

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**The supermarket employees preferences on leadership styles  
required during the COVID-19 crisis in KwaZulu-Natal,  
Pietermaritzburg**

**by**

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for the degree of Master of Commerce**

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## DECLARATION

I, Naadirah Bux, declare that:

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## ABSTRACT

The coronavirus pandemic was an unprecedented crisis that severely impacted the globe. The COVID-19 pandemic caught leaders within the food retail industry off-guard. Supermarkets within the food retail industry were severely impacted by the changes of COVID-19. Leaders needed to quickly identify challenges and evaluate what their organisations needed in order to survive. Hence, effective leadership was required to overcome this crisis situation. Leadership styles play an important role in dealing with crises, as they assist leaders in choosing which type of leadership style to adopt to ensure their employees remain motivated and continue to work towards the goals of the organisation so that it survives and remains successful during a crisis. The aim of the study was to explore supermarket employees' preferences for leadership styles during the COVID-19 crisis in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

The study followed a qualitative interpretivism approach to gain an in-depth understanding of which leadership style was most preferred by supermarket employees while working during the COVID-19 crisis. This research study involved conducting interviews with ten participants who were employed in various supermarkets in Pietermaritzburg throughout the COVID-19 crisis. It explored what aspects of a leadership style supermarket employees prefer now compared to those used prior to COVID-19 and to determine which leadership style motivates supermarket employees to work towards their supermarket's goals. It was found that prior to the pandemic, supermarket leaders used transformational, transactional, democratic and autocratic leadership styles. However, after the COVID-19 crisis, leaders had to change their leadership style to adapt to the changes brought about by the pandemic and include an adaptive leadership style in their approach. It was deduced from the findings of the study that there is no one specific leadership style that can be used to directly address the coronavirus pandemic. That is, each leadership style presents its own unique set of strengths and weaknesses.

Leaders had to engage with their employees to determine which type of leadership style they preferred to motivate them to work towards the goals of their supermarket. The reality is that COVID-19 is not the first crisis that the world has faced, and it will not be the last. If leaders continue to ignore the effects of the pandemic, it could lead to the demise of certain supermarkets within the food retail industry. Therefore, the greater the understanding gained about pandemics, the better equipped leaders will be to confront the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic and any other crises that may arise in the future.

**Keywords: COVID-19, crisis, leadership, leadership styles, survival, supermarkets.**

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# CHAPTER ONE

## OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

### 1.1. Introduction and background

“When written in Chinese, the word crisis is composed of two characters; one represents danger and the other represents opportunity—John F. Kennedy” (Change Factory, 2014). From a leadership perspective, when organisations are faced with unexpected changes or moments of crisis, a leader needs to identify the danger and seek out opportunities from within the crisis. Hence, leaders must be able to use or adapt their characteristics and leadership styles to try and bring about opportunities from the dangers that follow the crisis to direct employees in order to survive and ensure organisational success.

One of the largest industries in South Africa is the retail sector. The food retail industry within the retail sector accounts for 60% of all retail sales (Veneto, 2013). The South African food retail industry is highly saturated with major corporate supermarket chains that play a crucial role in South Africa’s economy (Wood, 2021). For example, the food retail sector employs 22% of the national labour force and is estimated to employ an average of 2 825 000 people. In addition, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2020) states that the food retail industry is an entrance to meet consumers, contributes to 5% of a country’s GDP and employs one in twelve workers, resulting in this industry being of great importance. As a result, the food retail industry is considered the backbone of South Africa’s economy as it promotes the country’s economic growth by providing job opportunities and supplying the public with goods and services that meet their essential needs (Veneto, 2013; Singh, Garg & Deshmukh, 2008).

Telukdarie, Munsamy and Mohlala (2020) state that the COVID-19 crisis is unprecedented and has majorly impacted all global organisations. Due to the pandemic, multiple changes, disruptions and challenges occurred, resulting in the introduction of new policies and procedures that all businesses had to adapt to and abide by (Plessis & Keyter, 2020). These regulations included rules surrounding national lockdown measures, sanitising, social distancing and the use of face masks (Saleh, 2021). Many companies had no choice but to shut down due to lockdown measures to minimise the spread of the virus (Allen, 2021). Thus, companies struggled to survive the effects of the COVID-19 crisis. According to the OECD (2020), the coronavirus pandemic significantly disrupted the retail industry and sent huge shockwaves through companies, especially essential small and large retailers. During the national lockdowns, essential service providers, such as supermarkets, were required to remain open. This put pressure on leaders to keep their businesses functioning by creating certain strategies and finding new

ways to manage their businesses (Allen, 2021; Kaul, Shah & El-Serag, 2020). Hence, leaders faced the added pressure of keeping their companies operational despite the challenges brought on by the pandemic (Allen, 2021).

When confronted by a crisis, leaders need to quickly establish what their company needs in order to survive. In addition, they need to determine how challenges can be addressed adeptly (Allen, 2021). Plessis and Keyter (2020) assert that a more proactive approach to leadership rather than a reactive approach is required when dealing with the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis or any other future challenge. Leaders must be willing to change their old patterns of leadership to address the new changes they are faced with to survive and succeed under pandemic conditions (Koh, 2020; Plessis & Keyter, 2020). Hence, effective leadership is important to overcome the COVID-19 crisis or any other future crisis (Chen & Sriphon, 2021).

Voon, Lo, Ngui and Ayob (2011) explain that a leader influences employee behaviour so that they work towards reaching the organisation's goals and objectives. The type of leadership style adopted by an organisation's leaders directly influences employees to work towards the organisation's goals and ultimately influences the success of the organisation. Therefore, leadership styles directly influence organisational performance (Purvanova, 2009). Leadership styles play an important role in dealing with crises, such as COVID-19, as they assist leaders in understanding and choosing which type of leadership style to adopt to ensure their employees remain motivated and continue to work towards the goals of the organisation so that it survives and remains successful during the COVID-19 crisis or any other future crisis (Plessis & Keyter, 2020). COVID-19 was an unprecedented crisis and not much research has been done to determine the types of leadership styles employees of supermarkets favour while working during a pandemic. As a result, this research study adds value by helping leaders understand the types of leadership styles employees of supermarkets in Pietermaritzburg favoured while working during the COVID-19 crisis.

## 1.2. Significance and contribution of the study

This research is relevant as the world had recently faced a new health challenge in the form of the coronavirus pandemic. The solution to this pandemic does not seem to be found soon but rather it is a crisis that the world had to adapt to and live with for the long term (Telukdarie *et al.*, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on supermarkets within the food retail industry. Many supermarkets within the food retail industry have closed due to the negative impact of the pandemic, as leaders were not able to adjust and lead their employees in a manner that targeted the changes COVID-19 had brought about (Chen & Sriphon, 2021; Wood, 2021). As a result, the type of leadership style a leader adopts plays a crucial role in motivating, encouraging and directing employees within any

organisation towards reaching their set goals and objectives (Al Khajeh, 2018). It is therefore important to understand which leadership style worked more effectively and was most favoured by employees while working during the COVID-19 crisis. If leaders continue to ignore the effects of the pandemic, it could lead to the demise of certain supermarkets within the food retail industry. Hence, the more that is learned about this topic, the more prepared leaders will be to face the pandemic.

According to Griffin and Denholm (2020), the reality is that COVID-19 is not the first crisis that the world has faced, and it will not be the last. Due to urbanisation, globalisation, climate change and deforestation, we expose ourselves to unknown pathogens that bring about emerging infectious diseases (Lindahl & Grace, 2015). As a result, it is vital for leaders to understand what style of leadership works best for their employees to ensure their organisation's survival and attain overall success (Bhargavi, 2016). Hence, the more leaders learn and understand, the more prepared they will be to face major changes in the future.

This research study contributes and adds value to supermarket leaders in the food retail industry as it determines which leadership styles are most preferred by employees working during the COVID-19 crisis. It helps gain insight into leadership and the different types of leadership style leaders can adopt to deal with crises. Thus, this research study raises awareness about the importance of choosing the correct leadership style to ensure employees are motivated and continue to work towards the goals of the organisation. This is essential for the organisation's survival and success in adapting to the new normal (Bhargavi, 2016).

### 1.3. Research problem statement

Understanding employees in terms of their skills, strengths, weaknesses, core capabilities, knowledge and experience is vital in every business. Leaders play an important role in determining what style of leadership works well for employees in order to motivate and direct them to reach the desired goals of the organisation (Hamel, 2018). Hence, the type of leadership style a leader adopts is important in this regard. The COVID-19 pandemic caught leaders within the food retail industry off-guard (OECD, 2020). Leaders are now faced with all the major changes and challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought. For example, lockdowns, social distancing, the use of face masks, remote working, the use of sanitisers, and many other changes followed (Saleh, 2021).

The food retail industry is considered an essential service provider and was required to remain open. Supermarkets within the food retail industry were severely impacted by COVID-19 as their employees deal directly with consumers daily. The way leaders in the food retail industry encourage and motivate their employees to work during a crisis is important in order to ensure their organisation's survival and

success. (Vento, 2013). Hence, the correct leadership style needs to be adopted to ensure that employees are inspired and motivated to work towards the organisation's goals (Garretson, 2021). Leaders need to identify the type of leadership style they used prior to COVID-19 and determine if it would remain effective in leading and motivating employees during the COVID-19 crisis.

Consequently, it was crucial for leaders to adapt and adjust their leadership style to address the changes of the pandemic to ensure their employees work towards the goals of the organisation (Plessis & Keyter, 2020). It was important to explore what type of leadership styles employees of supermarkets working during the COVID-19 crisis preferred in order for them to be motivated and strive towards their organisation's goals.

#### 1.4. Research aim and objectives

The research aim of the study is to explore the supermarket employees' preferences on leadership styles required during the COVID-19 crisis in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

The research study's set objectives and sub-objectives are as follows:

- To determine which leadership style is most preferred by supermarket employees while working during the COVID-19 crisis in Pietermaritzburg, Kwa-Zulu Natal.
- To identify how supermarket employees perceive their leader's current leadership style.
- To determine which leadership style motivates supermarket employees to work towards their supermarket's goals.
- To determine the challenges supermarket employees faced when coping with the changes of the COVID-19 crisis in Pietermaritzburg, Kwa-Zulu Natal.

#### 1.5. Research questions

The study posed a main research question, followed by sub-questions, namely:

- Which leadership style is most preferred by supermarket employees while working during the COVID-19 crisis in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg?
- How do supermarket employees perceive their leaders current leadership style?
- Which leadership style motivates supermarket employees to work towards their supermarket's goals?
- What challenges did supermarket employees face when coping with the changes of the COVID-19 crisis in Pietermaritzburg, Kwa-Zulu Natal.

## 1.6. Outline of the study

The research study is presented as follows:

Chapter One provided an introduction to the research topic, including the rationale behind the study as well as the research problem statement. Furthermore, it outlined the research aims and objectives, including the research questions that needed to be addressed.

Chapter Two presents a literature review. The literature review contains a theoretical foundation summarising the leader-member exchange theory (LMX). Thereafter, key concepts such as leadership and leadership styles are explained. Furthermore, it reviews literature from secondary sources, such as journal articles and books, pertaining to leadership, leadership styles and other related themes.

Chapter Three explains in detail the research method used to collect and analyse data, as well as the reasoning behind the chosen method, so that conclusions can be drawn.

Chapter Four focuses on the presentation and interpretation of the results. The findings are discussed in context of their relation to theory and previous literature pertaining to the objectives of this study.

Chapter Five concludes the research study's findings. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made pertaining to the study. Furthermore, limitations pertaining to this study are identified and discussed, in addition to recommendations for further research.

## 1.7. Summary

This chapter introduced the importance of understanding what type of leadership style employees of supermarkets working during the COVID-19 crisis prefer for them to be motivated and strive towards their organisation's goals to ensure their survival and success. The nature of the research was summarised, and the problem statement was formulated together with the research aim, objectives and questions. The next chapter will focus on the literature review.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Introduction

A literature review is a critical assessment of a topic. As a result, it helps guide a researcher in the right direction in terms of putting context into their findings. This chapter first discusses concepts pertaining to leadership and leadership styles. Secondly, how different types of leadership styles can be used in times of crisis are discussed critically and aspects relating to employees and leadership styles are summarised. Thirdly, it introduces the LMX theory of leadership as the basis for the theoretical foundation of this research study. These three components, combined, form the literature review of the study.

#### 2.2. Concept of leadership

Leadership is a difficult concept to define. Silva (2016) reported that over the past four decades, many different definitions of leadership arose from different scholars. According to Yukl and Gardner (2020) leadership can be defined in terms of an individual's behaviour, traits, relationship role, influence and interaction patterns. Hence, there is no one single definition of leadership but rather the definition of leadership depends on the interests of the researcher and the type of problem or situation being faced. Subsequently, among others, leadership can be defined as the act of influencing the tasks of an organised group of individuals with the intention of setting goals and achieving them (Stogdill, 1950). Similarly, Tannenbaum, Weschler and Massarik (1961) emphasised that leadership consists of an interpersonal influence used in certain circumstances and is directed through communication towards the fulfilment of specific goals. However, Kotter (1988) argued a new different viewpoint and defined leadership as the process of moving a group of individuals in a specific direction by using non-coercive means. Bwalya (2023) expands on Kotter's definition and describes leadership as a person's ability to inspire, motivate and guide individuals or groups collectively to work towards the achievement of a common goal. In addition, McCauley (2024) asserts that leadership can be defined by producing three outcomes, namely direction, alignment and commitment. That is, leadership is a process where an individual works together with employees to generate results that they could not reach if they worked alone. As a result, leadership is an evolving concept, but it could be summarised as the manner of influencing individuals to achieve common goals. Hence, leadership is present when a leader is able to exercise influence over his/her followers (Brevis & Vrba, 2014). For the purpose of this study, leadership will be defined as an individual's influence over their employees in motivating them to achieving specific goals.

Kaiser, Hogan and Craig (2008) asserted that leadership focuses on bringing individuals together and joining their efforts to promote the success and survival of an organisation. It consists of influencing people to willingly work towards the good of the organisation, and it requires guiding and directing individuals to achieve organisational goals (Kaiser *et al.*, 2008). In order to accomplish this, effective leadership is required. According to Kouzes and Posner (2002), effective leadership demands a leader to be intuitive and self-aware. It requires one to be organised, to have the ability to constantly communicate and reinforce a shared future vision, and to be able to successfully keep employees motivated to work (Klingborg, Moore & Hammond, 2006). Thus, leadership is linked to the success or failure of a company (Al Khajeh, 2018). As a result, leaders must be able to influence employees by inspiring, motivating and directing employee behaviour so that they achieve organisational goals (Khan, Bhat & Hussanie, 2017; Gandolfi & Stone, 2018). Therefore, the concept of leadership is relevant to this study, as it is important for leaders of supermarkets to understand that they need to evaluate their leadership role and how they should inspire, motivate, direct and influence their employees to work during the COVID-19 crisis in order to attain the goals of their supermarkets.

### 2.3. Leadership styles: the importance and types of leadership styles

Every leader has a certain leadership style. Al Khajeh (2018) explains that a leadership style is the technique a leader uses towards people in order to direct or motivate them to reach the goals of the organisation. Hence, a leadership style refers to the traits, characteristic behaviours or approaches that a leader chooses to use when directing, motivating and guiding employees to reach their organisation's goals (Cherry, 2021; Al Khajeh, 2018). Leadership can be considered as a pattern related to managerial behaviour, which is made to combine organisational or personal interests, so that certain objectives are achieved (Mitonga-Monga & Coetzee, 2012). However, it is important for leaders to examine their internal and external environments and choose or change their leadership style when necessary. Furthermore, leadership styles are important as they directly influence employee behaviour, thus affecting their performance, attitude, motivation levels and satisfaction (Warrick, 1981; Yasir, Imran, Irshad, Mohamad & Khan, 2016).

Subsequently, Smyth (2021) argued that it is important to understand the various styles of leadership as it helps one to become an effective leader, as an effective leader acquires the best performance out of their employees. Furthermore, leadership styles are crucial, as they provide leaders with insights into the most effective approach to adopt to keep their employees motivated to work towards the goals of their company (Glaser, 2019; Smyth, 2021). Many different types of leadership styles have been found throughout literature (Murari, 2011). According to Bwalya (2023) there are various leadership styles that can significantly impact the productivity and culture of an organisation. Among others, some of the

most prominent leadership styles are transformational leadership, transactional leadership, autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, servant leadership and adaptive leadership.

A *transformational leadership style* focuses on the development of people and their needs (Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy, 2014). According to Al Khajeh (2018), the main aim of transformational leadership is to “transform” individuals and organisations. That is, transformational leaders concentrate on transforming individuals by promoting creativity and personal growth (Bwalya, 2023). Brevis and Vrba (2014) define transformational leadership as a process where leaders and followers lift each other to greater levels of morality and motivation. A leader with a transformational leadership style must be able influence their employees that leads to them having trust, loyalty and respect for their leader, resulting in them being motivated and working beyond what they are expected to do. Furthermore, a transformational leader must be able to inspire confidence, employee respect and communication through a shared vision, which results in higher productivity levels, stronger employee morale and job satisfaction (Sfantou, Laliotis, Patelarou, Pistolla, Matalliotakis & Patelarou, 2017). Hence, a transformational leadership style is determined by establishing relationships and motivating employees. In addition, Sofi and Devanadhen (2015) assert that transformational leadership has a major influence on organisational performance. Thus, transformational leadership and organisational performance are linked.

A *transactional leadership style* focuses on the exchange of rewards or punishments for compliance between a leader and follower (Bass, 1985; Burns 1978; Brevis & Vrba, 2014; Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013). As a result, a leader achieves their goals and retains organisational stability through a system of rewards and punishments (Bwalya, 2023). A transactional leader appeals to employee self-interest to motivate them towards attaining the goals of an organisation. Bass and Avolio (1997) assert that transactional leaders portray three transactional styles, namely: contingent reward, active management by exception and passive management by exception. Hence, a transactional leader functions as a manager of change, that is, making deals with employees that result in an improvement of their work (Burns, 1978).

An *autocratic leadership style* allows an autocratic leader to have full control over all the decision-making within the organisation and takes minimal suggestions from employees (Bwalya, 2023; Maqsood, Bilal & Baig, 2013; Ardichvili & Kuchenke, 2010; Egwunyenga, 2010). Therefore, autocratic leaders use their own ideas and judgements to make decisions and disregard those of their employees (Chukwusa, 2019). With an autocratic leadership style, central authority is strong and autocratic leaders believe in power centralisation (Demirtas & Karaca, 2020; Wachira, Gitumu & Mbugua, 2017). Hence, autocratic leaders have no trust in their employees and believe that only rewards can motivate them to behave in a reciprocal way.

A *democratic leadership style* allows employees to partake in the decision-making process within a company; however, democratic leaders will eventually make the final decision (Starrat, 2001; Bhatti, Maitlo, Shaikh, Hashmi & Shaikh, 2012). According to Demirtas and Karaca (2020), a democratic leader allows ideas to be freely expressed and openly discussed. Democratic leaders must establish a work environment where they empower and motivate their employees to perform their work productively (Jimoh, Olayide & Saheed, 2012). Hence, a democratic leadership style places trust in employees' decision-making capabilities and emphasises involvement and collaboration from all employees (Bwalya, 2023).

A *servant leadership style* refers to where a leader attains authority rather than power over their employees by interacting with them in a certain manner (Kenton, 2021). The authority of a servant leader will encourage innovation and empower and guarantee the well-being of their employees. According to Dierendonck (2010), a servant leader uses traits such as empathy, stewardship and commitment towards their employees to create a learning organisation that secures their personal growth and value. Hence, servant leadership aims to establish leadership qualities in employees (Kenton, 2021).

Lastly, an *adaptive leadership style* refers to leaders being able to quickly change and adapt under any circumstances or crisis (Ramalingam, Nabarro, Oqubay, Carnall & Wild, 2020). Adaptive leaders aid employees in adapting when faced with challenges and prepare them to confront the processes of change. According to Ramalingam *et al.* (2020), an adaptive leadership style encourages leaders to identify, intervene and innovate as a way of establishing capabilities that will align with the goals of the organisation. Adaptive leaders are willing to consider employees' views to assure them that they are respected and valued (Hale, 2023). Hence, adaptive leaders recognise the best way to introduce change to ensure employees embrace it quickly.

Therefore, the concept of leadership styles is relevant to the study, as leaders need to completely understand what each type of style entails and the significance of adopting the correct leadership style to use when interacting with employees. In addition, these concepts help leaders determine which leadership style employees favour when working during the COVID-19 crisis.

## 2.4. Coping with change and the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis

Jalagat (2016) asserts that change is unavoidable and as a result it cannot be stopped. Consequently, organisations have to learn how to cope and adapt to these changes to ensure their survival. Chen and Sriphon (2021) assert that the international spread of the coronavirus pandemic has caused socio-economic responses that negatively impacted the lives of society, businesses, economic activities and organisational culture. The emergence of Covid-19 created many challenges for leaders in terms of which they had to change their coping strategies and find new ways to cope and adapt to the pandemic. Hence, the unexpected changes of Covid-19 and lockdown measures put pressure on leaders to keep their organisations running by learning new lessons on how to manage their organisations (Allen, 2020; Kaul, Shah & El-Serag, 2020). Furthermore, the challenges brought on by the pandemic and the changes due to lockdown rules resulted in organisations changing all their strategies, processes and procedures in order to transform the organisation to adapt and cope with the changes under the new normal (Telukdarie *et al*, 2020).

Subsequently with the Coronavirus and its challenges, there is volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity that require quick high impact decisions to be made with minimal information gathered (Kaul *et al*, 2020). Leaders need to be able to identify a need for urgency to change, create a new vision for their organisations and empower employees towards reaching the goals of the organisation in order to survive and remain successful under the new normal. In addition, leaders need to identify any resistance to change and effectively manage the resistance within their organisations in order to survive and remain successful under the new normal. Iszatt-White and Saunders (2017) assert the types of resistance to change are shock, denial, awareness of incompetence, acceptance, testing, search for a meaning and integration. However, resistance to change with regards to the Covid-19 pandemic is far more difficult for leaders to identify and manage. Hence, leaders need to be proactive and empathetic in order to deal with and avoid resistance to change within organisations.

Furthermore, Andersen (2020) explains that the challenges brought on by Covid-19 is too much for employees to handle. Safety and job security concerns, as well as the introduction of remote working, new technologies and new processes and procedures to follow have proven to be overwhelming for employees resulting in them resisting change within their organisations. Leaders need to ensure that they manage these challenges well in order to ensure the survival of their organisations in the future. In addition, Andersen (2020) asserts that there are levels to resistance, namely: cognitive and emotional level. The cognitive level of resistance refers to the fact that many people do not understand the change and the emotional level of resistance refers to the fact that people do not like the change. Hence, leaders need to anticipate and respond to the challenges by displaying empathy and offering direction, advice and support to employees (Issah, 2018).

Thus, when hit by crisis, leaders need to quickly evaluate what their organisation needs in order to survive. In addition, they need to determine how they can address the changes and challenges efficiently. Hence, effective leadership is required to overcome this situation (Chen & Sriphon, 2021). Subsequently, an organisation's success depends on the type of leadership style displayed by the organisation's leaders. Therefore, effective leadership is vital during times of crisis as an individual's leadership style directly influences the performance of an organisation (Purvanova, 2009). However, Koh (2020) asserts that leaders must be willing to change to survive and succeed under the new normal brought on by the pandemic. This concept is relevant to the study as the type of leadership style displayed by leaders during crisis is crucial and leaders need to evaluate whether their current leadership style is effective in these circumstances and change it when necessary (Haider, 2020).

## 2.5. Leadership during the COVID-19 crisis

The international spread of the coronavirus crisis has caused major challenges and placed significant demands on leaders at all levels and in all industries (D'Auria & De Smet, 2020). The uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19 crisis has forced changes to occur in all aspects of life. The first thing a leader must do is acknowledge that their company is facing a crisis. Perrow (1999) asserts that a crisis stems from either an environmental force, technological failures or human error. Furthermore, Perrow (1999) argues that there are three consequences to a crisis, namely, a surprise, a threat and limited time for decision-making. Hence, leaders need to quickly adapt and respond to the crisis (Plessis & Keyter, 2020; D'Auria & De Smet, 2020). Coombs and Holladay (2012) developed a three-step process that deals with crisis management from a leadership perspective. This includes prevention and preparation (pre-crisis), response to the crisis, and learning and revision (post-crisis). However, some crises are unexpected, such as the COVID-19 crisis. As a result, leaders cannot prevent or prepare in advance for crisis as they cannot recognise pre-crisis warning signals (Regester and Larking, 2002). Thus, leaders must adapt and respond quickly to the crisis when it occurs (Plessis & Keyter, 2020).

According to Pearson and Clair (1998), a crisis is distinguished by two factors, which are: uncertainty and determination. These two factors influence a leader's effectiveness and capabilities to evaluate information and make effective decisions in a short period of time to address the crisis. Billings, Milburn and Schaalman (1980) support this by emphasising that uncertainty and time pressure are important factors to consider during an emergency. Hence, leaders need to identify crises and quickly adapt to the changes. The coronavirus pandemic created a sense of urgency for change to occur within organisations. The changes brought on by the pandemic and lockdown rules resulted in organisations changing all their strategies, processes and procedures in order to transform the organisation in order to adapt and cope with the changes under the new normal (Telukdarie *et al.*, 2020). Leaders need to be able to identify a need for urgency to change, create a new vision for their organisations and empower employees

towards reaching the goals of the organisation in order to survive and remain successful under the new normal. In addition, leaders need to identify any resistance to change. Iszatt-White and Saunders (2017) assert that the types of resistance to change are shock, denial, awareness of incompetence, acceptance, testing, searching for meaning and integration. Leaders need to effectively manage the resistance within their organisations in order to survive and remain successful in the new normal.

Subsequently, the coronavirus pandemic has proven to be a difficult challenge for leaders worldwide. Certain leaders have managed to overcome the challenges of the crisis, while other leaders have not been successful (Al Mazrouei, 2023). The new reality is that leaders need to adopt a new approach to be effective during the COVID-19 crisis, as individuals' attitudes towards everything have changed (Mukherjee & Krish, 2021). That is, the pandemic psychologically impacted employees, which affected their attitudes and behaviour within the work environment (Rathi, Soomro, & Rehman, 2021). In order for employees to preserve their productivity levels, they had to quickly adjust to unknown work circumstances (Waizenegger, McKenna & Cai, 2020). As a result, leaders had to change and adapt their roles to become motivators within their organisation in order to ensure that they maintained and increased employee motivation and performance. Furthermore, companies across the world were swift in establishing new systems to counter the change of the COVID-19 crisis, including adapting their leadership styles to manage their staff (Al Mazrouei, 2023). The new adapted leadership styles were introduced to assist employees in maintaining their health and productivity. Hence, it is important for leaders to examine their internal and external environments and choose or change their leadership style when necessary (Mitonga-Monga & Coetzee, 2012). Under the new normal, leaders need to rethink their approach toward their employees. That is, leaders must evaluate if their previous way of associating with their employees remains effective or if they must alter the way they communicate with their employees.

Consequently, many of the common leadership models or theories have undergone changes in order to adapt to the changing circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic. Organisations and their leaders need to manage and lead their employees more effectively (Al Mazrouei, 2023). Hence, managing the COVID-19 crisis requires a leader to adopt a leadership style that is radically driven, more human-centric and direct. That is, a leader must be direct, able to take action and make quick decisions while working during a pandemic (Deloitte, 2020). Leaders need to identify their current leadership style and respond to the COVID-19 crisis by changing the way in which they lead. Therefore, it is vital for leaders to establish which leadership style employees favour when working during the COVID-19 crisis, as leadership styles motivate employees to work towards organisational goals.

During a crisis, leaders must understand how different leadership styles uniquely deal with crises, as each style has its own set of strengths and weaknesses (Plessis and Keyter, 2020). The most effective leadership styles to use in times of crises are the transformational, transactional, democratic, autocratic, servant and adaptive leadership styles (Plessis & Keyter, 2020). These leadership styles have traits that can address crises individually, or a leader can borrow traits from different leadership styles to address the crises.

*Transformational leadership style:* Transformational leaders have qualities that they can use to directly target and counteract some of the negative effects of a crisis (Bass, 1985). That is, they can respond quickly to change during an emergency (Kelly, 2005). The main characteristic of a transformational leadership style is a leader's idealised influence on their followers. Hence, transformational leaders should set an example of the core values, ideas and ethical principles that they can use during crises. Plessis and Keyter (2020) assert that during the coronavirus crisis, a leader's actions should be based on set standards. That is, leaders must fulfil promises made after the actual crisis has passed to ensure that their followers are loyal and trust them.

*Transactional leadership style:* A transactional leadership style focuses on the exchange of rewards for compliance. Transactional leaders need to ensure promises are kept in times of crises, as employees will not be motivated to work towards the organisation's goals if they break their promises (Plessis & Keyter, 2020). According to Germano (2010), transactional leaders are proficient in making agreements that motivate employees, thus proving to be beneficial to a company. These proficient agreements will guarantee a company's sustainability after a crisis or if a new crisis emerges in the future (Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013; Northouse, 2016).

*Democratic leadership style:* Democratic leaders focus on people during crisis and thus make decisions together with employees to reduce the consequences of crises (Preda, 2006; Plessis and Keyter, 2020). Preda (2006) asserts that a democratic leader focuses on individuals. The decisions made by a democratic leader together with their employees should be made to ensure a change to reduce the consequences of the crises or prevent future crises (Plessis and Keyter, 2020). Hence, during a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for employees to know that their democratic leaders focus on and care for them.

*Autocratic leadership style:* During crises, an autocratic leader becomes defensive about risk; as a result, autocratic leaders focus on ensuring that their strategies are in place (Preda, 2006). The main objective of an autocratic leadership style during crises is to accomplish tasks to ensure that the mitigating strategies are in place so that their implementation occurs on time to reduce the impact of the crises (Plessis and Keyter, 2020). Preda (2006) explains that employees are obedient towards their autocratic

leaders, which ensures that decisions are carried out timeously. Thus, the timely execution of decisions is crucial during crises.

*Servant leadership style:* Servant leaders focus on a sense of togetherness and belonging within a company and use certain traits and skills when dealing with crises; for example, listening skills, communication skills, decision-making skills, persuasion skills and emotional healing of employees (Spears, 2010; Plessis & Keyter, 2020). The skills of a servant leader mean that they should acquire consensus rather than compliance from their employees during crises. According to Spears (2010), servant leaders are able to foresee likely outcomes by understanding the past. That is, they are able to: learn from past situations; identify what is presently occurring; and understand the consequences of their decisions. These traits of a servant leader are vital for open and positive communication during crises (Plessis and Keyter, 2020).

*Adaptive leadership style:* Adaptive leaders can adapt in moments of crises, which safeguards the survival of their organisations (Plessis & Keyter, 2020). Adaptive leaders face adaptive problems, which consist of complex, technical and practical problems. These adaptive problems are difficult to define and describe. It requires leaders to use reflection and analysis to improve learning rather than using approaches that are commanding (Keyter, 2019). Furthermore, adaptive leaders need to control distress. That is, they need to influence their employees to feel the pressures of a crisis without overwhelming them. In addition, Plessis and Keyter (2020) assert that adaptive leaders need to keep their attention disciplined. This means that adaptive leaders must focus on the crisis at hand without paying attention to denial or personal attacks. Furthermore, adaptive leaders need to delegate work to their employees to ensure that everyone shares responsibility when dealing with crises.

This concept on the various leadership styles when dealing with crises is relevant for this study as it helps leaders understand that when dealing with a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, adopting the correct leadership style is crucial for the survival and success of the organisation. Leaders need to consider the strengths of each leadership style and employee preferences when choosing the correct type of leadership style to use when dealing with a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2.6. Employees and leadership styles

Organisations today face many different challenges. Hence, there is a great need for them to continuously improve and change their efficiency and effectiveness in order to survive and gain a competitive advantage (Buble, Juras & Matic, 2014). As a result, organisations need to exploit their employees full potential; thus, leadership plays a vital role in this process. Conger and Kanungo (1992) explain that the role of leadership is to provide direction, motivation and guidance to employees and for employees to gain commitment from their leaders and work in a specific direction in order to achieve organisational goals. Similarly, Burns (1978) asserts that leadership is a driving factor in ensuring that all functions lead to achieving all the organisation's goals and that it provides a means of communication to all employees within the organisation. Furthermore, Nurhaida and Jefri (2023) emphasise that leadership is a crucial factor in establishing the development of an organisation. Hence, leadership affects a company's efforts in creating and implementing its goals and determining whether they are successful or not.

Chaleff (1995) explains that leaders establish goals and lead their employees to achieve them. An organisation's survival depends on its ability to maintain its effectiveness and its readiness to achieve its goals. Hence, this can be achieved through effective leadership. For leadership to be effective, a leader needs to adopt a leadership style that will motivate employees to work towards the organisation's goals (Argyris, 1976). Employee motivation depends vastly on a leader's leadership style; however, it varies in different organisations. Furthermore, Bouckennooghe, Zafar and Raja (2015) argue that employee motivation is a vital factor in leadership. As a result, motivated and satisfied employees can guarantee the growth and survival of an organisation in a dynamic and uncertain environment due to the powerful influence leadership has on their individual performances and their participation in reaching the organisation's goals (Nurhaida & Jefri, 2023). Hence, the relationship between a leader's leadership style and employee motivation is directly linked to high performance within a company.

Similarly, Fiaz, Su, Ikram and Saqib (2017) assert that effective leadership can lead to a more productive and profitable organisation, though an organisation's success depends on its leader's type of leadership style and the type of work environment created for employees to function in. Subsequently, the type of leadership style a leader portrays can influence the workplace environment (Nurhaida & Jefri, 2023). A favourable workplace environment can motivate employees to produce their best work and achieve their goals. However, a bad workplace environment will cause employees to be uncomfortable, decrease their production and will not meet their goals (Nurhaida & Jefri, 2023). For example, in certain circumstances, following an autocratic leadership style can create tension and give rise to a bad workplace environment. Whereas, following a democratic leadership style can create a favourable workplace environment, which can lead to the fulfilment of organisational goals. Hence, a leader needs

to take their leadership style into account. Consequently, Al Khajeh (2018) explains that a leader can direct and motivate their employees to achieve organisational goals by using their leadership style. Hence, a strong leadership style will influence employees to work well and towards the goals and objectives of a company.

Furthermore, Asrar-ul-Haq and Huchinke (2016) are of the opinion that the type of leadership style adopted by leaders influences organisationally valued outcomes to a great extent. For example, it results in low employee turnover, a decrease in absenteeism, increased satisfaction with customers and organisational effectiveness. In addition, a leadership style influences work relationships, rewards and punishments that affect employee behaviour, motivation and their attitude, which in turn affect organisational performance (Puni, Ofei, & Okoe, 2014). Hence, the type of style a leader chooses to adopt can influence an employee's self-image either positively or negatively (Kahn & Katz, 1952). Thus, a leadership style can result in either inspiration or detachment among employees, which can lead to an increase or decrease in productivity.

As mentioned, leadership styles influence a company's efficiency and effectiveness (Jain & Luhar, 2021). Leadership styles arise from communication between a leader and an employee within an organisational setting (Khan, Khan, Qureshi, Ismail, Rauf, Latif & Tahir, 2015). In addition, how employees perceive their leader directly affects their performance, productivity and work environment (Ganzemiller, Vo, Bertsch, Saeed, Ondracek, Pellenwessel, Kea and Nadeau, 2021). Moreover, employees may favour one leadership style over another due to past experiences, work styles and personal preferences. As a result, leaders must ensure that they use the correct leadership style when interacting with employees so that they work towards the goals and objectives of the organisation.

This concept is relevant to the study as it assists leaders in grasping how employee preferences for leadership styles affect the organisation. Thus, it helps leaders determine which type of leadership styles their employees favour so that they can adopt them to ensure that their employees are motivated and work towards supermarket goals during the COVID-19 crisis in order for them to survive and succeed.

## 2.7. The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory

Danserau, Graen and Haga (1975) assert that the LMX theory was introduced first as the Vertical Dyad Linkage Model. In leadership literature, the LMX theory is considered the foremost dyadic theory (Liden, Sparrowe & Wayne, 1997; Erdogan & Liden, 2002). Whereas contemporary leadership theories focus on the effects of leaders' behaviour on employee motivation and outcomes, the LMX theory focuses on the dyadic relationship quality between leaders and individuals, as it is essential in

understanding leaders' effects on their employees, their teams and ultimately, their organisations (Erdogan & Bauer, 2013). According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), the LMX theory posits that leaders and followers build unique relationships with each other due to their social interactions and that the quality of these interactions influence employee outcomes within an organisation. Hence, under the LMX theory, leaders are more accessible, social, friendlier, approachable and communicative to only those employees who report to them (Erdogan & Bauer, 2013). In addition, leaders develop high-quality trust and respect bonds with specific employees within their teams while having lower-quality relationships with other employees limiting their relationship to only what is required by their job description.

Subsequently, one of the main beliefs of the LMX theory is that leaders have different relationships with their employees (Erdogan & Bauer, 2013). Despite leaders being equally trusting and fond of all of their employees, the reality is that employees ultimately bring different levels of competence, capabilities, motivation and willingness to put effort into working hard and building their relationship with their leaders. Furthermore, it is costly for a leader to maintain high-quality relationships with their employees, as they need to put in additional time and effort apart from their other work tasks to invest in relationship development (Liden & Graen, 1980). As a result, leaders are inclined to differentiate more often than not. However, this differentiation is not intentional but rather occurs naturally during the decision-making process (Dienesch & Liden, 1986).

Erdogan and Bauer (2013) explain that a leader and their employees start on neutral ground when they first start working together. Employees are tested by their leaders who appoint and delegate additional responsibilities and tasks to them. The manner in which employees respond to their leader determines whether a leader can trust their employee and work on building high-quality relationships with them. In addition, Bauer and Green (1996) emphasise that the LMX theory is based on a trust-building process where both the leader and employee focus on cues that show how much ability, consideration and integrity the other individual has. Hence, employees who have high-quality relationships with their leaders will experience a different work environment compared to others.

Consequently, the LMX theory has day-to-day implications on leaders and employees (Erdogan & Bauer, 2013). These implications include access to resources and information, conflict management, and learning and growth opportunities. Firstly, with regards to access to resources and information, it can be deduced that employees with high-quality relationships with their leaders tend to have access to better materials and informational resources at their disposal within the organisation (Danserau, Graen & Haga, 1975). Secondly, conflict is unavoidable in every relationship. However, conflict is less likely to occur between leaders and employees who have high-quality relationships (Paglis & Green, 2002). Lastly, with regards to learning and growth opportunities, employees that have high-quality

relationships with their leaders can grow, learn, improve and be effective at work as they receive specific tasks and growth opportunities, as well as guidance and mentoring from their leaders (Law, Wong, Wang & Wang, 2000).

As mentioned, the LMX theory posits that leaders and followers build unique relationships with each other due to their social interactions and that the quality of these interactions influences employee outcomes within an organisation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). It is important for leaders of supermarkets to understand that if they have the correct leadership style in place, they will be able to build quality relationships with their employees, leading them to feel valued, especially while working during a crisis, for example the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in them working harder to achieve the goals of the company, thus reaching organisational survival and success. Hence, this theory is relevant to this research topic as it helps leaders understand why they need to determine which styles of leadership are favoured by employees of supermarkets while working during the COVID-19 crisis.

## 2.8. Summary

This chapter discussed literature from various studies on leadership, leadership styles and leadership styles in times of crisis. It further looked at the Leader-Member Exchange theory of leadership and how employees perceive leadership styles. Leaders of supermarkets within the food retail industry need to determine which one of their leadership styles is most favoured by employees while working during the COVID-19 crisis. This helps gain insight into leadership and the different types of leadership styles leaders can adopt to deal with crises. Hence, it is important to raise awareness about the importance of choosing the correct leadership style to ensure employees are motivated and continue to work towards the goals of the organisation to attain their survival and success under the new normal.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Introduction

A research methodology refers to how researchers acquire knowledge about the world. That is, how they find and gather data depends on their views; what is known or exists and how phenomena will be explained. Thus, research methodology refers to the manner in which a researcher can systematically solve the research problem. This chapter explains the research design, research paradigm, population and sampling, data collection methods and data analysis methods employed by the researcher.

#### 3.2. Research design and approach

A research design is the overall strategy that a researcher chooses to use to combine the different parts of the study for it to be coherent and logical (De Vaus, 2001). It consists of the general plan on how a researcher will go about in answering their research questions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). There are three types of research designs one can follow, namely, a quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods research design. A quantitative research design focuses on numbers and statistics. For example, a quantitative data collection method could focus on questionnaires and the data analysis method could be in the form of graphs or statistics to produce numerical data (Saunders *et al*, 2019). Whereas a qualitative research design focuses on words, opinions, feelings and behaviours. For example, qualitative data collection could focus on conducting interviews and analysing data by coding and categorizing to give rise to non-numerical data to explore or gain an in-depth understanding on a particular problem (Saunders *et al*, 2019). Subsequently, a mixed method research design focuses on using elements from both quantitative and qualitative research to collect and analyse data to solve the research problem (Saunders *et al*, 2019).

This study followed a qualitative research approach as it pursued an in-depth understanding of social phenomena in their natural element. That is, it focused on acquiring an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, attitudes, experiences, intentions and motivations and has observed and concluded how individuals think and feel (Ahmad, Wasim, Irfan, Gogoi, Srivastava & Farheen, 2019). This research depended on the direct experiences of participants' daily lives. That is, it is based on the views and opinions of employees who worked during the COVID-19 crisis for supermarkets within Pietermaritzburg. In addition, this qualitative approach was used to understand how participants perceived and gave meaning to their social realities during the COVID-19 crisis (McLeod, 2019). As a

result, phenomenology was used, as it seeks to explain the essence of a phenomenon by looking at it from the perspectives of those who have experienced it (Neubauer, Witkop & Varipo, 2019). Furthermore, an inductive approach was used in this study, as it focused on participants' experiences and observations. According to Trochim (2006), induction involves moving from the specific to the general. Hence, the study worked from the bottom up and used participants' views to establish themes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Lastly, this qualitative approach is interpretive in nature as the research was studied in its natural setting to interpret and understand phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them (McLeod, 2019).

### 3.3. Research paradigm

Du Plooy Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014) explain that a research paradigm represents a collection of beliefs and indicates to researchers what should be studied, how to do research and the manner in which results should be interpreted. A researcher can choose from various research paradigms, including positivism, interpretivism and critical realism when conducting research (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). This research used an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism is aimed at describing and understanding how individuals make sense of their worlds, as well as how they confer meaning to their particular actions. It is used to interpret and get a deeper understanding of how people perceive and confer meaning to different experiences (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). Thus, the interpretivist paradigm focuses on understanding the essence of social reality as formulated by one's consciousness (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

Consequently, this research is subjective in nature. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) and Bertram and Christiansen (2020) assert that a researcher using an interpretivism paradigm has to use a subjective perspective. It requires social phenomena to be perceived through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This research topic is best suited to the interpretivist paradigm as it allowed us to gain a deeper understanding on how the participants made sense of their changed world due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of participants subjective views on which leadership style they favoured while working during the pandemic. Hence, an interpretivist focuses on understanding human behaviour and experiences made this paradigm crucial to use, as it assists leaders in understanding which was the best leadership style to use during the COVID-19 crisis to help motivate their employees to work towards their supermarket's goals.

### 3.4. Population of the study

Population is defined as the total number of individuals, groups or organisations that are being considered for a research study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). Population can be determined in two ways, namely, target population and accessible population. The target population for this research study was all employees of supermarkets in Pietermaritzburg, while the accessible population for this study was only those employees of supermarkets in Pietermaritzburg that the researcher could access. Thus, participants were chosen based on the following population parameters:

- The nature of the population, that is, supermarkets within the food retail industry. However, the participants were employees in supermarkets within the food retail industry and had a solid understanding of how the supermarket operates.
- The gender of the participants included male and female.
- The geographic location was those supermarkets in central Pietermaritzburg.
- Participants with a minimum of three or more years' experience working in a supermarket in the food retail industry.

### 3.5. Sampling

A sample is a subset of a population that is chosen to research the population without having to collect data from the whole population (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020; Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). There are two types of sampling: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling depicts whether or not each unit (either an individual or social artefact) in the population has an equal chance to be a part of the sample (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). Probability sampling is generally used in quantitative research. In contrast, non-probability sampling is used when it is difficult to obtain access to the whole population or when it is almost impossible to establish who the entire population is. Non-probability sampling is used in qualitative research as the emphasis is on the number of people that needs to be interviewed to allow a researcher to gain an in-depth understanding on the research problem being explored (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014).

This research study focused on non-probability sampling as it is impossible to gain access to all employees of all supermarkets within the retail industry in Pietermaritzburg. Hence, the sample was not random but rather selected by making contact with employees from specific supermarkets in Pietermaritzburg. This research study's sample size consisted of 10 participants, all of whom were employees working for various supermarkets in Pietermaritzburg. The researcher aimed to explore the quality rather than the quantity of the data and chose to select a sample size of 10 participants. As a result, the researcher deemed it not feasible to include a larger number of participants in the study as the employee's chosen fully understood how their organisation and its leaders operated before the

coronavirus pandemic and after the pandemic hit, as they were purposely chosen for the particular reason that they would be able to contribute directly to the research questions. An advantage of this method was that it guaranteed that all the elements of our sample assisted the research, as these elements fulfilled the population parameters of this study. Those that did not do so were disregarded (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). Another advantage was that this method was straight-forward, in that there was little to no cost involved and it was much faster, thus saving time and money (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). Hence, the unit of analysis for this research study was employees working for supermarkets in Pietermaritzburg during the COVID-19 crisis.

### 3.6. Data collection method and its application

Data was collected virtually in the form of online, in-depth interviews done via Zoom. During the interviews, a set of standardised open-ended and in-depth semi-structured questions were posed to each of the ten participants in order to acquire an in-depth understanding of their respective views, beliefs and opinions. This method of online interviews was beneficial as it allowed the researcher control of the questioning (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). In addition, it was useful as the participants were uncomfortable being interviewed face-to-face due to the coronavirus pandemic. Gatekeeper's letters from the supermarkets allowing the researcher to interview their employees were acquired beforehand (a template of the gatekeeper's letter can be viewed in Appendix A). In addition, consent forms were given to and acknowledged by the ten participants before conducting any online interviews (a template of the consent form can be viewed in Appendix B). The companies and the participants were made fully aware of the contents of this research and they were made aware that their anonymity and confidentiality would be protected in an ethical manner.

Prior to conducting the online semi-structured interviews via Zoom, the researcher had created an interview schedule, which can be viewed in Appendix C, where the researchers set of questions were listed in a predetermined order and where the researcher had concepts ready to explain to the participants. The concepts that were explained related to leadership and leadership styles, and a set of standardised open-ended and in-depth semi-structured questions were posed to each of the ten participants in order to acquire an in-depth understanding of their respective views, beliefs and opinions. These questions required open-ended responses from the participants. The participants were free to answer in whichever way they pleased. While each participant answered, the researcher recorded notes and observed non-verbal cues.

The online interviews took place two weeks after receiving ethical clearance, which can be viewed in Appendix D. The exact date and time of the online interviews were arranged with the participants according to their convenience. Each interview took approximately 30-45 minutes, after which the

researcher thanked each participant for taking some time to partake in my interview. Once the data was collected, all the recordings and information gathered from the participants were protected and stored on a password-protected hard drive to which only the researcher had access. Thereafter, all verbal data collected from the ten participants during their individual online interviews was manually transcribed to be further analysed.

### 3.7. Data analysis method and its application

This research study used qualitative content analysis and a thematic coding approach to analyse data. That is, data was analysed by exploring and identifying different themes and patterns found within the information from the online interviews and attention was drawn to the unique themes that showed a variety of the meanings of the phenomena (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014; Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). This qualitative content analysis was done inductively. Hence, specific data was used to develop themes without using a pre-determined conceptual framework. As a result, by carefully examining and comparing the information, certain themes arose from the data collected from the participants (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). Therefore, thematic coding was used. The following eight steps were used to analyse data (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014):

1. *Preparing the data*: Once the data was collected, the researcher organised and turned the data into written text. That is, the researcher transcribed the data. The data was collected in the form of online interviews and was video and audio recorded. The researcher transcribed each interview by listening to the audio recording and typing out verbatim the exact words spoken during the interview (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). Each transcription took about two hours to complete; for a total of approximately 20 hours to transcribe all ten interviews. In addition, the researcher re-watched the video recordings to identify any non-verbal cues that the researcher could have missed while conducting the interviews.
2. *Defining the coding unit to be analysed*: This refers to the basic coding unit that the researcher used to analyse the information collected (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). The researcher used individual keywords and phrases to create headings as my coding unit. The researcher closely inspected the collected data and broke it down into different parts in terms of similarities and differences, for example, in terms of COVID-19, leadership and leadership styles. In addition, the researcher used highlighters, sticky notes and files to organise data into different categories, which helped make better sense of the information.
3. *Creating categories and a coding scheme (conceptual framework)*: In this step, the researcher grouped associated coding units together to form categories of codes. This helped create a

conceptual framework that ultimately aided the researcher in coding the data. Hence, the researchers raw data was used to develop the conceptual framework (coding scheme), further confirming that the researchers analysis was done inductively (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). In addition, the researcher identified certain categories from the codes and used labels as indicators.

4. *Testing your coding scheme on a sample set:* During this step, the researcher tested the clarity and consistency of category definitions on a sample of data (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). The researcher ensured that all problems related to coding categories were resolved in this step.
5. *Coding all text:* Coding data refers to the careful inspection of one's data and identifying all important useful sections and items (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). The researcher used colour highlighters and matching colour sticky notes to make notes of all relevant words or codes that are similar so that the researcher could refer to them further on in the analysis. In addition, thematic coding was used to code all the information collected. This was done by reducing the data by categorising it into different themes and patterns. By using an inductive approach, the researcher allowed certain codes to come out by examining the transcripts. The researcher repeatedly reviewed the transcripts, read through the information and identified dominant patterns and trends. Thereafter, certain codes were compared and placed into the relevant categories and themes.
6. *Assessing your coding consistency:* The researcher rechecked that the coding was completed with consistency and clarity (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014).
7. *Drawing conclusions from the coded data:* The researcher interpreted the associated themes and categories, looked at existing theories or previous studies to which the researcher made conclusions and displayed the reconstructed meanings obtained from the data (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014).
8. *Reporting your methods and findings:* The researcher reported as truthfully as possible on account of the coding, analysis and interpretation of data. (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014).

Subsequently, after the researcher reduced, organised and analysed the data according to the abovementioned eight steps, the researcher interpreted and drew certain conclusions from the data that had been collected. Thereafter, the researcher presented the findings as truthfully as possible to ensure full trustworthiness.

### 3.8. Trustworthiness

There are four concepts relating to the trustworthiness of a study: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014; Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). Hence, the researcher enhanced the trustworthiness and rigour of the research study by ensuring the four above-mentioned concepts were present.

**Credibility:** The researcher tried to interpret the data of the participants as accurately as possible. The Zoom online interviews were 30–45 minutes long and allowed the researcher to fully understand the participants and gain insight into their lives and personal feelings, thus increasing credibility (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014).

**Transferability:** The researcher applied the findings to a similar situation and checked to see if it delivered the same or similar outcomes (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). In addition, the researcher ensured that the participants views, opinions and meanings during the virtual interviews were represented accurately in the findings.

**Dependability –** The researcher ensured that there was a logical integration and flow between the data collection method, data analysis and the theories derived from this research study (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). The researcher guaranteed that all doubt and confusion was eliminated from the research study.

**Confirmability:** The researcher confirmed that the information collected from the participants supported the interpretation and findings (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). That is, the researcher provided a full explanation of the research process to aid others in inspecting the research design and to ensure that there was a comprehensive flow between the findings and the data.

### 3.9. Ethical considerations

I, the researcher, uphold the fact that I acted with integrity, abided by ethical principles and followed professional standards in a responsible manner. The researcher ensured that measures were in place to protect the participants interests and well-being.

All participants were fully informed about the research study and what was required of them during their participation. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw their participation in the study at any time. In addition, the researcher guaranteed that their identities would be protected and that they would remain anonymous (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). That is, their names were not mentioned at any stage during the research process and the information provided was only to the researcher and her supervisor. Prior to interviewing each participant, gatekeeper's letters from the various supermarkets allowing the researcher to interview their employees were acquired beforehand. The template of the gatekeeper's letter can be viewed in Appendix A. Each participant was interviewed individually and separately from the other participants, re-emphasising their anonymity and confidentiality. Moreover, the interviews had to be recorded in order to transcribe and code data into themes and patterns (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). Hence, permission was sought in this regard. As a result, the participants were provided with an informed consent form confirming the above information and their willingness to partake in the research study. This consent form template can be seen in Appendix B. Furthermore, the online interviews only took place two weeks after receiving ethical clearance from the researcher's institution. The ethical clearance certificate can be viewed in Appendix D.

All recordings, information and documents concerning the participants and the organisation were protected and stored on a password-protected hard drive to which only the researcher has the password. In addition, sensitive information concerning a participant, or the organisation was protected (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, no harm was inflicted on the participants in any way. The researcher avoided asking questions that would place participants in an embarrassing situation. In addition, the researcher did not create a situation where the participants future prospects in their organisation may be harmed (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). This was avoided by carefully structuring questions to stay clear of this. Questions that were asked during the interviews can be found in Appendix C.

Regarding the data analysis and reporting, the researcher did not mislead the participants by being dishonest about the research's purpose. The primary objective was to determine which leadership styles were favoured by employees who worked for supermarkets in Pietermaritzburg during the COVID-19 crisis. In addition, the researcher ensured that information collected was not used inappropriately or misused and that the results were not distorted or biased (Du Plooy Cilliers *et al.*, 2014).

### 3.10. Summary

This chapter explained the research methodology and approach used to obtain data for this study. To explore the preferred leadership styles among supermarket employees amid the COVID-19 crisis in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, a qualitative approach was employed. This approach aimed to acquire an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, attitudes, experiences, intentions and motivations. The goal was to observe and draw conclusions on how individuals think, feel and respond to unique circumstances. The study followed an interpretivism paradigm, as it allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of how the participants made sense of their changed world due to COVID-19. It allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of participants subjective views on which leadership style they favoured while working during the pandemic. Data was collected from ten participants by conducting online interviews via Zoom. The data was further analysed and transcribed using qualitative content analysis and thematic coding. The trustworthiness of the study, its limitations and ethical considerations were also outlined in this chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

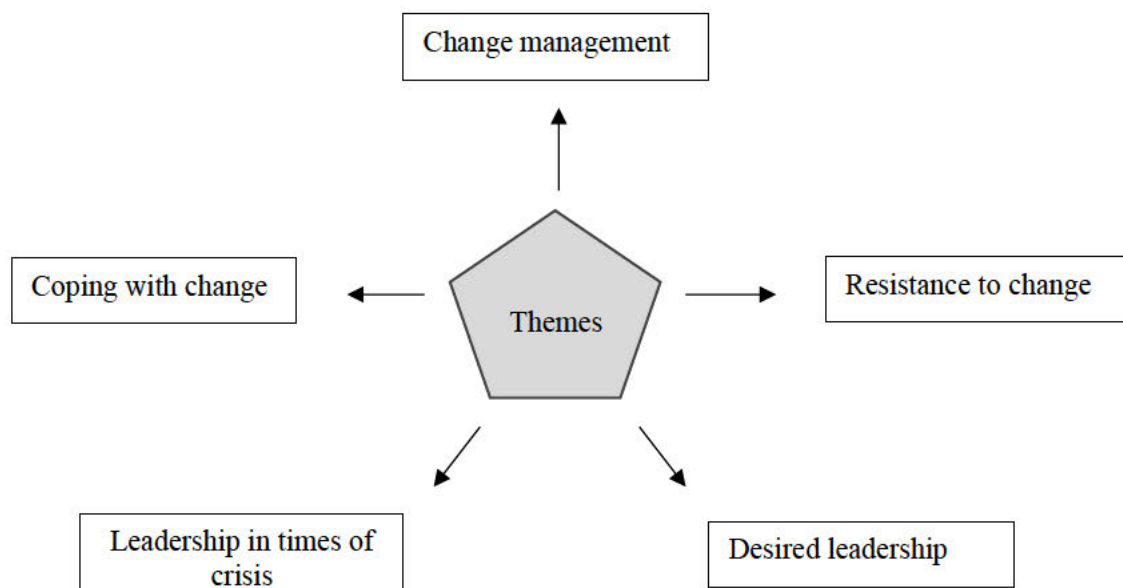
### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the presentation of findings and the interpretation of data after analysis. An inductive qualitative content analysis approach was used to analyse the data received from the participants of the study. Furthermore, thematic coding was used to identify patterns and trends, which were then placed into codes and categories and later translated into themes. Hence, this chapter will present and interpret the researchers findings.

#### 4.2. Presentation of findings

After the coding process was complete, five themes emerged from the data. The five themes that were established include: change management, coping with change, resistance to change, leadership in times of crisis and desired leadership. The following (Figure 4.1) reflects the main themes analysed by the participants of the study.



**Figure 4.1. Themes (self-generated)**

#### 4.2.1. Theme 1: Change management:

This theme was derived from the participants' opinions on how their supermarket had to manage change. This theme focused on two categories. The first category was that all ten participants agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic had brought on major challenges that caused their supermarket to change. With regards to the second category, all participants believed it was quite difficult for their supermarket and its employees to adapt to the changes the pandemic brought. They had to abide by new laws and regulations, overcome unexpected changes and incorporate new measures that they did not anticipate or plan, for example, the use of face masks and PPE, sanitising, temperature checks, social distancing and undergoing regular COVID-19 tests. The following illustrations showcase the responses from the participants:

Participant 1: *“Initially, it was uncertainty about how we can trade, or the number of people allowed in the store, what we could sell, all of those things... That was the biggest challenge that we had initially”.*

Participant 2 stated: *“... making sure and ensuring that we followed all the rules and regulations during that time period... You know we had social distancing; we had PPE gear that we needed to ensure, so it was quite challenging”.*

Participant 3: *“They had to enforce it for the staff; it was fine; customers got used to it after a while. In fact, they used to come and ask for sanitisers and things like that, so everybody had to follow the new rules...”.*

Participant 4: *“Another challenge also was getting them (staff) early on time because they had to adapt to coming in early for sanitising and checking temperature also, as it was one of the regulations we had to abide by”.*

Participant 5: *“Adhering to all the protocols of the COVID-19, in terms of mask wearing, sanitisation and our customers entering the premises, getting used to the norm of the new way of life at that time, just keeping your mask on and distancing... the 1.5-metre distance rule”.*

Participant 6: *“There was resistance in the beginning; a lot of employees did not like the idea of masks; they used to complain and make excuses, saying that they could not breathe... but there's certain procedures within the store we have to follow due to regulations, like they had to sanitise...”.*

Participant 7: *“Implementing new rules—being a challenge whereby the staff had to make a lot of changes and had to adjust to different jobs, yes and also like social distancing—customers were scared to come shopping as well. So, it was like limited.”*

Participant 8: *“At that time, it was just a few customers at a time being allowed in because of the virus, so that was also like another issue with customers and with staff as there was limited staff that we were working with”.*

Participant 9: *“The second challenge, the next part of it, was when we did open. When they did allow us to open, there were so much of rules and so much of regulations that it actually wasn't worth opening the store. It was that customers were allowed only 20 customers at a time, so yeah, they were allowed and even though we had ... the store was huge, we still had to abide by the customers at the time, so that alone was a challenge”.*

Participant 10: *“I think the main challenge was the uncertainty of everything and then along with that came your wearing of the mask and your sanitising and all of that, so I would think one of the major challenges was following the new protocols, following the new set of rules those that were in place to help curb the spread off the virus, because many of us were not used to wearing of the mask, to sanitising, so it was a challenge not only for the employees but also for the consumers as well”.*

#### 4.2.2. Theme 2: Coping with change:

This theme emerges from the fact that all the participating supermarkets were caught off guard and had no measures in place to cope with the challenges of the coronavirus, which initially brought on a lot of confusion among the supermarket's leaders and their employees. Hence, communication played a crucial role in coping with change. That is, by properly communicating their adjusted measures to all employees within the supermarket quickly, they were able to easily adjust to the new laws and regulations and cope with the change. The following illustrations showcase the responses from some of the participants in this regard:

Participant 6: *“I would say that there has been a major issue with regards to communication. So, during the COVID-19 pandemic, certain staff members in leadership positions used to get sick. and in doing so, they had functions within the business. It is important and with them not being over there to oversee, it has left a lot of confusion among the employees”.*

Participant 7: *“It was different now with the COVID-19 and employees had been adjusting to different things whereby they had certain tasks and staff obviously had problems going and doing a different job because they had to learn a new...”*

Participant 10: *“These were new protocols that were in place and not many people knew of [them], so this resulted in a lot of confusion and also tension between the employees and the leaders”.*

#### 4.2.3. Theme 3: Resistance to change:

This theme was derived from the fact that the changes in COVID-19 were unavoidable and could not be stopped. The COVID-19 pandemic was a severe global crisis that caught many supermarkets off-guard, which resulted in them having to change the way they conducted business at all levels. Hence, organisational change comes with resistance to change. Shock, denial, uncertainty, the search for meaning and integration were some of the types of resistance employees faced. With regards to the coronavirus, it was difficult for leaders to identify and manage resistance to change among their employees. Furthermore, the changes brought on by the COVID-19 crisis were challenging for the employees to handle. That is, safety and job security were major concerns among employees. Thus, the introduction of new processes and procedures proved to be overwhelming for employees, resulting in them resisting the changes within their supermarket. The following illustrations showcase the consensus of the responses from some of the participants in this regard:

Participant 2: *“The challenge was the unknown of the virus, so there were a lot of people that were scared obviously... we had to find a delicate balance between providing a service to our customers without compromising the health and safety of our customers and the jobs of our employees”.*

Participant 4: *“So staff had to become basically general workers working in all departments and not only in one department that they used to work [in], so the relation ... relationship between staff and management was a bit sore, you know, because they had to work in all different departments, like cashiers had to work as merchandisers [and] vice versa”.*

Participant 6: *“There was resistance in the beginning; a lot of employees did not like the idea of masks. They used to complain and make excuses, saying that they could not breathe; that was one of the top excuses for it”.*

Participant 7: *“It did create a bit of tension because it was different now with the COVID-19 and employees had been adjusting to different things whereby they had certain tasks and staff obviously had problems going and doing a different job because they had to learn a new way”.*

Participant 8: *“Yes, because we were like quite scared... So there was like tension because if they were getting sick, and you know, we were like scared now because they were just saying it's the flu and we didn't know whether it was the virus or not...”*

Participant 10: *“These were new protocols that were in place and not many people were used to it, so this resulted in a lot of confusion and also tension between the employees and the leaders”.*

#### 4.2.4. Theme 4: Leadership in times of crisis:

This theme gives a brief insight into the participants views on what kind of leadership styles were used by supermarket leaders before and after the COVID-19 crisis. Due to time constraints, it was not entirely possible to explain more examples; however, the leadership styles that were mentioned were what the researcher deemed important for the study. The five leadership styles explained to the participants included transformational, transactional, autocratic, democratic and adaptive. After exploring and analysing the ten participants’ responses, it can be concluded that their leader’s leadership style mostly remained the same after the COVID-19 crisis, with the exception that they became more adaptive. Consequently, managing the COVID-19 crisis caused many supermarkets to change their policies and procedures in order to adapt to the new rules and regulations brought on by the pandemic. Thus, supermarket leaders were forced to adopt an adaptive leadership style for their supermarket to survive and succeed. Table 4.2 reflects the types of leadership styles used by the leaders of supermarkets as quoted by each of the ten participant's responses.

<b>Participants:</b>	<b>Leadership Style:</b>	<b>Participants quote:</b>
Participant 1	Transactional and adaptive.	<i>“It had always been an adaptive leadership style... also like a performance based, rewards-based style”.</i>
Participant 2	A mix of all. That is, transformational, transactional, autocratic, democratic and adaptive.	<i>“I'm a firm believer of the democratic style of leadership... Transformational and adaptive in this context of COVID was very important and as I alluded to before you had to be adaptive, you had to be transformational in order to deal with the challenges and even transactional too and the autocratic way</i>

<b>Participants:</b>	<b>Leadership Style:</b>	<b>Participants quote:</b>
		<i>as a last resort so if I'm not getting what needs to be done then unfortunately sometimes you're going to say right, unfortunately, yes this is how it has to be done whether we like it or not... ”.</i>
Participant 3	Democratic and adaptive.	<i>“We had to adapt to all the situations that came in and especially when you look at COVID; you had to enforce... the procedures and processes that followed were right, that we had to adapt to... With democratic, we consult with the staff, the staff on the floor, mainly when changes that needs to be made to the current uh status quo ”.</i>
Participant 4	Autocratic and adaptive.	<i>“It's easy for adapting too, it's not that difficult and autocratic is better that way”.</i>
Participant 5	A mix of transformational, transactional, democratic and adaptive.	<i>“Supportive and innovative. That's what the company is currently trying to, uh, go forward with... and if any policies [put] in place. In the supermarket it's always good to involve the employees, in terms of what they think about it; would it work and how would it help them to be motivated; and will it improve the store; and we find that they lack enjoyment to work, so we would reward them with employee of the month or cashier of the month”.</i>
Participant 6	A mix of democratic, autocratic and adaptive.	<i>“...were constantly changing or constantly adapting like your rules towards the business... and democratic in a sense where the upper management decides rules, but it will be one person who makes the decision and once the</i>

<b>Participants:</b>	<b>Leadership Style:</b>	<b>Participants quote:</b>
		<i>decision is final, [it] is set in stone for the rest of the business”.</i>
Participant 7	Democratic and adaptive.	<i>“We have to adjust now to the different jobs and obviously been working under pressure as well still because people are still going around wearing masks and sanitising all the time...”</i>
Participant 8	Democratic and adaptive.	<i>“Adaptive...when the virus came about and like whatever challenges they like met it and we changed according to you know each time the virus changed... They had to adapt with it in a crisis and democratic, I think more if anybody was sick or if they had a family member that was sick and I, like my personal experience like everybody was supportive of me...”</i>
Participant 9	Democratic and adaptive.	<i>“We always asking our staff for their input in lots of issues, when issues do arise, we always give them a chance to bring forward their suggestions, we listen to them...”</i>
Participant 10	A mix of democratic, autocratic and adaptive.	<i>“Adaptive would basically focus more on the managers coming up with solutions to adapt to the changes and then they would take that to the boss which is where the democratic leadership style would come in, where he would listen to all of their ideas and then make a decision and also I think there could be a little bit of autocratic in the sense that after he had listened to the opinions of everybody else, ultimately when he decides to make a decision, it's his decision”.</i>

**Table 4.1. Leadership styles used within supermarkets in PMB at present.**

Based on the information provided above, it can be deduced that all ten participants have been exposed to an adaptive leadership style within their supermarkets. This would be expected, as the COVID-19 pandemic brought on a lot of changes, including new laws and regulations. As a result, supermarkets were forced to adapt by introducing new measures and adjusting their policies and procedures to align with the new laws and regulations in order to survive and succeed during the crisis. Furthermore, the world is constantly changing with regards to technologies and innovations; to succeed and survive the changes, leaders need to adopt an adaptive leadership style.

Eight out of ten participants were of the opinion that they had been exposed to a democratic leadership style. They believed that their leader focused more on their employees before and after the crisis. That is, they made decisions together, and this reduced the consequences of the crisis. However, Participant 4 and Participant 6 believed that their leader followed an autocratic leadership style. That is, they made their own decisions, which reduced risk and eliminated confusion among employees. Furthermore, Participant 2, Participant 5, Participant 6 and Participant 10 were of the opinion that they had been exposed to a mix of the different leadership styles and had very little dissatisfaction. Therefore, despite the overwhelming pressure that was felt due to the COVID-19 crisis, all participants made mention that their leaders attributes and characteristics were supportive and encouraging during these difficult times.

#### 4.2.5. Theme 5: Desired leadership:

This theme emerges from the collective responses of all ten participants regarding their preferences for the leadership style they prefer their leaders to adopt. The following illustrations showcase the responses from the participants in this regard:

Participant 2, Participant 5, Participant 6 and Participant 9 were of the same opinion that all five leadership styles should be used. They believe that each leadership style should be used hand-in-hand with the other. For example, Participant 5 stated: *“One can't work without the other, so for instance, if you want to be democratic, you have to adapt easily; then you also have challenges, day-to-day challenges, so you have to be transformational; then you have rewards and performance incentives with the employees; so, it works all round. It can't be just one, that's my opinion, it has to work with everything. You must as a leader, being authoritative is also very important and you have to get results out, so it's all round, it's all the five types of leadership”*. Similarly, Participant 2 stated: *“I would have to mix up all, as I said, there's a time and place for each one and you can't discount one over the other”*.

Participant 1, Participant 8 and Participant 10 believed a transformational, transactional and adaptive leadership style would work best within their supermarket. For example, Participant 1 stated: *“Employees need to start thinking for themselves and start analysing for themselves what they are doing (transformational). And coming back to the transactional performance-focused and rewards-based, if you get them to understand their performance and realise where they are falling short and to reward them for doing good, ... nothing is constant. I mean, you got to adapt to your environment, you got to adapt to what’s happening around you in the world to become successful”*. Similarly, Participant 10 stated: *“I would think transformational and a little bit of transactional because obviously everybody works towards rewards so I feel like if there were more rewards offered you would get more than 100% from your workers... adaptive would basically focus more on the managers coming up with solutions to adapt to the changes”*.

Consequently, Participant 3 and Participant 7 agreed with the leadership styles desired by Participant 1, Participant 8 and Participant 10. However, they believed that a democratic leadership style should also be included, as engaging with employees would reduce the consequences of crises. For example, Participant 3 stated, *“try transactional, performance-focused and rewards-based... and obviously transformational is challenging and communicative [and] democratic; we do communicate with staff whenever it's necessary”*. In addition, Participant 7 stated, *“it would be democratic because they have to adjust now to the different jobs and obviously been working under pressure”*. In contrast, Participant 4 desired their leader to be adaptive and autocratic. Participant 4 believed that setting firm rules to be followed would lead to the success of the supermarket. For example, Participant 4 stated, *“I would say autocratic because given the type of staff that we have in this day and age and given the market that we have regarding our customers, we have to be more of a stern type... We need to know how to adapt to changes and how to adjust to them... I think autocratic where they listen to our rules, and I think that's the way forward for the success of the business”*. Therefore, retaining fully satisfied and content employees contributes to the survival and success of any organisation. Hence, for employees to function efficiently and effectively, leaders need to understand and apply the leadership style most preferred by their employees.

### 4.3. Interpretation of findings

The data the researcher received from the participants in the study has allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of social phenomena that occur within supermarkets in the food retail industry in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. The researcher acquired an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, characteristics and experiences and interpreted how my participants think and feel with regard to the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on their supermarkets. As we know, supermarkets in the food retail industry have faced a number of changes in the past to which they had to adapt in order

to survive. Many supermarkets were caught off-guard by the global health challenge of COVID-19, resulting in struggling to survive or flat-lining (Telukdarie *et al.*, 2020). An analysis of the responses of all ten participants revealed that the COVID-19 crisis had caught all their supermarkets off guard. In addition, the participants' responses in themes 1 and 2 revealed that the coronavirus presented multiple challenges that their supermarkets had to adapt to and change to cope with the crisis. All ten participants mentioned that their supermarkets did not have any measures in place to address the effects of the pandemic. From the participants' responses, the researcher had determined that the supermarkets had to either introduce new measures or adjust their existing measures in order to manage the change. For example, the supermarkets introduced measures to address new laws and regulations, such as social distancing, the use of work permits, the use of facial masks, hand sanitising and COVID-19 testing.

Furthermore, with change comes resistance to change. From theme 3, the researcher concluded change is inevitable and inexorable. Due to the coronavirus, all supermarkets had to change the manner in which they operated at all levels within their organisation. Hence, organisational change brings about resistance to change (Burnes, 2004). The participants' responses indicated that the challenge of addressing employee resistance to change was difficult for leaders to handle. From the participants' responses, the researcher had determined that the types of resistance employees faced included shock, denial and uncertainty. In addition, employees were concerned about their safety and job security. As a result, it can be deduced that the introduction of these new measures, policies and procedures proved to be overwhelming for employees, thus resulting in them resisting the change (Andersen, 2020). Therefore, it is important for leaders to enforce proper change management to ensure the survival of their supermarkets. That is, they must anticipate and respond to change by presenting direction, advice, support and empathy to their employees (Issah, 2018). Thus, using the correct leadership style is important.

Subsequently, themes 4 and 5 derived from the participants' responses focused on leadership and desired leadership. The data obtained from the participants revealed that their leaders had to quickly determine what their supermarkets needed to survive when they were initially impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. For leaders to address the challenges efficiently, they need to determine which type of leadership style worked best before and after the coronavirus crisis (Deloitte, 2020; Du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). All the participants agreed that an adaptive leadership style was used during the COVID-19 crisis among others. In addition, nine out of the ten participants agreed that they desired or preferred their leaders to use a mix of leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, democratic and adaptive. However, only one participant preferred the use of an autocratic leadership style. Hence, it can be deduced from the participants' responses that there is no one specific leadership style that can be used to directly address the coronavirus pandemic. Each leadership style presents its own unique set of

strengths and weaknesses. Leaders would have to engage with their employees to determine which type of leadership style they prefer to get them motivated to work towards the goals of their supermarket.

Therefore, from the data obtained from the participants, it can be deduced that prior to the COVID-19 crisis, their leaders displayed transformational, transactional, democratic and autocratic leadership styles. After the onset of the pandemic, leaders incorporated an adaptive leadership style into their existing leadership style. Consequently, understanding employees desired leadership is crucial, as leaders directly influence their employees, resulting in them working towards their supermarket's goals and objectives to ensure its survival and success. Thus, it is vital for leaders to adopt a leadership style desired and preferred by their employees, as the type of leadership style will influence their organisational performance (Yang, 2020). Therefore, the data obtained from the participants' responses allowed the researcher to understand the supermarket employees preferences on leadership styles required during the COVID-19 crisis in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

#### 4.4. Summary

This chapter focused on the presentation of findings and the interpretation of data after analysis. An inductive qualitative content analysis approach was used to analyse the data received from the participants of the study. Furthermore, thematic coding was used to identify patterns and trends, which were then placed into codes and categories and later translated into themes. Five themes emerged from the data, namely: change management, coping with change, resistance to change, leadership in times of crisis and desired leadership. From the data it can be inferred that when the COVID-19 crisis hit, all supermarkets within the food retail industry in Pietermaritzburg had to manage the changes that the pandemic brought. That is, they had to cope with the change in terms of adapting to ensure their business operations aligned with the new laws and regulations. Hence, supermarkets had to adjust their previous measures or introduce new measures, policies and procedures to cope with the crisis. However, these changes within the supermarkets brought on resistance to change from employees. Thus, it was interpreted that it is important for supermarket leaders to choose the correct leadership styles to ensure that their employees are motivated and continue to work towards the goals of the organisation to attain their survival and success under the new normal.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presented and analysed findings from the data collected. This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the theory and literature. Furthermore, it discusses the findings in relation to research objectives and questions of the study. The research objectives of this study were like the research questions. As a result, the answers to the questions would be similar to those of the research objectives. This study intended to explore four research objectives. This chapter will discuss the findings of this study in relation to the research objectives.

#### 5.2. Findings in relation to the theory

In connection with prior theories, this research focused on the LMX theory. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) assert that the Leader-Member Exchange theory is about leaders and followers building unique relationships with each other due to their social interactions and that the quality of these interactions influences employee outcomes within an organisation. Furthermore, both the leader and follower can be seen as active participants in reaching organisational goals. In addition, the theory emphasises the formation of trust and transparent communication between leaders and their followers, in which leaders display support, respect, empathy and patience with their employees (Breukelen, 2006). Hence, leaders influence their followers, resulting in them working towards the objectives and goals of the organisation to ensure positive organisational performance and success.

Subsequently, it is important for leaders of supermarkets to understand that if they have the correct leadership style in place, they will be able to build quality relationships with their employees, leading them to feel valued, especially while working during the COVID-19 crisis, resulting in them working harder to achieve the goals of the company, thus reaching organisational survival and success. Hence, this theory was relevant to this research topic, as themes 4 and 5 helped leaders understand which styles of leadership were favoured by employees of supermarkets during the COVID-19 crisis.

### 5.3. Findings in relation to the literature

Themes 1 and 2 of the research findings talk about change management and coping with change — how the participants supermarkets had to change and alter the manner in which they functioned. The supermarkets had to adapt and adjust their measures or implement new measures to counter the effects of the coronavirus in order for them to survive and succeed under the new normal. All ten participants acknowledged the fact that the COVID-19 crisis caught them off-guard and that their supermarket leaders were forced to recognise the challenges the pandemic has brought, resulting in them developing new ways to cope with the change. Similarly, linking it to previous literature, Jalagat (2016) explains that change cannot be stopped, as it is unavoidable. In order to solve problems, adapt to environmental change and influence future change, a company needs to continuously consider change (Cummings & Huse, 1989).

Furthermore, Jalagat (2016) suggested that a company must be flexible and have the ability to quickly adapt to change to gain a competitive advantage. The participants responses indicated that their supermarkets quickly adapted to the COVID-19 crisis and the new laws and regulations. That is, they had to be flexible and change the way in which they conducted business in order for them to survive the pandemic. For example, from the data the researcher received from the participants, it can be seen that the supermarkets had to introduce new measures surrounding the use of face masks, sanitising, social distancing, the use of work permits and COVID-19 testing. Hence, it can be interpreted that it is crucial for supermarkets within the food retail industry to be flexible and to have the ability to alter their measures, processes and procedures in order to manage change effectively and survive, succeed and remain competitive during the COVID-19 crisis.

Research findings in Theme 3 discuss resistance to change, specifically examining how participants resisted change in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis. The responses indicated that supermarket employees felt overwhelmed by the challenges imposed by the pandemic. They experienced a wave of shock, denial and uncertainty at the initial onset of the pandemic. In addition, they were concerned about their safety and job security. Leaders within the supermarkets found it difficult to identify and manage resistance within their company. Linking it to previous literature, Iszatt-White and Saunders (2017) explained that shock, denial, awareness of incompetence, looking for a meaning and integration are types of resistance to change. According to Andersen (2020), resistance occurs on two levels, namely cognitive and emotional. The cognitive level of resistance is based on the fact that individuals do not understand or find it difficult to understand change. Whereas the emotional level is based on the fact that individuals dislike change. From the data collected, it can be seen that an emotional level of resistance was experienced and that the changes as a result of the coronavirus pandemic were far too difficult and stressful for employees to handle. Hence, leaders need to be more

empathic and proactive when dealing with resistance to change in their supermarkets. That is, they need to predict and counter challenges brought on by change by providing empathy, motivation, support, direction and advice to employees (Issah, 2018).

Subsequently, themes 4 and 5 from the research findings revolve around the concepts of leadership and desired leadership. Linking it to literature, Al Khajeh (2018) claims that one of the main components linked to the success or failure of a company is leadership and a person's leadership style. Yang (2020) agreed by asserting that an individual's leadership style is vital as it can influence employees to work towards the goals and objectives of the company while securing organisational performance and success. Based on the data gathered from the participants, it is evident that the participants unanimously agreed that their leaders' leadership styles did not change much after the COVID-19 crisis. However, after the COVID-19 crisis hit, all leaders from supermarkets within the food retail industry were forced to adopt an adaptive leadership style to use together with their chosen leadership style. From the participants' responses, it can be seen that nine out of the ten participants desired or preferred their leaders to use a mix of leadership styles such as transformational, transactional, democratic and adaptive. However, only one participant preferred the use of an autocratic leadership style. It can be deduced from the participants' responses that there is no one specific leadership style that can be used to directly address the coronavirus pandemic. Hence, it can be interpreted that it is important to determine the correct types of leadership styles to adopt in times of crisis, as a leader will be faced with many future challenges. All leaders need to become experts in change and resilience to counter the disruptions of change in the future. Thus, leaders need to be sure that they adopt the correct leadership style, as it will influence the growth, survival and future of the company.

#### 5.4. Research objectives

The research study's set objectives and sub-objectives are as follows:

- To determine which leadership style is most preferred by supermarket employees while working during the COVID-19 crisis in Pietermaritzburg, Kwa-Zulu Natal.
- To identify how supermarket employees perceive their leaders current leadership style.
- To determine which leadership style motivates supermarket employees to work towards their supermarket's goals.
- To determine the challenges supermarket employees faced when coping with the changes of the COVID-19 crisis in Pietermaritzburg, Kwa-Zulu Natal.

5.4.1. Research objective 1: To determine which leadership style is most preferred by supermarket employees while working during the COVID-19 crisis in Pietermaritzburg, Kwa-Zulu Natal.

It was inferred from the study's findings that all ten participants agreed that the use of an adaptive leadership style was preferable while working during the COVID-19 crisis among others. In addition, nine out of the ten participants agreed that they desired or preferred their leaders to use a mix of leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, democratic and adaptive. However, only one participant preferred the use of an autocratic leadership style. Subsequently, Participant 2, Participant 5, Participant 6 and Participant 9 concurred that all five leadership styles should be used. They believe that each leadership style should be used hand-in-hand with the other. Participants 1, 8, and 10, endorsed by Participants 3 and 7, preferred a combination of a transformational, transactional, and adaptive leadership style for their supermarkets. However, they believed that a democratic leadership style should also be included, as engaging with employees would reduce the consequences of crises. However, in contrast, Participant 4 desired their leader to be adaptive and autocratic. Participant 4 believed that setting firm rules to be followed would bring about the success of the supermarket. Hence, it can be deduced from the participants' responses that there is no one specific leadership style that can be used to directly address the coronavirus pandemic. That is, each leadership style presents its own unique set of strengths and weaknesses. Leaders would have to engage with their employees to determine which type of leadership style they prefer to get them motivated to work towards the goals of their supermarket.

5.4.2. Research objective 2: To identify how supermarket employees perceive their leader's current leadership style.

Based on the findings of the study, it was deduced that all ten participants were exposed to an adaptive leadership style within their supermarkets at present. This would be expected, as the COVID-19 pandemic brought on a lot of changes, including new laws and regulations. As a result, supermarkets were forced to adapt by introducing new measures and adjusting their policies and procedures to align with the new laws and regulations in order to survive and succeed during the crisis. Furthermore, the current use of an adaptive leadership style ensures that supermarket leaders are prepared for any other future change or crisis.

Subsequently, eight out of ten participants believed that they had been exposed to a democratic leadership style. They believed that their leaders focused more on their employees before and after the crisis. That is, they made decisions together, which reduced the consequences of the crisis. However,

Participant 4 and Participant 6 believed that their leaders currently follow an autocratic leadership style and make their own decisions, which reduces risk and eliminates confusion among employees. Furthermore, Participant 2, Participant 5, Participant 6 and Participant 10 were of the opinion that at present they had been exposed to a mix of the different leadership styles and had very little dissatisfaction. Therefore, despite the overwhelming pressure that was felt due to the COVID-19 crisis, all participants mentioned that their leaders display attributes and characteristics that are supportive and encouraging.

#### 5.4.3. Research objective 3: To determine which leadership style motivated supermarket employees to work towards their supermarket's goals.

From the findings of the study, it was seen that the changes brought on by the COVID-19 crisis were overwhelming and a lot for employees to handle. That is, employees were in shock and denial and faced uncertainty regarding their safety and job security. Furthermore, the introduction of new processes and procedures proved to be overwhelming for employees, resulting in them resisting the changes within their supermarket and being less motivated to work. From the participants' responses, leaders had to anticipate and respond to changes by providing direction, advice, support, motivation and empathy to their employees by using the correct leadership style. From Table 4.2 in Chapter Four, it was deduced that a democratic and transactional leadership style helps motivate employees to work towards their supermarket's goals.

Eight out of ten participants believed that they could be motivated by their leader using a democratic leadership style where they focused more on their employees before and after the crisis. That is, when they made decisions together it could reduce the consequences of the crisis. Hence, by adopting a democratic approach, supermarket leaders provide support and direction to their employees, which makes them more motivated to work towards the goals of their supermarket. In addition, three out of ten participants believed that if their leader followed a transactional leadership style, where they focused on the exchange of rewards for compliance and ensured promises were kept during the crisis, they would be more motivated to work towards their supermarket's goals. Hence, rewarding an employee with an incentive will make them feel more valued and motivated to work towards the goals of their company.

#### 5.4.4. Research objective 4: To determine the challenges supermarket employees faced when coping with the changes of the COVID-19 crisis in Pietermaritzburg, Kwa-Zulu Natal.

It was inferred from the study's findings that all ten participants agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic had brought on major challenges that caused their supermarket to change. All 10 participants believed it was quite difficult for their supermarket and its employees to adapt to the changes the pandemic brought. They had to abide by new laws and regulations, overcome unexpected changes and incorporate new measures that they did not anticipate or plan. For example, the use of face masks and PPE, sanitising, temperature checks, social distancing and undergoing regular COVID-19 tests.

In addition, Participant 6, Participant 7 and Participant 10 believed that communication was a major challenge that they had to face when coping with the change. Supermarkets were caught off guard and they had no measures in place to cope with the challenges of the coronavirus, which initially brought on a lot of confusion among the supermarket's leaders and their employees. Hence, communication played an important role in coping with change.

Based on the findings of the study, resistance to change posed another challenge for supermarket employees when coping with the changes of the COVID-19 crisis. Participant 2, Participant 4, Participant 6, Participant 7, Participant 8 and Participant 10 believed that the pandemic changing the way their supermarkets conducted business at all levels caused a major challenge in terms of resistance to change. Shock, denial, and uncertainty were some of the types of resistance employees faced. With regards to the coronavirus, it was difficult for leaders to identify and manage resistance to change among their employees. Furthermore, the changes brought on by the COVID-19 crisis were challenging for the employees to handle. That is, safety and job security were major concerns among employees. Thus, the introduction of new processes and procedures proved to be overwhelming for employees, resulting in them resisting the changes within their supermarket.

#### 5.5. Research aim reached

The main aim of this research study was to explore the supermarket employees' preferences on leadership styles required during the COVID-19 crisis in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. The study's findings made attaining the aim achievable. From the findings, it can be seen that the COVID-19 crisis caught many supermarkets off-guard. The coronavirus pandemic has brought multiple challenges in terms of which supermarkets have had to adapt and change to cope with the crisis. In addition, supermarkets did not have any measures in place to address the effects of the pandemic. From the participants' responses, I had determined that the supermarkets had to either introduce new measures or

adjust their existing measures in order to manage the change. For example, the supermarkets introduced measures to address new laws and regulations, such as social distancing, the use of work permits, the use of facial masks, hand sanitising and COVID-19 testing. Furthermore, all supermarkets had to change the manner in which they functioned at all levels within their organisation. Hence, this organisational change brought on resistance to change (Burnes, 2004). From the participants responses, it was deduced that the resistance to change among employees was difficult for leaders to handle. Therefore, supermarket leaders had to enforce proper change management to ensure the survival of their supermarkets. That is, they had to anticipate and respond to change by presenting direction, advice, support and empathy to their employees (Issah, 2018). Thus, using the correct leadership style was important.

Subsequently, leaders had to quickly determine what their supermarket needed in order to survive when they were initially hit by the COVID-19 crisis. For leaders to address the challenges efficiently, they needed to determine which type of leadership style worked best before and after the coronavirus crisis (Deloitte, 2020; Du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). Hence, five types of leadership styles were explored in this study, namely: transformational, transactional, democratic, autocratic and adaptive. From the participants' responses, all ten participants agreed that an adaptive leadership style was used during the COVID-19 crisis, among others. In addition, nine out of the ten participants agreed that they desired or preferred their leaders to use a mix of leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, democratic and adaptive. However, only one participant preferred the use of an autocratic leadership style. Hence, the participants' responses indicated that one specific leadership style cannot be used to directly address the coronavirus pandemic. That is, each leadership style presents its own unique set of strengths and weaknesses. Leaders would have to engage with their employees to determine which type of leadership style they prefer to motivate them to work towards the goals of their supermarket.

## 5.6. Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of the study in relation to the theory and literature. Furthermore, it discussed the findings of the research study by addressing the research objectives as set out in Chapter 1. In addition, this chapter explained how the research aim was reached through the findings of the study. The next chapter will conclude the study, provide further recommendations, establish managerial implications and present the limitations of the study.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the findings in relation to the research objectives of the study. This chapter will provide a conclusion, present recommendations, determine the managerial implications and address the limitations of the research study.

#### 6.2. Conclusion

Dealing with crises requires leaders to think outside the box. The COVID-19 crisis required supermarket leaders to adopt a leadership style that guaranteed their supermarkets' survival and success. Prior to the coronavirus, supermarket leaders used a transformational, transactional, democratic and autocratic leadership style. However, after the COVID-19 crisis, leaders had to change their leadership style to adapt to the changes of the pandemic. Hence, leaders had to include an adaptive leadership style in their approach. An adaptive leadership style encompasses the strengths borrowed from a transformational, transactional, autocratic and democratic leadership style (Du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). Thus, an adaptive leadership style can be seen as the most appropriate leadership style to use when dealing with crises such as COVID-19. The findings of the study deduced that no one specific leadership style can be used to directly address the coronavirus pandemic. That is, each leadership style presents its own unique set of strengths and weaknesses. Leaders would have to engage with their employees to determine which type of leadership style they prefer to get them motivated to work towards the goals of their supermarket.

Griffin and Denholm (2020) assert that the reality is that COVID-19 is not the first crisis that the world has faced, and it will not be the last. For leaders to lead successfully in a crisis, such as the coronavirus, they need to change their leadership style to address the changes brought on by the pandemic. That is, they can use certain attributes or characteristics from all the different types of leadership styles to efficiently address the changes and challenges of the crisis. Consequently, a leader's leadership style is extremely vital, as it influences an organisation's performance. That is, the manner in which leaders address their employees influences them to work towards the organisation's goals and objectives in order to secure their survival and success (Yang, 2020). Therefore, supermarket leaders need to ensure that they adopt the correct leadership style, as it ultimately influences the growth, survival, success and future of the company.

### 6.3. Recommendations

The following are recommendations supermarket leaders can use to lead efficiently and effectively when dealing with crises (Nichols, Hayden and Trendler, 2020):

- Quick decision-making: a crisis occurs rapidly and is often unexpected. Leaders must quickly assess available information, swiftly determine what is important and make decisions with the utmost certainty.
- Boldly adapt: leaders need to get ahead of changing circumstances. They need to identify what they know and do not know and outsource expert information when needed. That is, they need to build and strengthen connections with other leaders who have a deep knowledge of crises.
- Engage with employees: it is crucial for leaders to take care of their employees when faced with crises. Supermarket leaders must try to understand their employees and look for ways to inspire, motivate and communicate new priorities to ensure alignment within their company during crises.
- Train crisis leadership teams: during crises, leaders have limited time to react as they are dealing with new challenges. Supermarket leaders should consider support and coaching investments for themselves and their employees to attend as teams to boost their effectiveness.
- Exercise caution: leaders need to be quick and measured. They need to quickly evaluate the change and determine the best course of action. Exercising caution would reduce resistance to change among employees.
- Build unique relationships: in accordance with the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, leaders can use their positive influence by communicating, empowering and motivating employees to reach the goals of the organisation. They should build their trust and focus on establishing high quality relationships that will aid in reaching organisational success.

### 6.4. Managerial Implications

Al Khajeh (2018) claims that one of the main factors linked to the success or failure of a company is leadership and a person's leadership style. Similarly, Yang (2020) asserts that an individual's leadership style is crucial as it influences employees to work towards their organisation's goals and objectives to secure its success or failure. Determining which type of leadership style to use in times of crises is extremely vital for next-generation leaders, as they will be leading through the coronavirus pandemic and will be faced with many other future crises or challenges. In addition, it is crucial for leaders to acknowledge and understand multiple types of leadership styles to use in times of crisis as they need to

become experts in change and resilience in order to face future disruptions. Furthermore, leaders influence their employees to work towards the organisation's goals and objectives in order to secure positive organisational performance, survival and success (Yang, 2020). Therefore, supermarket leaders need to ensure that they choose to adopt the correct leadership style, as it ultimately influences the growth, survival and future of their company.

There are few scholarly articles relating to change management, leadership and leadership styles in supermarkets within the food retail industry trying to cope with changes under the new normal. The coronavirus was an unexpected recent disruption that challenged the world; as a result, not many articles have been written in this regard. This research can help future leaders, managers and academics understand this topic in the future. This research can provide insight and a deeper understanding of the importance of using the correct leadership style in times of crisis. Furthermore, this research study can educate readers about the repercussions of the coronavirus on supermarkets operating in the food manufacturing industry in Pietermaritzburg and how they have managed to survive during the pandemic. Hence, this research enlightens readers on the supermarket employees preferences on leadership styles required during the COVID-19 crisis in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg

## 6.5. Limitations

The main limitation of this study is the coronavirus pandemic and all its variants. Due to the pandemic, only a limited number of people were willing to participate in the interviews. In addition, all interviews were conducted online via Zoom. Hence, load shedding and WIFI connection issues were further disadvantages. Time constraints proved to be another limitation; as a result, only five leadership styles could be explored as there was not enough time to discuss more. Another limitation was difficulty in finding hard-copy journals. As a result, I had to acquire most of my information through online journals, electronic textbooks and other academic resources. Apart from the virus, another limitation was participants' reluctance to speak honestly and partake in the interviews due to fear, therefore, their confidentiality was guaranteed. Lastly, this field of research is relatively new and there is not much information relating to this research topic. Consequently, there are little to no sources that directly focus on the leadership styles that are favoured by employees of supermarkets in Pietermaritzburg while working during the COVID-19 crisis.

## 6.6. Summary

The reality is that COVID-19 is not the first crisis that the world has faced, and it will not be the last. Supermarkets in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, need to learn how to manage and cope with the changes brought by COVID-19 and determine the applicable leadership style to facilitate their adaptation to current and future changes. Hence, the more supermarket leaders can learn and understand at present, the more prepared they will be to face major changes in the future. This chapter will enhance the comprehension of supermarket leaders by offering actionable recommendations to implement, elucidating managerial implications, and acknowledging the limitations of the research study.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Gatekeepers Letter

(A gatekeeper's letter template is provided to retain the anonymity and confidentiality of the supermarkets used in the study)

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To Whom It May Concern:

#### **PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AS PART OF THE MASTERS COURSEWORK QUALIFICATION**

It is a requirement of our Masters of Commerce qualification that all students undertake a practical research project. In this way students are given the opportunity to creatively link and discuss the theoretical aspects of the programme to the practical issues facing organisations in real life settings. Typically, this project necessitates data gathering by questionnaires or interviews.

Naadirah Bux has chosen to do a research project entitled: "The supermarket employees preferences on leadership styles required during the COVID-19 crisis in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg".

Your assistance in permitting access to your organization for purposes of this research is most appreciated. Please be assured that all information gained from the research will be treated with the utmost circumspection. The student will strictly adhere to confidentiality and anonymity.

I am available at any stage to answer any queries and/or to discuss any aspect of this research project.

If permission is granted, please sign the attached form bellow.

Thank you for your assistance in this regard.

Yours sincerely,

Naadirah Bux


The contact details of supervisor:

Professor Msizi Mkhizi





**Gatekeeper’s Consent**

Print on company letter-head

I ..... in my capacity as .....hereby give permission to *Naadirah Bux (222102868)* to conduct research in my organization.

.....(*Please fill organisation name*) welcomes *Naadirah Bux* to do a research study on our company. The conditions for allowing the study to be performed on our organisation are that the organisation’s name will not be used anywhere in the study and will thus remain confidential. In addition, any participants from the organisation that are interviewed must be briefed on the purpose of the study and agree to participate by signing an informed consent form.

**Signature of Manager/Owner/Gatekeeper:** .....

**Date:** .....

## Appendix B: Informed consent forms

To whom it may concern,

My name is Naadirah Bux and I am a masters student at the University of Kwazulu-Natal. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Professor Msizi Mkhize on the supermarket employees preferences on leadership styles required during the COVID-19 crisis in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding on which leadership style is best suited to use so that organisations can survive and succeed under times of crisis.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you are an employee of a supermarket in Pietermaritzburg who worked during the COVID-19 crisis. The aim and purpose of this research is to explore the supermarket employees preferences on leadership styles required during the COVID-19 crisis in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. The study is expected to enroll 10 participants in total. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to conduct one interview with you. The interview will take approximately one hour of your time. It will be scheduled at a time that it is convenient for both of us and will take place via zoom. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions. Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your experiences as an employee of a supermarket in Pietermaritzburg who works during the COVID-19 crisis. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor and I will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at your supermarket, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Masters in Management degree. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study. This research will be ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Naadirah Bux

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Professor Msizi Mkhizi

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration:

Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

Tel: 27 31 260 4557 Fax: 27 31 2604609

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

## Consent form for participants

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the research conducted by Naadirah Bux about the supermarket employees preferences on leadership styles required during the COVID-19 crisis in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

1. I agree to be interviewed for this research.
2. My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
3. My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
4. I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
5. I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Furthermore, I hereby provide consent to allow Naadirah Bux to audio record my interviews as part of the research. I understand that:

1. The recordings will be stored in a password protected file on the researcher's computer.
2. Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C: Interview questions

### Questions to ask during the online interview

1. What are some of the leadership challenges your supermarket has faced due to the coronavirus? Please provide and explain at least 2 examples.

How did these challenges affect the relationship between leader and employee?

Please explain.

How did these leadership challenges affect your motivation to work?

Please explain.

---

2. How would you describe the current leadership style being used within the supermarket?

(Wait for participants response first, if they need assistance on what are leadership styles then continue and explain)

Would you say it was:

A transformational leadership style – in that your leader had qualities that they could use to directly target and counteract some of the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis quickly. That is, they were able to transform the supermarket and their employees despite the COVID-19 challenges they faced.

or

A transactional leadership style – where your leader focused on the exchange of rewards for compliance and where leaders ensured promises were kept during the crisis.

or

A democratic leadership style – where the leader focused on people during crisis and made decisions together with their employees to reduce the consequences of crisis.

or

An Autocratic leadership style – where during the crisis, your leader becomes defensive about risk and as a result, the autocratic leader focuses on ensuring that their strategies are perfectly in place.

or

An adaptive leadership style – Adaptive leaders can adapt in moments of crisis which safeguards the survival of their organisations.

Please pick one and explain how and why you feel they acted in that leadership style. Give examples of how/when they used this type of leadership style.

---

3. Did your leader change their leadership style due to the coronavirus crisis, or has it remained the same? Please explain

That is, if it changed what was your leader's leadership style before the COVID-19 crisis? and how does it differ now? Please explain by giving some examples.

4. Which attributes or characteristics of the current leadership style are liked by you? Please explain by giving some examples.

5. Which attributes or characteristics of the current leadership style are disliked by you, or would you amend it in any way?

Please explain by giving examples of what you dislike and describe how you would amend it.

6. Would you recommend a change in leadership style for your organisation and in what way? Please explain.

## Appendix D: Ethical clearance certificate

Correct EC



09 September 2024

Naadirah Bux (222102868)  
School of Man Info Tech & Gov  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear N Bux,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00007453/2024

Project title: The supermarket employee's preferences on leadership styles required during the coronavirus crisis in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg

Degree: Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 05 August 2024 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.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 09 September 2025.

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

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

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)  
/nng

#### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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

Telephone: +27 (0)31 2608350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

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

INSPIRING GREATNESS

## Appendix E: Editors certificate

### Sury Bisetty Academic Editing Services

CIPC No. 2021/360666/07



The pen is mightier than the sword

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To whom it may concern

I edited the thesis titled: The supermarket employees preferences on leadership styles required during the COVID-19 crisis in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, by Naadirah Bux, student number: 222102868, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Commerce at the School of Management, IT & Governance in the College of Law and Management Studies at UKZN

Disclaimer: I provided language and technical editing as per discussion with the client. The **content and structure** of the article were not amended in any way. The edited work described here may not be identical to that submitted. The author, at his/her sole discretion, has the prerogative to accept, delete, or change amendments/suggestions made by the editor before submission.

[REDACTED]  
Sury Bisetty Date: 19 January 2024  
Professional Language and Technical Editor

---

#### CONTACT DETAILS

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#### MEMBER OF:

Professional Editor's Guild (BIS002)  
South African Council of Educators (222277)  
SAMEA [REDACTED]

#### CERTIFICATION:

BA. PG. UHDE (English Majors)  
MLA – Academic Editing & Proofreading  
ELSEVIER – Editor's guide to reviewing  
Editing Mastery: How to Edit to Perfection  
Complete writing, editing master class.  
PEGSA: Critical Reading

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