse information, and the ability to recognise patterns that emerged.

“As academic leaders, we meet periodically to provide feedback on how the teaching was progressing, communicate challenges experienced especially related to student’s participation in lecturers and assessments, shared best practices and so forth” (P2)

“Our action plans were thoroughly formulated and are continuously revised to accommodate any new developments, we streamlined our processes and input was openly welcomed. All our online assessment plans served at official management structures within the School” (P7)

“The students were beating the system and we had to re-strategise and find ways to mitigate against students collaborating when writing assessments.” (P4)

The competencies identified enabled leaders at the SAEF to carry their mandate successfully and weakened the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations of the School. The summary of coding for leadership competency is depicted below.

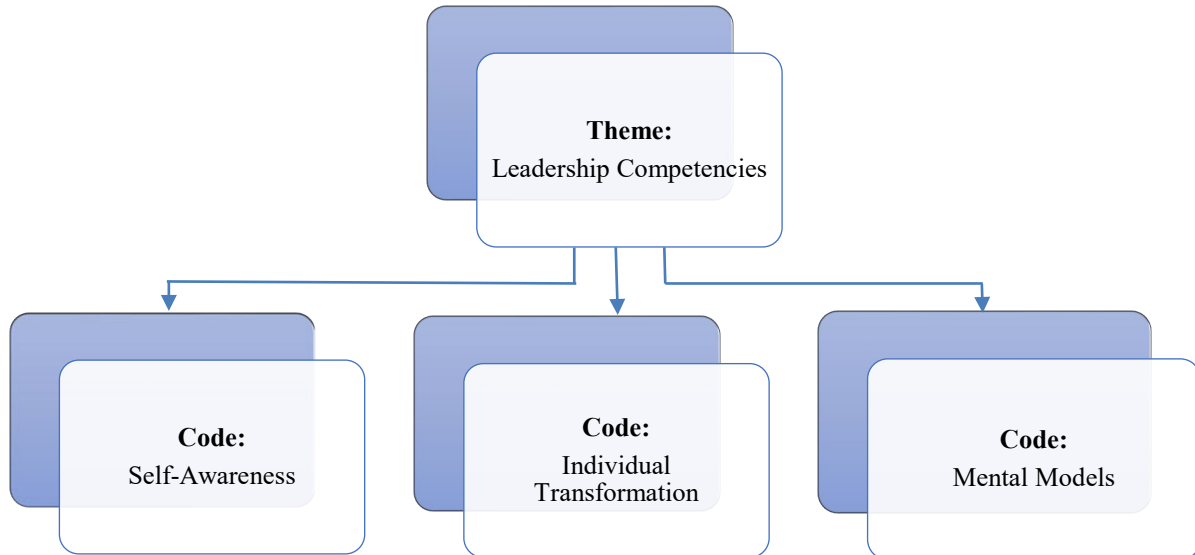


Figure 4.8: Summary of Coding Hierarchy for Theme 8

4.2.9 Theme 9: Leadership Styles

The results from the analysis presented evidence that underpins the role of leadership in crisis management and the importance of various leadership approaches and their effectiveness in overcoming the problems emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic. The academic leaders in the SAEF advocate

the leadership approach used should neither oppress nor impose force on other staff members.

The interviews highlighted three appropriate leadership approaches, namely, transformational leadership, inclusive leadership and intuitive leadership.

Leaders in the SAEF agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the status quo and it has effectually joined the never-ending transformation, shift and change into practically immediate revolution. This situation demanded highly structured responses and clear directives to manage the academic and administrative operations of the SAEF. To survive and thrive under the COVID-19 circumstances, leaders in the SAEF followed a transformational leadership approach by promoting a digital revolution.

“We were challenged and we were at cross-roads but we were very intentional about using this period to determine what minor incremental changes or greater transitions are needed to transform our functions in the School.” (P9)

“I am happy that the School will integrate technology and the lessons learned from the pandemic into the future plans of the department, post the pandemic. We also intend to look into the developmental needs for staff” (P5)

“My role as a leader was to find a path to success and guide how we travel that road given the circumstances we are in” (P10)

Secondly, the elements of the inclusive leadership approach were evident from the analysis. The leaders in the SAEF encouraged all staff to participate in crucial discussions, planning, and decision-making processes. Leaders displayed a willingness to listen and to investigate suggestions from their subordinates. However, the ultimate decisions that affected the SAEF as an entity were delegated to leaders. Each discipline was afforded discretion to accommodate its unique needs.

“The decision to give certain disciplines a choice of conducting their final assessment face-to-face on campus was liberating, but due to the mathematical nature of our course, assessing it online was problematic.” (P2)

“All points of views matter and their merits need to be tested. I believe we all want to emerge victoriously and set trends for other Schools in our College. All staff members have shown unity and are doing their best to meet the objectives of the School. (P6)”

The research showed that the SAEF leaders took a coordinated approach in implementing their plans and all disciplines worked harmoniously with one another and task teams were formed. These task teams were led by various staff members regardless of their positions. Staff were identified according to their expertise and availability. This resulted in strengthening relationships, mutual trust, staff capacitation, and recognition of talents.

“I can safely say that, I know I am not alone as a leader and I don’t have an answer to every question. No one expects me to be perfect and all-knowing, so my leadership style embraces knowledge and solutions from all my team members” (P4)

“Delegating some of the activities assisted me a great deal, work was increasing enormously every day so sharing the load with some of my colleagues alleviated pressure and stress” (P3)

“To fast track the process and maintain collegiality, special liaison groups were formed to handle the identified bottlenecks, technological glitches and student queries. Teams include both academic and support staff who were experienced in those fields” (P8)

When the leaders in the SAEF were asked to share their thoughts on inner leadership, they spoke with one voice. They affirmed the notion that leadership begins from within. There was consensus that inner leadership has a major influence on the degree of resilience a leader might have. They positively discussed how inner leadership enables them to adjust to adversity.

“I attend a leadership course recently and I learnt more on the importance of inner leadership. I think inner leadership is one of the vital components in the growth of a leader. It strengthens my mentality.” (P7)

“When practicing inner leadership, you are able to control your thinking and your emotions. You become more focused and can absorb strain but also remain sensible.” (P6)

“I practice meditation as a form of inner leadership, it keeps me sane and allows me to look at situations with a clearer perspective, no pre-judgement or assumptions. It opens my mind and my heart. One of my teachers tout me that as a leader your mind should always be open and your heart should always be receptive” (P4)

One leader shared the view that one of the benefits of inner leadership is positive emotions and these emotions serve as a barrier against anxiety and pressure, thus contributing towards effective functioning at work and general well-being.

“I use to be subjected to anxiety attacks but since I incorporated inner leadership practices in my routine, I am able to adapt to changes and handle difficult situations professionally and successfully. I don’t let my emotions get the better of me. I know things always work out one way or another.” (P1)

Another respondent highlighted how inner leadership helps leaders to take away their focus on authority and control and turns their focus on how best to serve their teams

“Reflecting makes me conscious of how I relate to my colleagues and I am always finding ways to inspire them.” (P5)

The transformational leadership approach assisted the SAEF leaders to address uncertainty and confusion by actively thinking and putting a clear plan into action. Leaders were intentional and

decisive. The Inclusive leadership approach improved staff morale and promoted unity within the School. As a result, the School was able to streamline its processes and to share leadership responsibility with non-leaders in the School. Intuitive leadership allows leaders to dip deeper into their inner selves. Leaders in the SAEF were able to adjust to the adversity of the Covid1-19 pandemic. Through inner leadership they were able to strengthen their minds, control their emotions and attitudes. The coding hierarchy for leadership style is illustrated below.

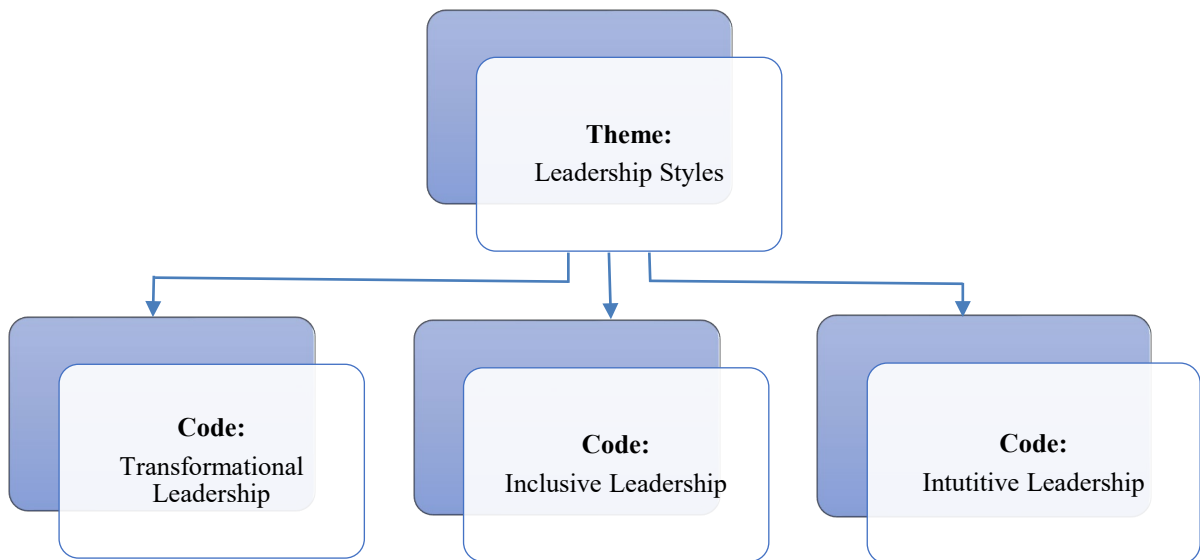


Figure 4.9: Summary of Coding Hierarchy for Theme 9

4.3 Interrelationship between Challenges

In this study, keeping the different themes distinct was difficult because the content of one theme either supported or anticipated elements of another theme or the outcomes or causes of another themes. For instance, the political history of South Africa appears to be an underlying factor contributing to the VUCA challenges in the higher education sector in South Africa. The ripple effect of the country's socio-economic inequalities impacts on equal academic opportunities for students in academic institutions. Students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds are subjected to a language barrier and have a poor mathematical background. This translates into a lack of students' confidence and motivation which is manifested in their lack of commitment to their studies and consequently to high failure and dropout rates which has a financial implication for institutions. This feeds back into the increased unemployment rate in the economy.

On the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic, the national lockdown meant that students had to vacate University residences. Whilst observing the COVID-19 protocol, universities introduced online teaching and learning to salvage the academic year. This outcome was both negative and positive. It

was difficult for students whose home environment did not promote learning, and it was hostile to staff members who were subjected to an increased workload and they had swiftly to learn how to work productively under the new norm. The digital transformation created a further digital divide between well-resourced institutions and less-resourced institutions. This digital divide extended to the divide between students with good economic backgrounds and those with poor economic backgrounds.

These issues indicate the complexity of the existing challenges and how intricate it was in this investigation to compare and construct all parts of participants' perspectives into separate themes. The interconnectedness means that leaders need to be mindful of this when they attempt to address the issues and that their solutions need to be comprehensive as one simple problem bears consequences for more problems. Figure 4.10 below illustrates the interrelationship between the challenges in the higher education sector.

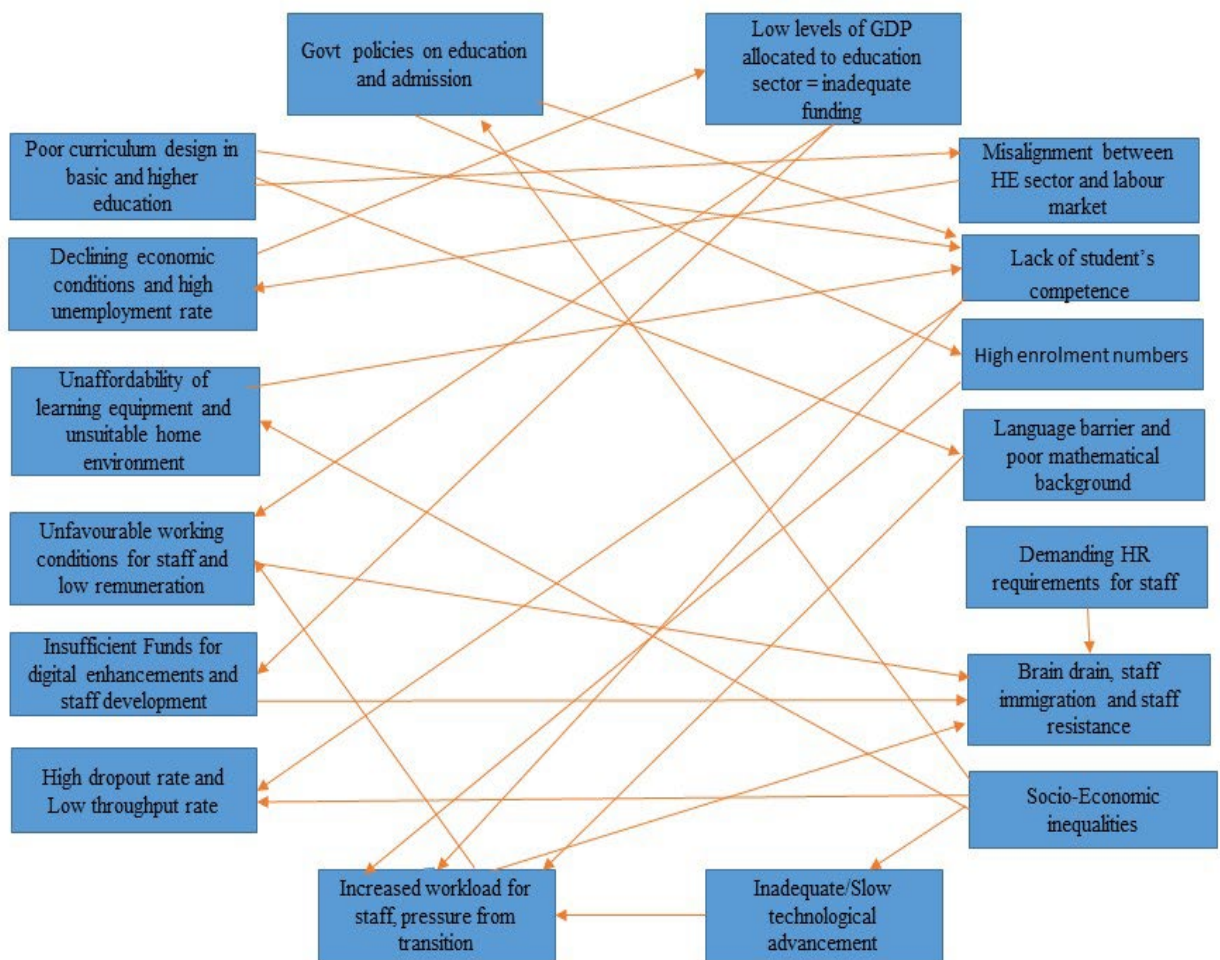


Figure 4.10: Interconnection between Challenges

Source: Developed by the Author

4.4 A Systems Thinking Phenomenon

Judging from the results presented and the interrelatedness between the challenges, this study makes two interpretations, 1) the higher education sector is a system, and 2) the COVID-19 pandemic is a systems thinking problem. Hassan et al. (2020), described the system as a unit with interconnected and co-dependent elements that work closely to accomplish a mutual purpose. Higher Education is considered a system. At its heart is the idea of elements co-dependent at various levels. Any alteration to one element of the system causes a ripple of changes to other parts and the entire system. In this study, we have learned how changing from contact to virtual learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, has affected other elements involved and presented additional challenges for leaders in the SAEF.

Systems thinking is one of five principles published by Senge (1997), and it is regarded as a paradigm change in human thinking. Systems thinking offers an all-inclusive method to better understand how the elements within the system interrelate with one another; the fundamental cause of system failure, and the required method for effective problem-resolving involvements. The results of the study reveal that the government, Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the Department of Basic Education (DBE), socio-economic status, higher education institutions, lecturers, and students are elements in the higher education system. The results further highlight that the costs of the COVID-19 pandemic in the higher education sector are huge. not only do they present new challenges like the digital divide and enforce digital transformation, but they resurface issues related to the prevailing social-economic inequality and historic political imbalances in South Africa.

Systems thinking can be employed to simplify and enable a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics in the higher education sector in South Africa and how isolated COVID-19 interventions from one part of the system affect other parts of the system. Jackson (2020a), emphasised the need to recognise the complexity of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequent challenges as systems thinking phenomenon across all business and social spheres. This will empower individuals and leaders to restructure their systems, thus fundamentally producing desired outcomes. In their research, Cabrera & Cabrera (2019), maintains that the complexity and uncertainty of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic together with the leadership challenges identified requires leaders to see beyond the symptoms and to penetrate through these to the underlying causes. The results of the study imply that the COVID-19 situation requires wisdom, precision and consciousness. Through systems thinking, leaders will be able to establish the factual sources of the problems, identify strong-leverage areas for interventions, streamline their operations, implement procedures to reverse unintended outcomes emanating from interventions, and foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement (Rajagopalan, 2020). Because the themes are interrelated, leaders in the SAEF ought to address all challenges holistically but prior to that a thorough investigation of the root causes of the problems is of vital importance.

4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the results of the data examination. It links the data examination to the research questions and demonstrates uniformity with the analysis and with thematic analysis methodology. Ten leaders were interviewed for this study and the interview questions were designed to capture the perceptions of the SAEF leaders on the dynamics of the higher education sector in South Africa, to understand the leadership challenges presented to the SAEF leaders emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic, and to learn how they mitigated the presented challenges.

Data were analysed using a thematic analysis which involved four stages; critical reading, open coding, selective coding and thematic coding. Additional analysis was conducted based on the interrelationship diagram and categories emerged from that selective coding process. Further continual evaluation was exercised to discover patterns and this process led to nine themes being identified. These themes resulting from the data examination, summarised the persistent VUCA challenges that exist in the higher education environment, the leadership challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic and various leadership approaches deemed essential by leaders in the SAEF to navigate the challenges. The identified themes are:

- Government's Contribution
- Socio -Economics Issues
- Internal Organisational Challenges
- The Crisis Management Dilemma
- Digital Transformation Paradox
- Demanding Commitment
- Leadership Behaviour
- Leadership Competencies
- Leadership Styles

The results revealed that the higher education environment is characterised by issues emanating from South Africa's political history and socio-economic inequalities. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues and also introduced new leadership challenges. In addition, the chapter revealed the interconnectedness between the challenges and discussed the idea of perceiving and addressing the COVID-19 pandemic challenges as a systems-thinking problem. Systems thinking can assist in identifying the root causes of the challenges and it recognises strong leverage points for interventions.

The following chapter presents the discussion of the results.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the results of the data analysis collected through in-depth interviews. This qualitative thematic study aimed to identify leadership challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic in the UKZN, SAEF, and to examine how Theory U can be incorporated into the decision-making process in order to assist leaders to navigate through the challenges. Included in this chapter is the discussion of main findings associated with literature on VUCA in the higher education environment, and on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on leadership

The narrative of challenges that leaders are confronted with in the UKZN, SAEF is multilayered and consists of nine themes. The first three themes - Government's Contribution, Socio-Economics Issues, and Internal Organisational Challenges, involve how the dynamics in the HE Sector contribute to VUCA challenges. The second group of themes - Crisis Management Dilemma, Digital Transformation Paradox, and Demanding Commitment, involves the leadership challenges experienced by the UKZN, SAEF leaders emanating from the COVID-19 Pandemic. The last set of themes - Leadership Behaviour, Leadership Competencies, and Leadership Styles, involves the leadership approach used by the UKZN SAEF leaders to navigate the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The chapter further discussed how Theory U as a framework, can be applied in managing the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in pursuit of leadership development. Theory U is recognised in this study as a tool for collective change and management, which advances leadership development at an holistic level where the leader/follower binary is minimalised. The chapter also presents a conceptual model that can be used by leaders in the UKZN, SAEF to navigate through the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.2 Interpretation of Findings

Although leaders in the SAEF differ in their specialties, levels within the profession and personal experiences, the identified themes were prominent and common to all leaders who participated in this study. The themes possess a dynamic dimension, as to how the changes in the environment affect the changes in the normal operations and cause changes in the leadership requirements. The following section discusses each individual theme.

5.2.1 Government's Contribution

The results highlighted government as one of the major actors in the Higher Education sector in South Africa and is perceived as an instigator of the persistent challenges. However, it is worth mentioning that Government's perceived intentions to achieve equality in education were noble but that unintended consequences resulted from their plans.

According to Fish Hodgson (2018), the South African government used two significant tactics to promote equality in education; firstly, the provision of financial aid for students whose families could not afford the University fees and secondly through amendment of admissions policies and selection measures.

Leaders in the SAEF pronounced their frustration on how each academic year commences with student protests mainly due to financial exclusions and historical debts which are categorically funding issues. They spoke conversely about both inadequate funding and inefficiency of the NSFAS office and how this disrupts the scheduled academic processes. Salmi & D'Addio (2021), highlighted similar issues and they uttered that government is battling to address the students' financial barriers in the HEIs. The problem of outstanding fees causes uncertainty and instability for universities. This outcome corresponds with accounts in the literature as suggested by Walker (2018) who confirmed that universities depend highly on tuition fees and the *Fees must Fall* protests have a severe impact on financial stability.

Participants shared their thoughts on government funding from a negative perspective when it comes to funding universities. The findings of the study suggest that the continuing decline in government's subsidy to universities hampers development and education quality in the education sector, these corresponds with results from (Swartz, Ivancheva, Czerniewicz & Morris, 2019). The SAEF's experiences were not an exception to the debacle, the leaders realised that the cost of providing education escalates as the admission numbers increase. More academic and admin resources were required. Research conducted by Kwasi-Agyeman (2020) confirms the views of the SAEF leaders that universities in South Africa are habitually underfunded and restrictions on student fees increment exacerbates the financial shortfalls.

According to Matsolo, Ningpuanyeh & Susuman (2018), prior to the democratic election in 1994, the education system in South Africa did not prioritise social inclusiveness of different groups especially those with previously disadvantage backgrounds. The SAEF leaders agree with the literature that specifies that increasing admission and improving involvement of students from underprivileged backgrounds is challenging to sustain (Mzangwa, 2019). From a social justice perspective, restricted access accepts inequalities and supports the separation policies of the apartheid regime.

Connell (2019) emphasize that the implications of the apartheid laws were visible in every sector of the economy, including education, therefore, revolution in the higher education sector is regarded as a

benchmark for social transformation. The leaders in the SAEF understood and appreciated the idea of opening access but also acknowledged the difficulties that come with it. Mahomed (2020) concluded that the decision to merge previously disadvantaged higher education institutions with 'prestige' higher education institutions was a turning point for the higher education sector but also a development in social change for the nation at large. While some participants shared the benefit of that transition some admitted to the difficulty of integrating students who were unprepared. Advocating open access corresponds with the literature that policies in the education sector were aimed at redressing the colonial principles of our history (De Jager & Bitzer, 2018), however, participants expressed the view that the policy to increase admission could have been considered in a healthier manner by conducting feasibility studies .

Participants highlighted that the monitoring procedures were neglected and derailing issues took the lead and this fuelled complexity in the higher education sector. This concern was also raised by Mahlangu (2020) who emphasized the need for proper governance and regular feedback. The impression received from leaders in the SAEF is that the attempts to transform higher education institutions remains a respectable initiative. However, due to improper execution and lack of monitoring of the processes caused more problems and the policy failed to receive the desired outcome. Instead students quickly dropped out as the previously white institutions do not go out of their way to accommodate students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. Secondly, students from poor backgrounds were victimised by the policies as they were not adequately prepared to learn at University level. These findings are supported by Karlsson, McPherson & Pampallis (2020) who raised similar undesirable outcomes.

5.2.2 Socio-Economic Issues

Participants revealed that the prevailing issues in the higher education environment are connected to the national problems facing South Africa as a nation. These findings are reinforced by Cross (2020) when he points out universities in South Africa are impacted by the economy's disjointed social structures and expanded economic inequalities. The findings of the study suggest that the problems in HEIs are directly linked to the historic political background, social and financial inequalities, stagnant economic growth and increasing unemployment levels.

Cross (2020) maintains that expansion and sustainability in universities depends on which students are admitted and which are not accepted on the basis of their socio-economic status. Leaders in the SAEF perceived socio-economic background as a current barrier to development in the Higher Education sector. The results of the study exposed that the weight of the challenges posed by the diverse socio-economic standards exposed the vague relationship between equity and the higher education sector. The

Participants queried the quality of education obtained by students from poor socio-economic backgrounds against the education received by students from well-resourced institutions. Harry, Chinyamurindi & Mjoli (2018) agree with the findings of the study by suggesting that students' socio-economic background not only impacts the quality of their education but also impacts their likelihoods of finding employment once the qualification is completed. In addition, the participants acknowledge the issue of using only English language as medium of instruction in UKZN and other neighbouring universities, as this deters fruitful participation in the higher education sector. These findings are supported by Jansen (2019) who advocates decolonisation of universities through language transformation and other means.

This study concludes that the quest for quality depends on preserving and applying academic values by cautiously evaluating minimum expectations and requirements. Literature advocates that socio-economic background plays a vital role in shaping a student's success or failure in the participation in Higher Education (Cross & Govender, 2021). The discussion above prompts the study to admit that economic and social standings are correlated with equity in education.

5.2.3 Internal Organisational Challenges

Leaders in the SAEF expressed their frustration at how the academic promotions policy at the UKZN is stringent and demanding when it comes to academic progress to professorship. Only five out of approximately 60 academic staff members in the SAEF have achieved a professorship. Correspondingly, literature has shown that universities in South Africa are confronted with the difficulty of replacing the decreasing numbers of professors and the rate of their replacement is not adequate to sustain the growth in the higher education sector (Subbaye, 2017). The findings of this study further suggest that the problems of attracting, retaining, and equity of academic staff are persistent and cause volatility in the sector.

Further on the displeasure with the UKZN's academic promotions policy, the participants implied that the policy requires a review as it currently does not necessarily consider additional administrative commitments that academics are involved in. These views are supported by Barnes, du Plessis & Frantz (2021). These researchers articulate that there is a necessity for HEIs to establish an efficient approach to managing academic promotions, by distinguishing main performance areas including the workload in various academic phases. The participants highlighted that the main focus is on research productivity output, the National Research Foundation (NRF) rankings, and international reputation. Although progressing to full professorship is perceived as a rite of passage in academia, this tends to cause friction when attention is needed on 'bread and butter' issues existing in universities in developing nations.

One of the leaders in the SAEF indicated that although the UKZN's objective is to be the premier

University of African scholarship, the objective should be centered around the context of South Africa's unique history and current circumstances. The results show that the main issues that UKZN is dealing with relate to meeting student's academic, social and financial needs

5.2.4 Crisis Management Dilemma

The results of this study revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a deep impact on the operations in the SAEF. The changes undergone in the SAEF, involved how academic progress was salvaged, how teaching was delivered, how normal operations and processes were modified and how the adaptation to the 'new norm' transpired. Hayes (2021) advised that change management theory highlights the value in identifying issues that could disturb success when an organisation is faced with immediate change. Kaul, Shah & El-Serag (2020) claim that change is advantageous under two circumstances; firstly, when changes transpire in relation to drastic environmental modification and secondly, when these changes enhance the existing developed procedures and capabilities. With regard to the UKZN, SAEF and the COVID-19 pandemic, the first condition is fulfilled and the results of the study demonstrated that fulfilling the subsequent condition depended on the decisions made by the executive of the UKZN as an institution and decisions made independently by leaders in the SAEF. In the SAEF, the COVID-19 pandemic brought a state of emergency in education and the challenges and decisions were centered around staff's lack of acquaintance with virtual teaching and the capabilities of the technological infrastructure and the big difference between new ways of operation and the teaching technique used in the past.

According to leaders in the SAEF the changes were abrupt in nature and required quick decisions with the abrupt changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The study suggests that it was vitally necessary for the SAEF to establish a crisis management strategy and to be prepared to respond to transformation of this magnitude. However, the SAEF did not have a proper crisis management or change management strategy to counteract the impact of the pandemic. Leaders had to 'think on their toes' in the absence of an established strategy. The COVID-19 disruption emphasised the need for the SAEF leaders to know how to maintain stability and how to manage social changes. At the outset, the information was very limited and there was uncertainty about the magnitude of the changes necessary. Leaders were confronted with challenges of identifying the nature of risks that the SAEF was exposed to. Under normal circumstance a SWOT analysis could have been undertaken but due to lack of information and time, leaders in the SAEF faced difficulty in managing the situation efficiently to mitigate the risks.

The findings of the study highlight the impact of organisational structure on crisis management is supported by Kuipers & Wolbers (2021) who articulated that organisational structure has a significant effect on managing change successfully in a crisis. Similarly, the results of the study suggest that,

because of the vertical management structure of UKZN, major decisions pertaining to the transition from normal face-to-face operations to online platforms had to be taken by the University's highest decision-making bodies that sit on top of the hierarchy. Studies on change and crisis management detect bureaucracy as a hindrance to managing a crisis and the execution of changes. The vertical organisation structure meant that decisions were made with minimal consultation with academic leaders at School level who are sitting at the bottom of the hierarchy. Not including academic leaders in major decisions meant that some aspects of the problems which are evident at School level are overlooked or underestimated. These findings correspond with the findings of Dumulescu & Muțiu (2021) who noted a substantial decline in faculty leaders' involvement in the governance of the University and being less influential in important campus matters. Leaders in the SAEF were of the opinion that the existing bureaucratic structure is less effective in situations which require a rapid response. The speed of academic and administration decision-flow was hindered by structural layers and this caused unnecessary delays.

Literature of crisis management suggest that action plans needs to be clear and precise (Boin, Lodge & Luesink, 2020). Leaders in the SAEF believe that the decisions were delayed and the information shared lacked details on how the objective would be met. The study concludes that there was lack of directive on how specific needs (of students and staff) would be met and when. This caused more confusion in an already unclear situation. The SAEF leaders were uncertain about the COVID-19 pandemic and ambiguous about UKZN's reaction plan. The study noted that the COVID-19 situation required rapid and comprehensive decision-making in order to manage transition during the crisis effectively.

The COVID-19 pandemic confronted leaders in the SAEF with two separate but related challenges; firstly, managing the crisis at hand and secondly, they were also confronted with the challenge of adapting to the changing environment which came with a unique set of demands. In their study, Bussin & Swart-Opperman (2021) brought it to attention that in times of crisis leaders confronted with these two interconnected challenges, and therefore, to address these issues, separate response actions to must run parallel to one another to avoid further confusion and to limit fear and to curb uncertainty.

5.2.5 Digital Transformation Paradox

The results of the study revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic forced the SAEF to transform technologically in order to navigate through the lockdown period and also to prepare for the digital future. Although most of the interventions involved changes in the use and advancement of technology and in acquiring new tools, the findings of the research indicate that the change is also more people-centered. These findings are supported by Datta & Nwankpa (2021), who advocate that people are the drivers of change and that technology is an enabler. The results of the study propose that successful

transformation is highly dependent on the transformation of the workforce and on transforming people's perceptions, habits, beliefs, and traditions. This is one of the most difficult leadership challenges.

As with any situation that involves change, leaders in the SAEF were confronted with different degrees of buy-ins for the proposed change. The results indicate that a certain level of staff resistance posed challenges to leaders. The pandemic forced the UKZN, SAEF to embrace digital transformation, but some staff members were not supportive of the transformative initiatives. There was fear amongst staff that everything was all happening at once and there was not sufficient time to think things through. Others were not fully comfortable with virtual teaching and learning due to technical issues, difficulty in communication and dialogue with students, inadequate resources and lack of internet connectivity. The study concludes that resistance to change is a significant challenge to the SAEF leaders. This study showed that COVID-19 crisis management required leaders to sustain motivation by mobilising their teams, educating them and obtaining their support. Furthermore, leaders must promote digital learning and service delivery to all stakeholders. Findings of the study conducted by Mefi & Asoba (2021) suggest that the psychological implications of crisis and immediate changes in the workplace are substantial and employees demand special consideration and motivation.

Results also revealed that COVID-19 pandemic requires leaders to foster organisational learning and to include capacity building as part of their strategic plans. Leaders in the SAEF learned that capacity building should be an ongoing process for all staff members in the School and they emphasised that the SAEF ought to adopt and cultivate a culture of continuous learning and re-evaluation of operational systems even outside of the crisis mode. Morakanyane, O'Reilly, McAvoy & Grace (2020) agree with these findings and suggest that successful digital transformation in an organisation can be obtained through constant learning.

The results showed that the SAEF attempted to capacitate staff quickly in the midst of chaos and uncertainty from the transition itself. Under normal circumstances, changes are implemented in a systematic way and the rollout is staggered, which allows all stakeholders to absorb the new developments fully. The findings of the study emphasize the negative consequences of a quick transition such as increased instability, depletion of financial resources, and exhaustion of staff. These findings are aligned with the results of a study conducted by Alsaleh (2021) which revealed that the COVID-19 enhanced transformation and uncertainty, as a result, it was challenging for leaders to implement skills building and knowledge acquisition programmes.

Further results of the study revealed that leaders in the SAEF ought to maximise trust and minimise control during staff supervision or managing projects. Some leaders expressed difficulties in managing and monitoring staff outside of the normal working environment. Ahern & Loh (2020) claim that uncertainty from the Covid- 19 intensifies the challenges associated with trust. These authors advocated

that building and sustaining trust is a necessity for effective leadership. The COVID-19 situation demanded that the SAEF leaders strengthen their relations with their subordinates and build trust and professional dependency on one another. Through open and honest communication on expectations and feedback the SAEF leaders were able to build credibility and trust.

The result further revealed the issues of maintaining academic integrity during the transition and emphasised the need to formulate and implement effective remote invigilating systems for online assessments going forward. Leaders in the SAEF were new to online assessments and were challenged with maintaining the integrity of the assessments. The blended learning approach indirectly implied that all assessments are 'open book' and evidence of cheating surfaced. Butler-Henderson & Crawford (2020) share the same sentiments and highlight potential decrease in education standards due to unmanaged cheating and plagiarism. The transition to continuous online assessment was implemented without supporting monitoring plans against cheating.

5.2.6 Demanding Commitment

This study concludes that balancing work and personal life was challenging for the SAEF leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic since there were expectations placed on leaders to find solutions and to manage the dilemma presented by the COVID-19. The results revealed that leaders in the SAEF prioritised work-related matters and neglected their personal lives and to a certain extent jeopardised their mental and physical health. Leaders expressed the view that prioritising work came from the sincere commitment they have for their work. Such imbalances affect the quality of life and well-being of an individual. In his study, Gigauri (2020) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in imbalances through increased workloads and through working longer hours. In addition, the results show that leaders in the SAEF were exposed to enormous pressure and stress.

The results indicate that emotional intelligence played a significant role in assisting leaders in the SAEF to remain focused, to understand the logic behind the reactions of their colleagues and to respond effectively to the demanding situation. Their emotional intelligence capacity supported them to build resilience and to show sympathy to their counterparts. Literature has shown that emotional intelligence can impact on how leaders deal with stress and Gómez-Leal, Holzer, Bradley, Fernández-Berrocal & Patti (2021) state that the emotionally intelligent leaders have the ability to gauge their individual emotions as well as those of others and consequently they can guide their conduct and thinking patterns.

5.2.7 Leadership Behaviour

According to Eichenauer, Ryan & Alanis (2022), the COVID-19 pandemic accentuated the role of leadership during a crisis. The findings of the study agree with this statement as they highlight that the

pressure from the situation required leaders in the SAEF to be attentive, effective and to focus on the interventions which were actionable. Three key elements of effective leadership surfaced from the analysis; namely responsible leadership, experiential learning and taking care of the interests of all stakeholders. These elements of leadership identified in the study correlates with the leadership qualities suggested by Eichenauer et al. (2022) which highlighted the importance of participative and common goal achievement oriented leadership.

The results of this study show that responsible leadership fostered a commitment to unified objectives and provided a positive social impact, thus enabling the SAEF to recognise opportunities for growth and change. Leaders in the SAEF ensured that keeping all staff members safe and well, unified and productive was prioritised during the COVID-19 pandemic. Literature on leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic also acknowledges that whilst leaders are confronted with enormous challenges, the well-being of people ought to be on top of their priorities (Azevedo, Bell & Medina, 2021) By practicing responsible leadership, the SAEF was able to navigate through uncertainty presented by the COVID-19 crisis and they gave new hope for a rising future. The analysis also highlighted the importance of relationship-oriented leadership behaviour during a crisis. This was critical in decision-making as it emphasised the need for honesty and involvement of other stakeholders. A joint list of priorities from all disciplines within the SAEF was established but a greater level of autonomy was given to each discipline to determine the specific measures for implementation. Dumulescu & Muțiu (2021) suggested that effective leaderships promote empowerment of other individuals to make decisions where appropriate, bearing in mind, the visions and goals of the organisation.

The impact of leadership on education in the SAEF has been explicit during the COVID-19 pandemic, where leaders have adjusted and transformed together with academic and support staff members to guarantee education endurance. Based on the analysis, leaders in the SAEF focused on building partnerships with all stakeholders. The SAEF leaders worked closely with student representative committees, module coordinators and private companies to identify the student's needs and to acquire funding and to donate laptops and other learning resources. This supported the notion behind responsible leadership and consequently, minimised the devastating impact of the COVID-19 crisis. In their study on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, Aslan, Silvia, Nugroho, Ramli & Rusiadi (2020), concluded that collaboration between education leaders, learners, parents, businesses and all stakeholders aided an all-inclusive approach to learning restructurings and ensured enhanced continuity. Another aspect of essential leadership behaviour that surfaced from the analysis the willingness of the SAEF leaders to learn and to adapt as the situation unfolded. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has modified the education system and how online platforms and technological tools have dominated teaching and learning, the results of the study reveal that traditional means of operations in the SAEF no longer serve their needs given the circumstances and they were required to learn about available technology systems,

the costs and how best to use them to meet their specific needs.

5.2.8 Leadership Competencies

The findings of the study suggest that challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic require leaders in the SAEF to have a level of competency above standard decision-making etiquette. Participants agreed that personal proficiencies including keeping abreast of the situation and being foresighted, being knowledgeable and experienced, being open-minded, serious and committed to finding solutions, being courageous, having a sense of accountability and self-sacrifice, being empathic and passionate towards others were all required.

The results show that, relating to staff in a manner which demonstrated unity and fairness was one of the qualities used by leaders in the SAEF when managing staff. During the interview, leaders in the SAEF expressed their view that staff members were consumed by fear, confusion and anxiety because of the crisis. According to the leaders, genuineness and sympathy are required in a state of emergency. Knowing and understanding each staff members' strengths, weaknesses, needs and their family's situations laid the foundation for individualised attention. Each person was attended to in a manner that suited their individuality. Leaders in the SAEF shared what they knew of their staff members at a personal level so it was easier to motivate them as fear and anxiety took its toll. The close relationship assisted leaders to connect with their staff members at a level where both parties could relate and were comfortable to share their feelings, thus releasing the strain. Bailey & Breslin (2021) point out that when connecting and showing sympathy during a crisis, the unseen barrier of hierarchy between a leader and his followers is minimised.

Leaders in the SAEF highlighted the need for self-leadership in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, the challenges presented required leaders to be conscious of how they perceived themselves and their role in the midst of a complex situation. Secondly, how they purposely influence their thoughts, emotions and actions towards a specific goal. The result reveal that by engaging in self-leadership behaviour, leaders in the SAEF were able to navigate through the Corona virus crisis. It is undoubted that due to the complexity of the COVID-19 pandemic, often it was difficult for leaders to action what they believed ought to be done. One of the participants openly discussed that at some point they did not know how things should have been done. These leaders imbedded behaviour attentive approaches to overcome the challenges they were confronted with. The process involved reflection and taking inner stock of their assumptions, limiting beliefs and biasness. The process implied that leaders in the SAEF undertook essential (but sometimes objectionable) actions and sacrifices. Reflection and mediation were useful tools and after mature reflection leaders instituted actions and made sacrifices. Baba (2020) states that self-leadership is important for effective leadership during this unprecedented time because it assist

leaders to ascertain why they behave and react in certain ways and it gives them the power to regulate themselves.

Shared leadership was another finding of this study, leaders in the SAEF distributed and delegated decision-making for certain activities by forming task teams and selecting group leaders for the teams. The group leaders demonstrated good leadership qualities and added value to the operations of the School. Responding to the Corona crisis, the participants promoted a culture of distributed leadership and collaboration to confront the complex problems. The results of the study suggest that in order to navigate successfully through the problems, all members' contributions (with or without official leadership title) within an organisation are appreciated and talents and expertise are recognised and appreciated. In their study, Fernandez & Shaw (2020) declared that shared leadership distinguishes those individuals in authoritative positions but also pays attention to how those individuals distribute their powers amongst those with no official leadership titles. Xie, Han, Beyerlein, Lu, Vukin & Boehm (2021) state that the key in enduring the new ordinariness of the COVID-19 is collaboration and shared leadership.

5.2.9 Leadership Styles

Because of the adaptive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders in the SAEF were forced to transform from regular operations and to revise their leadership approach, their organisational culture and adapt to new technological strategies in order to remain relevant and effective. The results of the current study advocate that a combination of transformational and democratic and intuitive leadership styles is suitable in the midst of the pandemic. Literature confirms that transformational and inclusive leadership are instrumental for organisations facing a crisis (Antonopoulou, Halkiopoulos, Barlou & Beligiannis, 2021b).

The findings of the study revealed that the transformational leadership style used by the SAEF leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic is related to the success of the team. These results are supported by Kaul et al. (2020), these authors advocate that the efficacy of leadership relates to the use of a suitable leadership approach and to good and productive teamwork. The results of the study revealed that leaders in SAEF focused on motivating their staff members by putting in extra efforts, going beyond the scope of normal duties and interacting with staff at all levels, and encouraging 'out of the box' thinking in order to navigate the challenges. This aligns with findings of the study by Antonopoulou, Halkiopoulos, Barlou & Beligiannis (2021a), they noted that when followers recognise the extra effort made by their leaders, they tend to want to partake in and do more, and their desire to succeed improves.

In this study, elements of transformational leadership style are evident and the responses from the

interview highlights how SAEF leaders thoughtfully worked on founding strategies to restructure and realign the processes, to capacitate staff and to cooperate with other stakeholders with an intention to respond successfully to the challenges presented. The findings of the study revealed that transformational leadership was suitable in endorsing the digital revolution, navigating the COVID-19 crisis and enabling overall change. Charoensukmongkol & Puyod (2021) claim that the objective of a transformational leader is to motivate his or her followers, to seek to accommodate their main needs and to secure their full commitment.

The emergence of transformational leadership as an effective leadership style in complex situations requiring prompt adaptation and flexibility is based on the fact that it strengthens the validity of certain essential leadership principles which are related to vision and transformation. The formulation of a vision and determination of objectives and guidelines can motivate subordinates in that they have a joint purpose as an important stimulant for their work. The SAEF leaders shared their vision via execution of different discipline goals. The SAEF is made up of six academic disciplines (Accounting, Auditing, Economics, Finance, Management Accounting and Taxation). Each discipline's objective fed into the overall vision of the SAEF. Leaders in the SAEF used the different discipline goals to promote high-performance, to recognise the value of each discipline and to encourage collaboration. Research has shown that the accomplishment of organisational vision through segmented departmental goals can make a significant contribution to employee skills development, commitment and resilience (McCombs & Williams, 2021).

As per their proposition, allowing their followers to voice their opinions and to use their expertise permitted the SAEF leaders to plant the seed of shared wisdom and to sponsor inclusive leadership. One of the leaders acknowledged that, as an individual, he did not have answers to all questions but kept an open mind to every question. Both leaders and staff in the SAEF shared knowledge required to plot against the crisis. All staff members were able to access the appropriate information concerning the plans and to communicate their responses. Current research suggests that involving others and opening the window for knowledge generation and knowledge creation is influential in managing the challenges emanating from the COVID-19 crisis in the SAEF (Chaturvedi & Singh, 2021). The results suggest that another positive effect of knowledge sharing was for the SAEF to be able to anticipate consequential issues that might arise. They could consequently make decisions speedily and act promptly which was vital when managing the COVID-19 challenge. With respect to this, Dirani et al. (2020) revealed that making use of the team member's knowledge and involvement and the ability to make bold decisions quickly is vital for leaders when dealing with a multifaceted and turbulent situation. Furthermore, the results of the study suggest that inclusive leadership had a positive impact on outcomes.

The leadership qualities required in education emergencies are fundamentally different from those needed under 'normal circumstances. Good leadership in academia is effective in strategizing for the

future, and in empowering staff and supporting students with the intent of achieving excellence in teaching and learning. However, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that leadership pertains to dealing with trials, emotions and instantaneous consequences, in a manner that reduces individual and organisational disorientation (Kirchner, Ipsen & Hansen, 2021). In support of existing literature, the results of the study indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the need for intuitive leadership. Leaders in the SAEF are still in the process of discovering how best to fit their disciplines into the virtual environment and how to orientate the School's plan and operations in order to survive and to strive for achievement beyond the challenges presented by the pandemic. Rayburn, Anderson & Sierra (2021) supports the results of the study and highlights that the learning feature of crisis management is a long-term continuous process.

According to Rami (2022), various leadership theories encourage leaders to make rational and information-driven decisions, however, the chaotic COVID-19 pandemic situation renders this approach impractical. Similarly, the findings of the study correspond with literature. Leaders in the SAEF maintain that the COVID-19 pandemic presented a lot of unknowns and had to rely sometimes on their intuition when making certain decisions. The unprecedented situation meant that the normal decision models used in the past were not suitable. The decisions made by the SAEF leaders were based on how the situation was unfolding at that given time. The responses were quick and the outcomes were not guaranteed and were prone to restructuring. According to Sengupta (2021), contingency theories suggest that complex uncertain chaotic and ambiguous situations often require an 'act-sense-respond' decision-making process which is comparable to intuitive leadership. Literature shows that many leaders depend on intuitive decision-making during a crisis but are less open about this practice due to fear of judgement (Cohu, 2021). It is imperative to note that intuitive decision-making is more than just a mere 'gut feeling' but it is rather an all-inclusive, subconscious, experimental, inductive and distinctive manner of perceiving the right decision. The results highlight the interrelationship intuitive decision-making and expertise. Leaders in the SAEF operated from a compound, intuitive framework resulting from years of accumulated experience.

5.3 Using Theory U as a Leadership Development Tool

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the critical role of leadership into focus and in addition emphasised the intricacy around it. Over and above the core duties of leading their organisations and employees, the findings of the study indicated that agility, self-awareness, and empathy are qualities required when managing the problems presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings are supported by Pavey (2021) It is necessary for leaders in the SAEF to firstly, learn how to appreciate the value of empathy and compassion and secondly, to adopt behavioural patterns that demonstrate these qualities in order to manage the emotional intensity encountered by students and staff. Another interesting conclusion from

the results was that the COVID-19 pandemic requires both leaders and individuals to put aside old behaviour, traditions, and viewpoints and to acquire new skills and attitudes. Such conclusions are similar to those provided by Watkins & Marsick (2021). The results further suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic is a transformative and an enlightening phenomenon which unites and strengthens leaders and employees at organisational level. At individual level, the COVID-19 pandemic has sharpened consciousness and forced leaders to reevaluate their thinking patterns.

Recent literature points out that leaders in organisations often struggle to respond to the dynamics of the VUCA environment partly because they are fixated in their traditional ways of thinking (Hautle, 2018). Theory U produces a matrix for individuals to dissociate themselves from their habitual ways of thinking and it enables them to make their contribution to potential outcomes which are in tune with the needs of the organisation (Koenig, Seneque, Pomeroy & Scharmer, 2021). Theory U is about personal leadership and a different way of thinking. It is a framework that looks at leadership and at the decision-making process from the deeper source of excellence which draws from the deeper source of the inner place that individuals operate from. These authors further claim that Theory U seeks that quality of attention and intention from within.

Theory U is acknowledged as a framework for management and learning. It can be used by leaders as a change management technique to break through old unproductive behavioural patterns which hamper efficient and effective decision-making. This includes surpassing the barriers that prevent leaders from empathising with their employees and customers (Pillay, 2022). Theory U can be recognised as a method of creating change. Change in the mindset can be reformed into physical reality. Theory U expresses the idea that the inner mindset affects how individuals produce their work. Therefore, it can be used as a technique in explaining how we move from a challenge to a solution (Heiden & Tonino-Heiden, 2021).

As a practical tool, Theory U proposes a set of principles organised around a U shape. These principles are intended for collectively fashioning the future that develops when moving from co-initiating, through co-sensing, and co-inspiring, via co-creating to co-evolving. Thus, this study uses the Theory as an explicit conceptual model. Scharmer (2009) suggests that the journey through the U connects individuals and people to their true selves. Koenig, Seneque, Sharpe, Ash-Harper, Bergheim, Hodgson & Odugleh-Kolev (2022) articulate that the movement down the left side of the U shape leads to presencing. They further explain that Presencing is a combination of 'presence' and 'sensing' which represents an individual's capacity to sense and induce their uppermost impending potential into the present. Bockler (2021) concurs and further asserts that as individuals and groups move up the right side of the U, they bring new insight into the work environment.

The U Process, also known as the U journey, articulates the idea of Theory U which is based on Presencing. Presencing is about learning from the experience and focusing on the future as it emerges

without being afraid. Because the COVID-19 pandemic affects every individual in an organisation, the realisation of future potential depends entirely on individuals. Both leaders and employees in the SAEF must participate in the journey collectively and progress together. The U process is illustrated in the figure below:

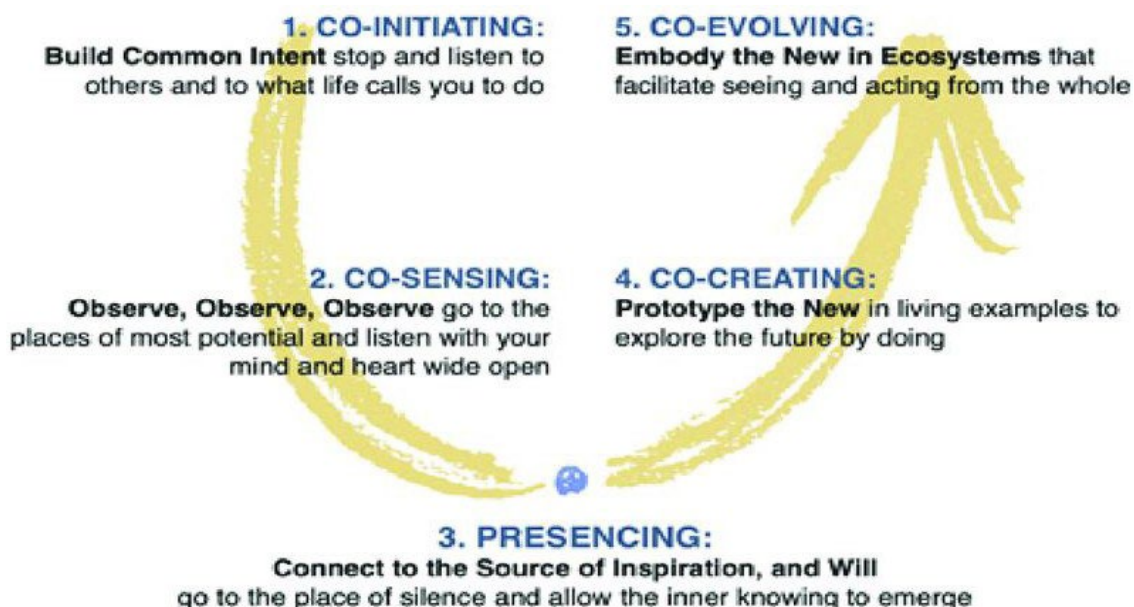


Figure 5.1: The U Process
Source: Ludevig 2016, p.157

5.3.1 Co-Initiating

According to Crayne & Medeiros (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic calls for leaders and their subordinates to work synchronously and collaboratively for the leadership objectives to be realised. They further claim that the situation calls for leaders to let go of the leader/follower binary. The important message to take away from this is that leaders in UKZN, SAEF need to surrender control and adopt communal leadership. Acosta (2021), advocates that in times of crisis, leaders must capitalise on the contribution made by other individuals and that organisation that practices collective leadership stands a better chance of achieving innovation, agility and collaboration. Uhl-Bien (2021), argues that when operating in crisis mode, leaders must discard the belief that a top-down decision-making hierarchy will produce stability.

The current organisational structure of UKZN follows a top-down leadership approach, however, the results of the study showed that the COVID-19 pandemic requires leaders in UKZN, SAEF to discard the top-down approach and to adopt a more horizontal and distributed leadership approach. By adopting a horizontal structure, the University will be in a better position to co-initiate the transition to the new ways of operation as suggested by Bojadjev & Vaneva (2021). The findings of the study revealed that

SAEF practiced collective decision making and bargained on action plans and measures for evaluation and management and according to literature, this is a positive step towards the co-initiating stage of the process.

5.3.2 Co-Sensing

The second stage of the U journey involves conscious observation and listening. Co-sensing the landscape of change entails going to the most promising areas and listening with an open mind and heart (García-Feijoo, Alcaniz & Eizaguirre, 2021). This stage aims to open group members' eyes, ears, and hearts to what their circumstances are showing them. Leaders in UKZN, SAEF need to assess the situation and to interpret it in its purest form. This process requires leaders to interrogate their mental models and to look beyond their mental commentary and to be willing to open their minds, hearts and will as indicated by Hutagalung, Purwanto, Prasetya & Pramono (2020). The results of the study indicate that there was a lot of misconception and incomplete information around the COVID-19 pandemic which fuelled complexity and uncertainty and consequently created chaos and fear. This highlights the need for radical transformation from traditional leadership and management approaches. Literature suggest that it is imperative for organisations to sift through the information circulated amongst employees and ensure that relevant and verified information is shared timeously and proficiently (Keith, 2022). The findings of the study suggest that clear and frequent communication is necessary to ease confusion and anxiety during a crisis.

The results of the study indicate that the COVID-19 situation calls for leaders in the UKZN, SAEF to acquire a distinctive understanding of the individuality of how each employee is personally and professionally affected and Coleman & Donohoe (2022) further emphasize that leaders need to accept that a one-size-fits-all approach was futile. There is need for leaders to acknowledge diverse individual circumstances. The results of the study indicate that UKZN, SAEF is characterised by diverse cultural and personal beliefs and consequently, leaders were forced to diversify their thinking and be open minded to different perspectives and potential outcomes. Navigating the challenges presented by the pandemic demands supplementary skills and proficiencies like compassion and empathy. (Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021) attest to the fact that connecting with employees at a personal level amid the COVID-19 pandemic, enables the leader to be truthfully transformational and validates the partnership.

Theory U presents four different levels of attention which leaders operate from (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). These functioning levels corresponds to different categories of listening:

- 1) Functioning from the old 'me-world' which corresponds with downloading mental models and traditional leadership approaches;
- 2) Functioning from the current situation "'t-world' which resembles listening to presented facts;

- 3) Functioning from the current 'you-world' which corresponds with listening with empathy; and
- 4) Functioning from the highest opportunity as it arises which matches generative listening.

The first two ways of functioning are responsive since they present a response to surface challenges and the remaining ones are generative since they are born from understanding and perception of what is about to emerge and goes beyond what is already happening (Calia, De Oliveira & Demarzo, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic situation calls for leaders in UKZN, SAEF to operate from a 'you-world' that accommodates and prioritises the needs, emotions, and fears of the employees while they adjust to the new teaching and learning atmosphere and to conform to the variability of the situation. Leadership development calls for leaders to open their hearts and to show empathy in times of calamity (Jian, 2022). Thus, it is imperative for UKZN, SAEF leaders to use empathy as a tool for leadership development as it encourages inclusiveness and connects peoples' ideas, mindsets and emotions.

5.2.3 Presencing

Theory U submits that there is a 'blind spot' in the present leadership styles and that blind spot is the inner place where leaders operate from. Chlopeczik (2014) believes that finding that inner place is key to effective leadership and the finding of the inner place necessitates proactive listening and learning which consequently fosters innovation. This stage requires leaders in UKZN, SAEF to investigate thoroughly the foundations of their viewpoints with the intention to innovate their thinking. Literature suggest that leaders as individuals should interrogate their personal beliefs, attitudes and assumptions and determine the impact of these elements on their decision-making processes (Paoletti, Reyes & Salas, 2019). Similarly, Mathieu, Gallagher, Domingo & Klock (2019) highlight that at an organisational level, employees together with the leaders should probe into how the culture and espoused values of the organisation (or departments) affect the perceptions and responses towards a crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that innovative qualities of awareness are shaped through a balance of emotional and cognitive resources on a psychological level and by using all-inclusive means of communication. The findings of the study revealed that some leaders in UKZN, SAEF engaged in mindfulness practices such as meditation and reflection to maintain a sensible state of mind and emotions.

Gunnlaugson (2021) regards presencing as a key point in the transformation process where a substantial difference between before and after can be detected. Arts, Baldini, Goodman, Hayashi, Jandernoa & Scharmer (2021) articulates that presencing is manifested as a modification in the quality of interactive process together with the transformation in the quality of the inner processes of individuals within an organisation. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that it is mandatory for leaders in UKZN, SAEF to be able to relate to those whom they lead emotionally whilst at the same time contain their own emotions.

This process includes trust and faith. Orrù, Rebecca, Gemignani & Conversano (2020), advocate that the psychological idea of emotional containment is critical when leading with the heart.

Marshall et al. (2020) emphasize that there is a need for leaders to be open and to share their doubts and fears, this paves a way for healing for themselves and for those whom they are leading. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the role of leadership in sponsoring psychological protection so that employees are free to share their thoughts and to, ask questions without fear of oppression. This form of openness helps people to understand the situation and the decisions made, clearly.

Chen & Sriphon (2021) raised a critical point that, it is vital for leaders to reflect often and to take time to check-in. They explain that this process allows leaders to identify and to let-go of all perceptions, beliefs, experiences and attitudes which are not important and by doing so, subsequently, let-go of their 'ego-self' and then the 'higher- self' institutes a delicate connection to a profound foundation of knowing. Corresponding to the above statement, Arts et al. (2021), articulated that the heart of presencing is that the 'current-self' and 'best future-self' meet at the bottom of the U and commence to resonate and listen to one another. The letting-go process was identified in the study as the significant obstacle in UKZN, SAEF leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders as individuals battled with internal resistance as they were fixed in old traditional ways of thinking and practices.

Hougaard & Carter (2018) suggest that the courage to let-go emanates from the readiness to let go and from the dying of the old-self (through the suspension of limiting mental models) to move forward into the unfamiliar territory that only begins to manifest once a person steps into that void. The challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic required leaders in UKZN, SAEF to act courageously and to be optimistic about the future. Rutayisire, Nkundimana, Mitonga, Boye & Nikwigize (2020) also suggest that in times of crises leaders should not be timid due to fear of failure and the unknown. The COVID-19 pandemic called for bravery in the midst of chaos and uncertainty. The results of the study indicate that leaders in UKZN, SAEF were open about trying out new methods of operation and often shared their failures and achievements.

Theory U suggest that leaders meet three major enemies during the letting-go process; The Voice of Judgement, the Voice of Cynicism and the Voice of Fear (Hautle, 2018). The three voices are obstacles in one's innerdialogue and they affect how leaders perceive a situation, make decisions and behave and can hinder leaders when moving towards a higher but uncertain future (Heller, 2019). Leaders need to be aware of these inner barriers and confront them cautiously. de Souza, Barbosa, Martins & de São Pedro (2020) state that the voice of judgement clouds the capacity to see beyond the current crisis and closes an open mind. These authors further state that an open mind is necessary for engagement, for acquiring new skills, for knowledge, and for learning new technologies. Keeping an open mind and an open heart was crucial for leaders and for the organisation in order to navigate through the pandemic's

challenges. Nullens (2019) acknowledges that overcoming cynicism improves respect, advances profound empathic skills and opens the heart. The voice of fear incapacitates and closes the will to step into the void of the unknown. By overcoming fear, leaders foster a way to establish clear goals and begin to enacting them promptly.

5.2.4 Co-Creating

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that some of the world's major challenges might only be resolved over and difficult procedure of co-creation. Leaders in organisations are caught in the universal crisis that is outside the capacity of a single individual, organisation or nation to resolve. The situation demands a greater degree of collaboration and cooperation, it necessitates co-creation. Co-creation is rooted in an open minded, positive attitude. It tends to be more proactive as opposed to being reactive in its approach (Calia et al., 2018). Ensuing the co-creation process requires leaders in UKZN, SAEF and their teams to trust and understand each other and be prepared to accept differences and negotiate in quest of a common goal. The role of a leader in this process is to assist and guide their teams to establish where the focus of the organisation should be at any given point in time.

The co-creation process requires leaders to be humble. Humility in the current situation means that leaders in UKZN, SAEF accept that, as the challenges presented by the pandemic demand quick responses, some decisions made will not be effective, errors will be made and amendments will be needed. The process requires increased commitment as both wins and losses are part of the transformation and the willingness to discard criticism if certain ideas are not fruitful or to cease fighting for personal credit (acknowledgements) when things turn out positively is needed. (Khalili, 2020) highlights that being flexible is part and parcel of co-creating as leaders and organisations step into the new territory. The findings of the study suggest that leaders in UKZN, SAEF demonstrated high level of commitment to being part of the solution and devoted extended time and effort during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.2.5 Co-Evolving

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the insight that to go forward, effective leadership heavily depends on how well leaders are equipped to manage more change. It has also transformed the role of a leader in UKZN, SAEF, altered the individuals' attitude towards UKZN as an organisations and leaders in particular. Leaders in UKZN, SAEF need to evolve and respond to crises with a reframed approach towards their subordinates by concentrating on the individuals holistically and by employing systems thinking and by concentrating on other social aspects. The findings of the research indicate that the pandemic has narrowed the gap between professional and social life and reformed values at both

individual and organisational levels.

The new leadership is required to alter their thinking and to accept that the persona of employees goes beyond work-life so they must aim at formulating comprehensive policies and procedures that are flexible and contextual. Leaders in UKZN, SAEF should also focus on solutions existing beyond their disciplines and develop agile and multipurpose systems. The pandemic further highlighted the role of leaders in employee's psychological well-being. Planning on how to promote motivation and mental health should be part of the leadership strategy. Focus should also be directed to creating equitable opportunities for growth and skills development and equal access to technology for all staff members. And lastly, leaders in UKZN, SAEF must gain insight into the value of immaterial assets including organisational status and intellectual property. This is vital in talent attraction and retention.

5.4 Framework for leadership development

The framework for leadership development in Higher Education in VUCA times is presented in Figure 5.2. The model incorporates three important elements of effective leadership; leading the organisation by playing a critical role in bringing about change, leading staff personnel by prioritising comprehensive (inclusive) solutions, and by leading self through personal transformation.

On the aspect of leading their organisations, leaders must be able to manage and adapt to changes from both the internal and external environments. Leaders also play an important role in structuring an organisation in a manner that allows for continuous development. In order to achieve this, a combination of certain skills, competencies and behavioural patterns is necessary. Leaders need to foster a culture of learning through periodic internal reviews, and closely link the transformed operations and procedures and overall changes to the development of staff. Focusing on knowledge generation and information-sharing allows leaders and their organisations to keep abreast and to be proactive. Leaders must be able to assess the information and use it to make informed decisions speedily. This corresponds to generative listening, where leaders learn to operate from the future as it emerges. The framework also encourages leaders to reassess decision flow structures to identify bottle necks and to limit unnecessary bureaucracy.

When leading others, the VUCA times requires leaders to narrow the gap between leaders and followers. Focus should be placed on building close working relationships and on promoting inclusivity and collaboration. The model suggests that leaders need to understand the value of and practice empathy and show humility to promote unity and the idea of pursuing of a communal goal. Leaders need to demonstrate commitment as this will also motivate their employees.

When it comes to leading oneself, leaders need to interrogate their thinking patterns and to renew their mindsets, beliefs and attitudes towards a particular situation and their employees. Leaders need to be

courageous and to make bold decisions and learn to let go of their fears (fears of judgement and failure). Overall a holistic and adaptive approach will enable leaders to navigate the challenges they are confronted with.

The framework presented in Figure 5.2 below, highlights the skills, qualities, competencies and behaviour required for leaders in the Higher Education sector (UKZN, SAEF) in order to survive the turbulent environment which, they operate in. The future calls for an evolution of leadership approach. The results of the study emphasise a collective transformation of leaders, employees, organisational culture and of the technological system employed. The VUCA emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic demands comprehensive developments and this framework should be useful in guiding those developments.

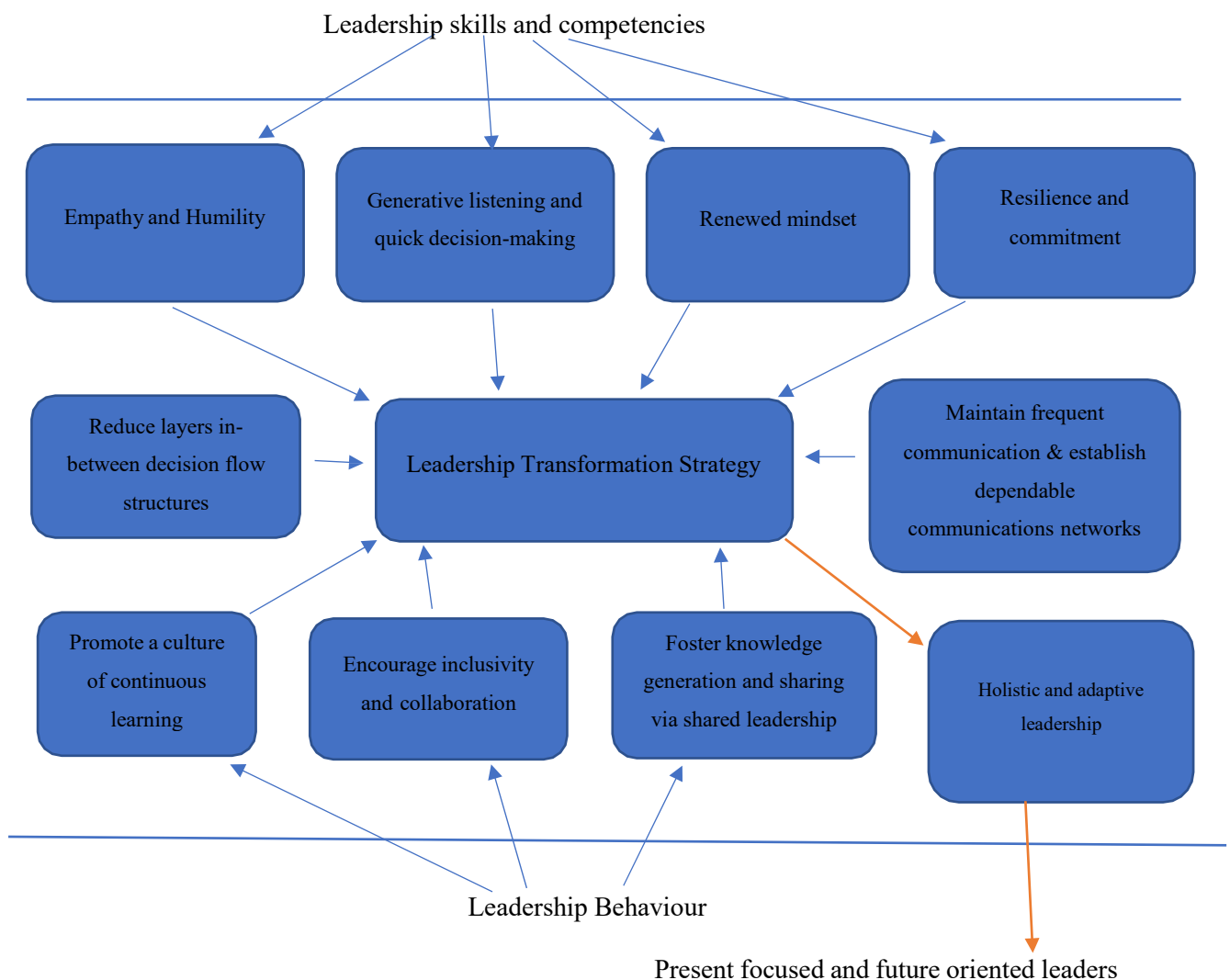


Figure 5.2: Framework for leadership development

Source: Developed by the author

5.5 Chapter summary

The aim of this study was to identify leadership challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic in the UKZN, SAEF, and to examine how Theory U can be incorporated into the decision-making process in order to assist leaders to navigate through the challenges. The generated themes were discussed in comparison with existing literature. The challenges facing leaders in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment are mainly centered around inadequate financial support and admissions policies from the government. Socio-economic inequalities brought challenges which deepened the issues as students and academic institutions were not 'equally prepared' for the COVID-19 pandemic demands. The study also discussed how academic institutions contribute to the complexity in the environment through their stringent academic promotions policy and increased workloads which results in brain drain.

The pandemic presented a unique set of leadership challenges including a crisis management dilemma, digital transformation paradox and a demanding commitment level. Issues on managing staff remotely and on obtaining their 'buy-in' regarding the changes intensified the situation. The COVID-19 produced a situation that demanded quick decision-making and the results point out issues with delayed responses and inconsistent communication from the University's top executive division. The transformation was almost immediate and that fuelled anxiety and chaos. The digital paradox lay in the fact that although the transformation heavily relied on technological systems and tools, the transformation, depended on people's willingness to accept and change. The intensity of the situation resulted in leaders expressing their professional commitment to an extent that disregarded their personal life needs and jeopardised their health.

A transformative leadership approach assisted leaders in the SAEF to navigate the challenges. The formation of task teams encouraged shared leadership and staff recognition and reskilling. Leaders admitted that intuitive leadership played a significant role in decision-making.

Theory U was used as a framework to discuss leadership development. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that such problems can only be solved through inclusive leadership, collaboration are framed mindset and innovative leadership approaches. Five U journey steps involving co-initiating, co-sensing, presencing, co-creation and co-evolving were discussed in detail. Critical skills and competencies like empathy, humility, resilience and commitment appeared prominent in leadership development. A conceptual model for leadership development was presented.

The study's conclusion and recommendations are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

Searching for a definition of ‘leadership’ produces countless explanations but what has become more important than the uniting definitions are the ideas, qualities, and skills that contribute towards effective leadership. Some of these ideas include determining and sustaining goals, focusing on good ethical behaviour, identifying problems and presenting solutions, maintaining professional relationships, and creating a safe working environment. Given the novelty of the COVID-19 pandemic and the dramatic shifts which occurred in the UKZN, SAEF, the focus on leadership has been magnified and perceptions of the leadership role with its intricacy and the required skills and qualities have been altered. The traditional principles of leadership are acceptable under normal conditions but given the current change in the status quo, leadership during the pandemic should look different. The restructured leadership principles involve being holistically present - physically, emotionally, and mentally; communicating frequently, thoroughly, and efficiently – keeping abreast of new developments and proposed resolutions and plans of action which prompt the promoting of a shared vision and common goal that all staff members can identify with, demonstrating commitment and resilience.

The aim of this study was to identify leadership challenges emanating from the restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), School of Accounting, Economics and Finance (SAEF), and to examine how Theory U can be incorporated into the decision-making process in order to assist leaders to navigate through the challenges. In pursuit of this aim, trustworthy data was collected qualitatively through semi-structured interviews that afforded participants the freedom to substantiate their answers and in return, this provided new knowledge to the researcher.

Ten participants were interviewed and the interviews were conducted on an individual basis. The sample of the leaders was chosen using the purposive sampling method. The sample consisted of academics who occupy leadership positions in the UKZN, SAEF. Although there is variance in their designated titles, they shared common leadership key performance areas and partook in the operations and academic affairs of the School. All academic disciplines from the UKZN, SAEF were represented in the study. This equitable representation promotes the credibility of the study.

Details of the research methodology have been provided in Chapter 3, and the results were presented in Chapter 4 and nine themes were identified. Chapter 5 presented a discussion of the results and compared the nine themes that emerged from the analysis to those mentioned in the existing literature. The results

were applied to the Theory U model with the purpose of evaluating how this framework could be utilised to assist leaders to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic challenges. A framework for leadership development was presented.

This chapter provides the summary and the conclusions resulting from the study and also presents recommendations that can be pursued by leaders in the UKZN, SAEF.

6.2 Conclusions aligned to objectives

The findings of this research are summarised according to the objectives of the study, as presented in Chapter 1:

6.2.1 Challenges facing leaders in UKZN, SAEF

The first objective of the study is to examine challenges facing leaders in the UKZN, SAEF operating in a volatile, uncertain complex and an ambiguous environment. The findings of the study reveal that the challenges in the SAHEC are influenced by the nation's political history, socio-economic inequalities and internal institutional policies.

Before the 1994 democratic elections, social inequalities were entrenched and echoed in all aspects of life, leading to the systematic exclusion of black people and racial segregation under apartheid laws. The Higher Education system was heavily influenced by these controlling inheritances. Those institutions that were reserved for the white minority were well resourced and developed in terms of government subsidies, infrastructure, human capital, and geographical location and accreditation. Whilst minimal provision was made to support the institutions that predominantly catered for the previously disadvantaged groups. After the democratic elections, the government expressed its commitment to transforming the Higher Education sector by 1) introducing policies that promoted equal access to Higher Education institutions, focusing on preciously excluded racial groups, and 2) introducing the National Students Financial Aid Scheme to financially support education for students who are financially needy.

Leaders in UKZN, SAEF highlighted issues that arose following the government's attempt at transformation. The challenges identified include the rapid increase in the number of enrolments and the high subsequent high failure rate, drop-out rate, and low throughput rate. The policies to increase access lacked details of how institutions should embrace and integrate the students. The participants pointed out that most students were not academically and socially prepared for University-level education or for the pace at which teaching and learning took place, as well as the use of English as the only medium of instruction, and all of this presented serious challenges. The lack of social and academic

integration feeds into the complexity of the SAHEC. The high influx of students resulted in increased workloads for staff and diminished the resources of the institutions. This caused frustration for both leaders and students. The problems in the SAHEC normally manifest themselves in student protests which disturb the operation of the institution and shorten the academic year and consequently affect the completion of the curriculum. Leaders in SAEF further identified inadequate funding for staff development and resources and the inefficiencies of the NSFAS office. In addition, the participants highlighted the vague relationship between equity access and the quality of education in the Higher Education sector. Leaders were challenged with balancing and maintaining educational standards whilst accommodating students with poor educational backgrounds due to inequalities in the basic education system which had also been subjected to the apartheid laws.

Over and above the transformative and social-academic integration challenges, South Africa is characterised by a high unemployment rate. Participants emphasised that a large number of graduates cannot find work and return to complete their honours. The challenge arises because the NSFAS only funds a student's first degree and students expect universities to support their studies and merely accept that they cannot find work so the next alternative is to study further and because of their socio-economic status, they cannot fund their studies. This highlights the concerns of curriculum relevance and misalignment between what the corporate world demands and what the Higher Education sector supplies.

The study revealed that the University's internal human resource policies especially regarding academic promotions are stringent and not comprehensive enough to accommodate different situations. Most academics in the SAEF are registered professional Chartered Accountants (CA) but the UKZN human resources policy requires all staff members to be in possession of Doctoral qualifications – Ph.D.'s. Another challenge identified was that the progress from senior lecturer to a professorship was demanding and unrealistic given the high workload and limited resources.

6.2.2 Leadership challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic in UKZN, SAEF

The second objective of the study was to identify leadership challenges that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic in UKZN, School of Accounting, Economics and Finance. The results of the study show that leaders in the UKZN, SAEF worked longer hours during the COVID-19 pandemic and struggled to balance personal life and work-life. This induced higher stress levels and physical exhaustion. New additional tasks required the leaders to dedicate more time to their work. Catering for students' needs and addressing staff's concerns in the midst of chaos was reportedly daunting. Leaders reported that emails were flooding in at all hours and due to pressure and the 'unspoken expectations' work was prioritised over their personal life.

Participants stated that working remotely is challenging and highlighted the difficulty in managing staff especially in getting quick responses to email correspondence. Staff resistance was identified as a challenge that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders indicated that some staff members were not keen on adopting online teaching and learning. The rejection reportedly came from the fear of the unknown (unfamiliarity) and inexperience, reliability of the systems, students' capabilities, and network problems.

Because the COVID-19 required prompt responses, leaders reported the rapid transition as a challenge. There was insufficient time to plan properly and to test systems. The rush meant that certain details involved in their work were not catered for. Leaders in the SAEF were confronted with the challenge of maintaining academic integrity as all assessments were completed online. The School struggled to prevent plagiarism and students' collaboration. The UKZN, SAEF did not appear to have a solid crisis management plan and leaders were challenged with managing the crisis and simultaneously responding to the demanding changes that the situation called for. Some leaders admitted that they didn't know what to do and there was no time to process things thoroughly.

Leaders in UKZN, SAEF identified the gap and delay in communication between the University executive Board of Committees and the leaders in the Colleges and Schools giving information on how the University planned to respond to the government's call to resume all academic and administrative activities online. Leaders reported that they experienced a communication breakdown during certain times. The bureaucracy in the decision-making process was also identified as an issue. Leaders in the SAEF felt that the decisions were prolonged and hindered by the red tape of many approval structures.

The COVID-19 demanded the SAEF to technologically transform all its operations in order to sustain academic progress and also to prepare for the digital future. Leaders in UKZN, SAEF experienced a technological revolution paradox. Although most of the interventions involved technical changes, the use and advancements of technological use, and acquiring new tools, the crux of the matter was that the success of these interventions not only involved but depended on all staff members. Changing staff's perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about the COVID-19 situation and the opportunities that it presented was identified as a significant challenge for leaders in the UKZN, SAEF.

6.2.3 Using Theory U as a tool to navigate the COVID-19 challenges in UKZN, SAEF

The third objective of the study was to explore how Theory U can assist leaders in the UKZN, SAEF to navigate the difficulties of COVID-19 pandemic. In the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders in UKZN, SAEF are presented with the greatest challenge of leading in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment. This adverse situation requires leaders to let go of the conventional ways of leadership, and to adopt innovative strategies and to transform their mindsets.

Theory U can assist leaders in UKZN, SAEF to navigate the current situation, to see beyond the hardships and to recognise emerging opportunities by addressing the challenges in a conscious and calculated manner. Theory U is acknowledged as a framework for management and learning. It can be used by leaders as a change management technique to break through old unproductive behavioural patterns which hamper efficient and effective decision-making including surpassing the barriers that prevent leaders from empathising with their employees and students.

Leaders in UKZN, SAEF can use Theory U as a practical tool by applying the five principles that are designed for collectively designing the future that develops when moving from co-initiating, through co-sensing, by co-inspiring, and via co-creating to co-evolving.

With regard to the initial step, Co-initiating; the COVID-19 pandemic calls for leaders in UKZN, SAEF and their subordinates to work synchronously and collaboratively for the leadership objectives to be realised. The situation calls for leaders to let go of the leader/follower binary. The important message to take away from this is that leaders need to surrender control and to adopt communal leadership.

The second stage of the U journey, Co-sensing, involves conscious observation and listening. Organisations need to assess the situation and interpret it in its purest form. This process requires leaders in UKZN, SAEF to interrogate their mental models and look beyond their mental commentary and be willing to open their minds, hearts and will. There was a great deal of misconception and incomplete information around the COVID-19 pandemic which fuelled complexity and uncertainty and consequently created more chaos and fear.

The Presencing stage requires leaders in UKZN, SAEF to investigate thoroughly the foundations of their viewpoints with the intention of innovating their thinking. Leaders as individuals should interrogate their personal beliefs, attitudes and assumptions and determine the impact of these elements on their decision-making processes. Similarly, at organisational level, employees together with the leaders should question how the culture and espoused values of the organisation (or departments) affects the perceptions and responses towards a crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that some of the world's major challenges might only be resolved over and difficult procedure of co-creation. The situation demands a greater degree of collaboration and cooperation, it necessitates co-creation. Co-creation is rooted in an open-minded, positive attitude. It tends to be more of a proactive as opposed to a reactive approach.

The COVID-19 pandemic implied that going forward, effective leadership heavily depends on how well leaders are equipped to manage more change. It has also transformed the role of a leader, altered individuals' attitudes towards organisations and leaders in particular. Leaders in UKZN, SAEF need to

evolve and respond to a crisis with a reframed approach towards their subordinates by concentrating on the individuals holistically and on systems thinking and other social aspects.

6.3 Recommendations derived from the study

The findings of the study revealed that challenges in the SAHEC are influenced by interdependent factors such as the country's political history, socio-economic inequalities, and internal institutional policies. Therefore, the study recommends that education should be perceived and treated as an ecosystem. Leaders in the UKZN, SAEF need to encourage collaboration with both the private and public sectors, to ensure quality. The SAEF could also benefit from relationships with other Schools and Colleges within UKZN. Moreover, it is advisable for the UKZN, SAEF leaders to consider partnerships with neighbouring universities.

There is a need for the UKZN, SAEF to establish a crisis management plan. The plan should contain details of guidelines for information management, organisational activities, communication strategies, and channels and general precautionary actions to be taken during an emergency. The plan should be widely communicated and easily accessible to all members of the organisation.

The results of the study revealed issues of maintaining academic integrity during the transition from face-to-face teaching to online learning and highlighted the need to formulate and implement effective remote invigilation systems for online assessments. The study recommends that the leadership of the UKZN, SAEF should focus on determining long-term alternatives to contact teaching and learning. Such alternatives should be sustainable and practical for all students. Matching plans pertaining to the integrity of the assessments and safeguards against students' collaboration and plagiarism are necessary.

There is a need for leaders to concentrate on prioritising plans that improve the UKZN, SAEF as a whole system. Focusing just on individual components of this could result in unintended adverse consequences since the components (staff, students, education quality, systems, policies, and procedures) that contribute to the successful development are interdependent. Focusing on the whole system improves collegiality and resilience.

An investment in staff capacitation initiatives should be considered. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an adaptive and transformative trial with no formal strategies to enlighten appropriate reactions and secondly, students are diverse in culture, socio-economic background, and technical capabilities, so that the UKZN, SAEF staff needs to be well-trained on how to engage with different students appropriately and effectively.

Leaders in the UKZN, SAEF need to adjust the concept of their roles in the midst of a crisis and be

prepared to share and discuss their insights openly. Leaders need to ensure that both employees and students understand the reason behind their actions. There is a critical need to narrow the gap between a leader and his or her followers. Creating connections with subordinate staff can assist in shaping desired behavioural patterns and determination a leader needs from his or her staff.

The results of the study highlighted the need for self-leadership in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges presented required leaders to be conscious of how they perceive themselves and their role in the midst of a complex situation. Thus, the study recommends that leaders in UKZN, SAEF must engage in activities that promote self-awareness, for example, reflection, journaling, and meditation. Complex situations require leaders to perceive and interpret the situation consciously without any downloaded mental commentary. There is a critical need for leaders to interrogate their assumptions and beliefs when dealing with an ambiguous problem.

Frequent and clear communication is of utmost importance. Leaders in the UKZN, SAEF need to make good use of the organisation's communication channels and should ensure that information-sharing is imbedded in the culture of the organisation. Frequent information eliminates anxiety and confusion. Leaders also need to make sure that the organisation's communication channels allow employees to provide feedback

Leaders in the UKZN, SAEF must value and practice empathy. By demonstrating empathy and compassion, leaders can foster loyalty and trust from the employees. A crisis triggers psychological distress so leaders need to respond to individual staff sympathetically. Leaders also need to understand that employees' personal circumstances, fears and limitations are different and they must be prepared to adjust their approach as they engage with different staff members.

Due to the adaptive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the results of the study highlight the need for leaders to transform from their traditional leadership approaches, and organisational culture and adapt to technological strategies to maintain effectiveness. The results of the study advocate that a combination of adaptive and inclusive leadership styles is suitable in the midst of a crisis. The study encourages leaders in UKZN, SAEF to promote staff participation in the decision-making process in order to develop inclusive solutions. This will improve staff engagement and the performance of the entire team.

6.4 De-limitation of the study

The interviewing of participants was limited to the UKZN, SAEF leaders. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the focus was on one School. Secondly, the study focused on the perspective of leaders only and the views of remainder of the staff within the School were not represented.

6.5 Limitation of the study

The study utilised a single form of data collection method – interviews. However, principles of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability were applied to maintain trustworthiness of the study.

6.5 Recommendation for Future Research

Future research can examine the leadership challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic from other four Schools in the College of Law and Management Studies, or all nineteen in UKZN and other neighbouring universities. Further studies can incorporate the perceptions of effective leadership styles from staff members who are not in leadership positions to attain additional viewpoints.

Further studies can examine the impact of organisational culture on leadership and strategy implementation. Such studies can incorporate the influence of decision-making process on the desired outcome.

6.6 Conclusion

This study introduced the research topic by discussing the background and context and the problem statement. The aim of this study was to identify leadership challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic in the UKZN, SAEF, and to evaluate how consciousness, presencing, and intuition can be incorporated into leadership through the Theory U application model.

The literature review in chapter two focused on the VUCA concept in context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implications of it in the higher education sector in South Africa. The VUCA model together with the VUCA action framework was presented and four principles were discussed; 1) vision, 2) understanding, 3) courage and clarity and 4) Agility and adaptability. The chapter further examined existing challenges in higher education environment and lastly identified leadership challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter also introduced the concept of Theory U as a management and leadership development tool. Seven principles underpinning the theory were presented.

A research methodology was presented in chapter three. The study was analysed qualitatively using semi-structured interviews. A research instrument consisting of 17 open-ended questions was constructed and used. A purposive sampling method was utilised to identify the sample of the study. The study was conducted using ten leaders from the SAEF. The sample were sought based on their experience and leadership obligations during the pandemic.

The data collected from the interviews was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Nine themes emerged from the analysis, namely, Government's Contribution, Socio-Economic Issues, Internal Organisational Challenges, Crisis Management Dilemma, Digital Transformation Paradox, Demanding Commitment, Leadership Behaviour, Leadership Competencies and Leadership Styles. These themes were presented in the results in chapter 4. The themes resulting from the data examination, summarised the persistent VUCA challenges that exist in the Higher Education environment, the leadership challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic, and various leadership approaches deemed essential by leaders in the SAEF to navigate the challenges. The results chapter further revealed the interconnectedness between the challenges and discussed the idea of perceiving and addressing the COVID-19 pandemic challenges as a systems-thinking problem. Systems-thinking can assist in identifying the root causes of the challenges and can recognise strong leverage points for intervention.

The generated themes were discussed in comparison with those existing in the literature in chapter 5. The findings suggest that the leadership role is evolving and new innovative thinking patterns, improved skills and specific competencies are necessary. The findings highlight the need for leaders to engage in self-awareness practices, to adopt an inclusive decision-making process, to demonstrate empathy and humility, to focus on practical solutions, to be resilient against calamity, and to be agile. The findings of the study suggest that although the pandemic enforced digital transformation which is needed and overdue, but similar to any situation that involves change, challenges are part and parcel of the process. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a new set of challenges for leaders in the UKZN, SAEF.

Three objectives were effectively pursued and discussed. The first objective was to examine challenges facing leaders in the UKZN, SAEF in the volatile uncertain complex and ambiguous environment. The findings of the study reveal that the challenges in the SAHEC are influenced by the nation's political history, socio-economic inequalities and internal institutional policies. The challenges facing the UKZN, SAEF leaders in the VUCA environment are mainly centred around inadequate financial support and admissions policies from the government. The existing socio-economic inequalities in the country, contribute to the challenges in the education sector. The political history and socio-economic inequalities exacerbated the problems which led to the digital divide and additional financial strains since students and academic institutions were not 'equally prepared' for the COVID-19 pandemic demands. The study also discussed how academic institutions contribute to the complexity in the environment through their stringent academic promotions policy and increased workloads which results in brain drain.

The second objective involved identifying leadership challenges that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic in the UKZN, SAEF. The findings of the study revealed that leaders worked longer hours during the COVID-19 pandemic and struggled to balance personal life and work-life. Participants

highlighted the difficulty in managing staff remotely especially getting quick responses to email correspondence. Staff resistance was identified as a challenge that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff were fixated on the traditional ways of operation and were unfamiliar and sceptical of online teaching and learning. Because the COVID-19 pandemic demanded prompt responses, Leaders were challenged with managing the immediate transition as there was not sufficient time to plan and to test systems and, as a result, leaders in the UKZN, SAEF were challenged with maintaining academic integrity as all assessments were conducted online. Leaders identified the gap and delay in communication between the University executive Board of Committees and the leaders in the Colleges and Schools.

The third objective involved exploring how Theory U can assist leaders in the UKZN, SAEF to navigate the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders are presented with the greatest challenge of leading in the VUCA environment. The findings of the study reveal that this adverse situation requires leaders to let go of the conventional ways of leadership, to adopt innovative strategies and to transform their mindsets. This research demonstrated how Theory U can assist leaders in the UKZN, SAEF to navigate the current situation, to see beyond the hardships and to recognise emerging opportunities by addressing the challenges in a conscious and calculated manner. The findings of this study advocate that Theory U should be applied as a framework for management and learning. It can be used by leaders in the UKZN, SAEF as a change management technique to break through old unproductive behavioural patterns which hamper efficient and effective decision-making including avoiding the barriers that prevent leaders from empathising with their employees and students. Leaders in the UKZN, SAEF can use Theory U as a practical tool by applying the five principles that were devised for collectively designing the future that develops when moving from co-initiating, through co-sensing, by co-inspiring, and via co-creating to co-evolving.

This research recommends that education should be perceived and treated as an ecosystem. Leaders in the UKZN, SAEF need to collaborate with both the private and public sectors, to promote quality. In addition, a relationship with other Schools within UKZN can assist leaders in streamlining their processes and procedures. The Covid-19 pandemic has emphasised the urgent need for leaders in the UKZN, SAEF to establish a crisis management strategy and effective communication channels. The study further recommends that leadership of the UKZN, SAEF should prioritise the determining of a long-term sustainable alternative to contact teaching and learning.

When developing strategic plans, leaders in the UKZN, SAEF should prioritise plans that improve the School holistically as a system. A system is required that provides accessible quality education, capacitated staff, efficient technological systems and comprehensive sustainable solutions This will promote collegiality and resilience. The research further recommends that leaders invest in self-

transformation practices which will enable them to interrogate their thinking patterns, attitudes and beliefs and also to re-examine their leadership approaches during a crisis. This will assist in promoting openness to various solutions and should be flexible to change.

The COVID-19 pandemic demanded leaders and organisations as systems to adopt a sense-making standpoint on crisis and change management. Effective leadership (which encompasses leading the organisation, leading people and leading the individual self simultaneously) can conjure a strong positive impact on the desirable solutions and responses to mitigate the VUCA emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic. Adopting Theory U as a change management tool and a transformation framework can assist leaders and employees to develop and pursue a shared vision.

It should be acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic has evolved the leadership role and the intricacy of it. Leadership development is at the forefront of organisational success. Adverse situations call for leaders to open their minds – perceive the situation consciously and see the opportunities as they arise, open their hearts -be sympathetic and understand the needs of those affected, and to open their will -demonstrate willingness and commitment to being part of the solution and embrace knowledge and insights from all directions.

In conclusion, the findings of the study can be summarised into two critical points, 1) the global COVID-19 crisis demands effective leadership and a collective change. 2) The essence of leadership is the leaders' ability to manage change and to be innovative in their thinking. The following quotation encapsulates these findings:

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.” (Harris & Stewart, 1982:94)

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APPENDIX A: Informed Consent Forms

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

For research with human participants

INFORMED CONSENT RESOURCE TEMPLATE

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 15 September 2021

Dear Participant,

My name is Smangele Ninela from the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, UKZN. I can be contacted telephonically on 031 2603198 and via email ninelas@ukzn.ac.za

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves qualitative research. The aim of this study is to determine how Theory U can be used to develop leadership skills in the UKZN School of Accounting, Economics and Finance (SAEF) to navigate the VUCA emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic. The study is expected to enroll 10 participants from the UKZN SAEF. It will involve a data collection process through semi-structured interviews. The duration of your participation if you choose to enroll and remain in the study is expected to be one 1 hour. The study is not funded by any organisation.

The study does not involve any foreseeable risk or discomfort and will provide no direct benefits to participants as individuals but the study should be beneficial to the UKZN SAEF as a whole. The research will provide insight into possible leadership development approaches which are practical and aligned to the operations of the Department. The research should benefit the UKZN SAEF by analysing the impact and identifying the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and by recommending comprehensive solutions.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number HSSREC/00002930/2021).

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 are as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email:

HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate and withdraw from the project at any given time with no consequences. You may inform the researcher of your withdrawal via email notification.

They will be no monetary gain from participating in this project.

Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained by the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, UKZN. The results will be presented in a generalised manner. Data will be stored in encrypted files and access will be limited to the researcher and the supervisor of the study.

BREC UKZN Oct 2008

1

CONSENT

I _____ have been informed about the study entitled “*The role of Theory U in developing leadership skills in Higher Education to navigate the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic*” by Miss Simangele Ninela.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

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

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

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher on 0312603198 or ninelas@ukzn.ac.za

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

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview YES / NO

Video-record my interview YES / NO

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX B: Interview Schedule

Interview questions

1. What is your position in the UKZN School of Accounting, Economics and Finance (SAEF)?
2. Do you consider yourself to be a leader? Please elaborate.
3. How would you describe the environment in the Higher Education sector in South Africa?
4. What are your thoughts on the role of leadership in Higher Education?
5. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected you?
6. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the University?
7. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the SAEF?
8. How did the SAEF respond to the challenges presented and what leadership approach was taken?
9. What is your understanding of VUCA?
10. What challenges do the VUCA present to the SAEF?
11. What are the leadership challenges that you experienced in your workspace during the COVID-19 pandemic?
12. Are there specific leadership styles that you used to address the challenges? Please elaborate.
13. Is there anything you wish could have been done differently to deal with the challenges?
14. What are your thoughts on Inner Leadership (Leading from within)? Is this important? Please elaborate.
15. Do you think mindsets, beliefs and attitudes affect the way we perceive a situation? Please elaborate.
16. How can leaders in Higher Education navigate the VUCA emanating from the pandemic?
17. Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX C: Gatekeepers Letter



21 May 2021

Miss Smangele Princess Ninela (SN 206515011)
Graduate School of Business and Leadership
College of Law and Management Studies
Westville Campus UKZN
Email: Ninelas@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Miss Ninela

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), towards your postgraduate degree, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"The role of Theory U in developing leadership skills to navigate volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Accounting, Economics and Finance."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting semi-structured interviews with leaders in the School of Accounting, Economics and Finance (Taking in account the regulations imposed during lockdown ie restrictions on gatherings, travel, social distancing etc. Zoom, Skype or telephone interviews recommended) on the Westville Campus.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using the 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely



Office of the Registrar

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

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 7971 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX D: Ethical Clearance Approval Letter



15 July 2021

Ms Smangele Princess Ninela (200301328)
Grad School Of Bus & Leadership
Westville Campus

Dear Ms Ninela,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002930/2021

Project title: The role of Theory U in developing leadership skills to navigate volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Accounting, Economics and Finance

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 08 June 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

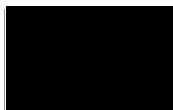
This approval is valid until 15 July 2022.

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

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

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

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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

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

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX E: Letter from Editor

Asoka ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITING
45 Vausedale Crescent, Escombe, 4093.

Cell no.: [REDACTED]

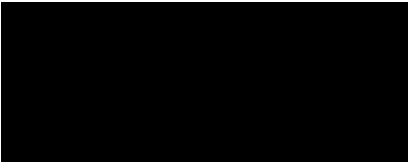


DECLARATION

This is to certify that THE Dissertation below has been English Language Edited

The role of Theory U in developing leadership skills in navigating volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity in the University of KwaZulu Natal, School of Accountancy, Economics and Finance

Candidate: Ninela S



DISCLAIMER

Whilst the English language editor has used electronic track changes to facilitate corrections and has inserted comments and queries in a right-hand column, the responsibility for effecting changes in the final, submitted document, remains the responsibility of the client and the editor cannot be held responsible for the quality of English Language expression used in corrections or additions effected subsequent to the transmission of this certificate on 07/02/2022.

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APPENDIX F: Turnitin Report



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