



**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**Exploring leadership competencies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Library in a digital age**

**By**

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## Declaration

I, Mbongiseni Magagula, declare that:

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## **Abstract**

Digitalization as a mega-trend is affecting the library sector, triggering challenges and opportunities that demand new competencies for leaders of academic librarians. The objective of this qualitative study was to explore library leadership competencies in the digital age according to the perspectives of library leaders at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The study adopted an interpretive paradigm and non-probability sampling method to purposively select nine library leaders from the University of KwaZulu-Natal for in-depth interviews. Interview data were analysed using thematic analysis.

The results from the study have shown that library leaders at the University of KwaZulu-Natal demonstrate a variety of five leadership styles and three key leadership competencies for the academic library to adapt to the changes brought by digitalization. The leadership struggles with clarity on the direction at UKZN, collective and shared leadership, an inclusive, partnership and alignment style, and the autocratic and adaptive leadership styles.

Secondly, this study revealed three leadership competencies used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive change and provide services in a digital age. These leadership competences include developing people and programmes to achieve change within rules; strategic thinking competences; and leading teams. Lastly, the study provided a Leadership Competencies framework for library leaders in the digital age at UKZN, comprising seven different leadership competences and four tasks and roles by leaders at UKZN, which are necessary for effective academic library leadership in the digital era.

The study recommended a variety of leadership competences that are key to leading the academic library through adaptive challenges in the digital era. Areas for future research were also highlighted.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Introduction

Digitalization as a mega trend is affecting the library sector and triggering changes and re-alignment which demands new competences for leaders. Technology advancements are enabling libraries to offer more tailored and prompter assistance than ever before. While the transition to digital services and delivery methods is improving accessibility, it also presents new obstacles for libraries in the modern digital landscape (Ashikuzzaman, 2023). Libraries have been transitioning their collections from print to digital formats even before the pandemic. COVID-19 showed that libraries cannot plan for every contingency, and as such, they must be able to adapt quickly to a changing landscape.

The rise of COVID-19 significantly sped up the transition of library collections, highlighting the importance of shifting from physical to digital resources. Libraries are exploring additional methods to enhance user satisfaction, such as simplifying the process of discovering and borrowing materials aligned with users' preferences and requirements (Cox, 2023). Equally significant is the library's capacity to centralise access for users, allowing them to grasp the contents of its collections in one place or seamlessly request materials not currently available. The evolution of libraries, regardless of their classification, relies heavily on the leadership provided. Digital pioneers, leading the charge in digitalisation within the library realm, are paramount for delivering exceptional library services and fostering employee support in attaining digital objectives, thereby enhancing organisational effectiveness and facilitating digital transformation. As library leaders face growing pressure to maximise outcomes with limited resources, automation will emerge as a pivotal tool in aiding them in accomplishing these objectives (Enweani, 2018).

The increasing presence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in libraries has added complexity to leadership roles within university settings. Simplifying processes through automation and artificial intelligence (AI) is not solely about saving costs, as it also allows librarians to engage more with patrons and offer additional services that show tangible value to stakeholders. Sağbaşı and Erdoğan (2022) argue that digital leadership is a style that emphasises driving digital transformation within an organisation. This approach empowers

businesses to digitize their work environments and foster learning cultures (Sağbaşı and Erdoğan, 2022). In the contemporary organisation, digital leaders are required to plan and execute systematic activities toward the goal of digitalization; empower their employees to act in accordance with this goal; adapt to changes; and design strategies that balance technology and human factors.

From the organisational perspective, using digital technologies within the digitalization process can increase internal efficiency, adding value to the customer and creating new opportunities for external collaboration (Ashikuzzaman, 2023). In many organisations, including the university library, the digital transformation process requires a leader capable of defining and managing a radical change strategy, rather than simply digitizing business processes and transactions or integrating new digital technologies into the organisational context (Okocha, 2022). In the digital era, it is imperative that leaders in university libraries are not only able to overcome the challenges associated with digital transformation, but also to develop a blend of digital and human skills (e.g. the ability to communicate effectively in a digitized environment; foster cooperation amongst geographically dispersed followers; encourage initiative; and assist libraries in achieving digital transformation by establishing a vision and empowering employees to carry it out) (Enweani, 2018). It is also suggested that digital leaders design and implement versatile and flexible policies in response to the rapid advancement of technology.

Many aspects of the university functions, including the library, were compelled to adopt remote working and distance/online education and training during the COVID-19 period. This compelled and accelerated the adoption of new technologies, hence increasing the demand for leaders with social influence in the digital world of work. The absence of participation in internal digital channels represents a significant missed opportunity for executives to lead self and others in organisations such as the university library (Wang, 2019). Globally, organisations are witnessing great transformation fueled by digitalisation and digital transformation. Numerous changes are well noticed at all levels of the organisation, including production processes, as well as the change in leadership and the necessary skills to allow the organisation to remain relevant in the context of the mega trend of digitalisation (Mwita and Jonathan, 2019).

According to the United Nations UN (2022), digital technologies have been widely integrated in different sectors and within every dimension of human life. The UN (2022) further

stated that this means that digitalization and digital transformation through digital technologies have potentially changed almost every aspect of human modern society, including communication, education, work, politics, culture, administration, and science. Transformations brought digital technologies change and continue to fundamentally change the services that are delivered, businesses that are operated and how values are delivered to consumers, as well as building new cultures of production and consumption. According to Petry (2018), institutions and companies around the globe in both developed and developing countries are already faced with technological transformation, including the leadership competences required to adapt to these changes. While the notion of digital leadership is becoming common and growing in popularity in practice, research on digital leadership is still in the infancy stage (Gfrerer, 2020). In this context, there is a growing need for literature and empirical research on the developing concept of digital leadership to understand the nature, complexity and practices of digital leadership in order to improve leadership effectiveness in practice.

Today, due to digital technological advancements, academic libraries and library leadership are witnessing change and are simultaneously adapting to this change by ensuring that new skills and the necessary competencies are acquired (Le, 2015). The digital age started with the advent of computers and virtual networks. In the digital age today, librarians can no longer be simply information providers or the “keepers of knowledge” (Enweani, 2018). According to Aslam (2022), the library service is no longer the same, as the needs of library users are equally changing. The introduction of the internet, for instance, has brought great strides into the academic library sector, the most important being digitalization. Growing access to technological advancements and opportunities as a result of these technologies has seen the academic library embracing the concept of digital library services, also referred to as electronic, hybrid or virtual libraries. In response to the changing nature of the library, the use of digital information tools in libraries and information demands new technical and leadership competencies (Khan, 2017).

Being part of a globalized education system, South Africa’s Higher Learning institutions have already embraced digital library services. Masenya and Ngulube (2018) believe that while the South African academic library is embracing digital library services, the concept is still new

and many academic libraries are trying to adapt to the digitalized library system. Peng (2021) states that individuals or organisations in the age of digital technology can fully transform teams, entire organisations and employees into digital thinkers by leveraging digital insight, digital decision-making, digital implementation and digital guidance to ensure that their goals are met. In the context of university library leaders at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), it remains unclear in terms of which leadership competencies are necessary to lead the university library in the digital era. The aim of this study is to explore library leadership competencies at UKZN, Durban, South Africa. Central to the study is to understand leadership competencies amongst library leaders and how such competencies facilitate or hamper the adaptation to digital library services.

The aim of this introductory chapter is to provide the context of the study by focusing on the background, problem statement, research aims and objectives, research questions, and the significance of the study. The chapter also illuminates the delimitation of the study, structure of the thesis and the summary of this chapter.

## **1.2. Background to the Study**

According to Pinfield, Cox and Rutter (2017), digitalisation of the library has brought about a shift in all areas of the academic library, including the emergence of open access, as well as the change in library leadership and the requirements of new skills. According to Hensellek (2020), leadership remains central to the digital transformation process as it involves all members of an organisation and is intended to develop leadership competencies in which all members of the organisation play a critical role, rather than just individual executives.

Renko, El Tarabishy, Carsrud, and Brannback, (2015) believe that the use of digital technologies in combination with modern leadership and related competences creates a space where those in lower levels of the organisation can enjoy greater freedom and a certain degree of self-leadership that will contribute to achieving the goals of an organisation.

Examining the library through the digital landscape lens, Haque1 (2023) asserts that if the library is to adapt to the changes brought about by the digital age, there is a need for appropriate digital leadership and skills that will help implement and manage the necessary programs. This means that library employees need to be equipped with new digital skills/competencies, including communication and technology related skills. Regarding the state of library

leadership in the digital age in the developing world, Okocha (2022:6) highlights four factors to consider when analyzing library leadership, namely “Sustainable funding, cost of infrastructures, digital Literacy, copyright issues and equity of access”. He believes that all these factors combined can determine the success of the library in the developing world and in Africa in particular. Haque (2023) adds that in Africa, if the library is to succeed, there is a need for African countries to leverage the benefits brought by the digital age to improve accessibility. Digital library leadership competences remain central if the academic library is to succeed and adapt to changes brought by the digital age.

Thamarauselvi (2018) believes that library leadership competences are critical because the role of library leaders is to motivate and inspire people in the organisation to achieve intended objectives. The digitalisation of the library entails new technologies. Therefore, it is important that library leadership provides the necessary direction through which members of the organization can acquire and retain the necessary skills and competences that will effectively promote and adapt to the changes brought about by new technologies. Library leaders are supreme custodians of knowledge and partners to Learning and information resources, discovery and use (Thamaraiselvi, 2018). Thamaraiselvi (2018) outlined the qualities of library leadership competencies as “cognitive ability and global thinking”.

According to Cox and Corrall (2013), the change in library professionals in the higher education environment is due to a number of factors, including the massive emergence of new library specialities. As technology advances, different features and innovative ideas come into effect, hence the requirements of new skills and changes in library leadership style. Cox and Corrall (2013) believe that due to the changing nature of the library and how it functions, it is important to note that the role of academic library professionals should evolve around clear and focused goals. In the library, like any organisation, the leader plays a critical role in the orientation and direction of the organisation.

The leader provides a set vision and mission for the organisation, and others follow it. Meraki (2017) believes that an appropriate leadership style has the potential to influence and ensure the prosperity and growth of both the organisation and its members of the organization. Meraku (2017) adds that leadership does not happen overnight, but it is a long engagement process whereby the leader provides direction and guides others towards achieving set goals.

Leaders encourage people to act in certain ways, and this entails changes in behaviour and ways of thinking.

In order for leadership to be effective, there are requirements, and these include qualities as well as the necessary skills. "Effective leaders not only observe but actively demonstrate a deep understanding of their team members. They prioritize trust, believing that people are inherently capable and trustworthy. By fostering an environment of mutual trust, leaders empower others to excel and encourage collaboration" (Alahmad, 2010: 31). This means that the success of an organisation lies solely on leadership and the management of members of an organisation. Effective leadership needs power in order to motivate and inspire people to make the utmost effort to increase their level of performance in an organization (Javidan and Waldman, 2003).

Examining leadership competencies from Western world literature, Fotso (2021) highlights three key areas, namely Managing Self, Managing Projects, and Managing People. He believes that an effective leader must have competences and integrity, honesty, and this should include consistency in what the leader does or says. Moreover, a leader should have interpersonal skills. Fotso (2021) asserts that managing an organisation means managing people to achieve a particular goal. This includes inspiring and fostering team commitment, building a collective spirit, pride and trust amongst members of an organisation.

This facilitates cooperation and motivates team members to accomplish organisational goals. It is believed that when there is team building, it leads to customer satisfaction because the expected needs are met. Team building helps members of an organisation deliver high quality products and services to the satisfaction of organisational client, as well as building the culture of accountability among members. The management of people helps build Human Capital capable of pursuing the goals and the objectives of an organisation. This entails building and managing the workforce based on organisational goals, budget considerations, and staffing needs.

While the focus of this study is to examine library leadership competences in the face of the digital age, a vast amount of literature indicates that library leadership competence requirements are not the same as any other organisation (Wanda, Jitka and Liebster, 2005 and Giesecke and McNeil, 1999). Examining leadership competencies for librarians in India, Samyal and Narang (2016) observed that the trend of library science practices in India is

moving professionals towards managerialism instead of dynamic leadership. In the era of digital technological advancement, leaders should be equipped with greater knowledge and abilities so that they can share information as needed. This includes acquiring new technical expertise and conventional service training, and project-based training in digital database management, as well as interpersonal, communication and teamwork skills. Aslam (2019) noted that leadership in the academic library is based on several key competencies, and these competences should work towards improving the service to library users.

In South Africa (SA), being part of the global community, academic libraries are embracing technological advancements and innovation. In 2018, Butler-Adam (2018) conducted a study in all 26 public universities in SA to understand how academic libraries in these universities are adapting to the “fourth industrial revolution” (FIR). The findings showed that academic libraries have embraced the concept. “For example, at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), staff who were shelvers, have had to be reskilled to perform other tasks such as running audio-visual equipment” (Marwala, 2022: 5). Butler-Adam (2018) added that while FIR was an embraced concept, there was a growing interest and research in the domain. Masenya and Ngulube (2019: 1) conducted a study in SA to assess “digital preservation practices in academic libraries in SA in the wake of the digital revolution”. This study found that SA, like many other African countries, is confronted with challenges when it comes to the preservation of digital resources, despite the efforts that have been made to promote digital preservation.

Examining academic library leadership in SA, Aslam (2019) conducted a study in 2019 with a total 16 library leaders including library directors, managers and most senior librarians. The findings revealed that there was a need for a shared vision among key leaders in the academic library. This suggests that there is limited shared vision among library leaders, which gives little preparation to employees for organisational change and, as result, it led to resistance. The findings also revealed that skills development remains a challenge at all levels of the organisation, and this trend was common to both private and public institutions.

Based on the above, it is worth noting that while there are existing studies on academic library leadership in SA, it is also important to note that there is limited literature on library leadership competences in the digital age in SA. The aim of this study is to explore the competencies of library leaders in the digital age at the UKZN, Durban, SA. As highlighted earlier, there are 26 public universities in SA, which includes (UKZN). The historical background of an

institution, financial ability and individual university library programs are very important in influencing the leadership and operation of a library.

The merger of the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) and the University of Natal in 2004 gave rise to UKZN, amalgamating the respective legacies of UDW, founded in the 1960s, and the Natal University College, which gained independent university status in 1949. UKZN's vision is to become the leading institution for African scholarship, while its mission entails embodying the essence of a SA university—excellence in academics, innovation in research, societal engagement, demographic inclusivity, and addressing historical disparities. The university library plays a pivotal role in realizing these goals. With over 45 000 students across five campuses in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, namely Edgewood, Howard College, Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine, Pietermaritzburg and Westville, UKZN operates on a college model, consisting of four Colleges: Agriculture, Engineering and Science; Health Sciences; Humanities; and Law and Management Studies. Each College houses multiple academic libraries. These include:

- Edminson Library at Edgewood
- EG Malherbe Library, Barrie Biermann Architecture Library, Eleanor Bonnar Music Library, and GMJ Sweeney Law Library at Howard College
- the Medical Library and Victor Daitz Library HIV/AIDS Information Gateway at the Medical School
- Cecil Renaud Main Library, Law Library, and Life Sciences Library in Pietermaritzburg
- Main Library and Joe Ryan Dentistry Library at Westville

Additionally, UKZN boasts five special collections of regional and national significance:

- Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives in Pietermaritzburg
- Centre for African Literary Studies (CALs) in Pietermaritzburg
- Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre in Westville
- Killie Campbell Africana Library in Durban
- University Archives in Pietermaritzburg

These libraries were helpful in supporting online learning during COVID-19 as they have new and different ways of storing information. Library leaders need competences to satisfy the needs of their users in unexpected situations, such as the COVID-19 induced transition to online

education. UKZN is not only one of the biggest universities in SA, but also has the UKZN online library that provides services to a variety of students and academic staff and researchers, which makes it very interesting to explore the leadership competencies at the UKZN Library in a digital age.

### **1.3. Problem statement**

While university libraries play a vital role in delivering off-campus information services or digital services in pursuit of the vision of a university, little is known about the competences that are critical to lead an academic library in the digital era at UKZN in SA. Studies conducted in the field of the academic library in Africa have revealed not only opportunities but also major challenges faced by the sector, including the mega trend of digitalization (Jain, Akakandelwa, 2016 and Arko-Cobbah, 2011). While studies point to a chronic financial constraint, the lack of adequate basic infrastructure, and limited access to modern and advanced technology, there is a compelling need to also examine the required competences for leadership in academic libraries in the digital environment of universities.

Scholars such as Jain (2016) concluded that inadequate curricula in library and information science, a sluggish adoption rate of open-access materials, opposition to change, and challenges with book and journal importation pose challenges to being an effective library in Africa. The myriad challenges faced by libraries in Higher Education are not only affecting the teaching and learning process, but also demanding new competences as libraries are also assuming new roles of partnership with research (Jain and Akakandelwa, 2016). Burnet (2013) noted that in Kenya, for instance, there was a lack of practical library experience and/or pedagogy by some lecturers; limited access to computer labs in some institutions of higher learning; software applications availability; and limited funding and leadership competencies hampered progress in the education system, leading to poor performance and global competitiveness. While SA has made some progress in the library sector, it is however important to note there are still a number of challenges to be addressed.

With the history of apartheid that discriminated against the majority of the SA population, including in the education sector, there are still apparent inequalities in the education system, including access to the library and required library leadership competencies in historically

disadvantaged institutions of Higher learning (Africa, 2021). Library leaders from institutions are faced with challenges from the obligation to assess their roles and responsibilities to remain relevant and prove valuable in a digital age (Africa, 2021). Nevertheless, today's library leaders are responsible for strategically aligning the digital library's endeavors to serve a more diversified yet extensive user group in a highly globalized environment (Wong, 2020: 10). Further challenges include the physical space-bound preconceptions of traditional librarians' duties, which have changed with the evolution of digital technologies, compounded with financial constraints.

Wong (2020) asserts that the challenges arising from rapid and continuous change have created uncertainty regarding the roles and responsibilities of academic librarians in the digital environment. There is growing ambiguity and limited clarity on the competencies required by library leaders in order to lead others in the provision of excellent user service in the ever-changing digital world. While there is sufficient research on library leadership competencies, there are not many studies conducted from an African perspective and within the African context (de Boer, Bothma, Olwagen, 2012). It is noteworthy that there is research which has focused on the competencies required of library managers to manage change in university libraries.

On the managerial dimension, Sukram (2009) conducted a study that aimed to identify and investigate the managerial competencies library managers need to manage change in South African university libraries effectively. In the domain of change management, there are studies interested in leadership competencies for change management in libraries in general, and challenges and opportunities in the African context (Oketunji, Oketunji and Alarape, 2016: 42). It is noteworthy that the study by Oketunji, Oketunji and Alarape (2016) discovered a lack of literature outlining what leadership competencies are necessary for African academic library leaders such as directors and library leadership executives. Wong (2020: 51) agreed that there is "insufficient literature discussing what leadership competencies are required by library leaders such as directors and upper-level administrators as most studies focus on discussing competencies for librarians and information specialists".

There is a gap in the existing corpus of knowledge which calls for research to explore the competencies of library leaders in South African public institutions, specifically in the context

of digital changes in the library. No study has focused on the UKZN library to understand how leaders of libraries in the university deal with the digital age and the challenges of leading the various libraries to meet the needs of users such as staff, and on and off campus researchers. This study seeks to fill this gap by thoroughly investigating leadership competencies in the context of the UKZN library and the opportunities and challenges associated with the digital era in an academic library, thereby providing valuable insights to leadership practice in the library and the information science sector in SA and Africa.

#### **1.4. Research aims and objectives**

This qualitative study aims to explore the competencies of library leaders to lead in the digital era at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, SA.

#### **1.5. Research questions**

This qualitative study addresses the following research questions:

- i. What is the nature and variety of leadership styles practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead themselves and others in the digital era?
- ii. What is the nature of leadership competencies used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive change and provide services in a digital age?
- iii. What constitutive elements are necessary for a Leadership Competence Framework for library leaders in the digital era at the UKZN Library?

#### **1.6. Research objectives**

The objectives of this qualitative research are:

- 1.6.1. To establish the nature and variety of leadership styles practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead self and others in the digital age;
- 1.6.2. To identify the nature of the leadership competencies used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive change and provide services in a digital age; and
- 1.6.3. To propose a Leadership Competence Framework for library leaders in the digital era at the UKZN library.

### **1.7. Significance of the study**

Libraries remain the cornerstone for a functioning education system. It is important to remember that while the library is key in advancing and allowing access to knowledge, it is important to note that leadership and the necessary competencies are key. In addition, the advancement in technology with the digitalization of the library has come with opportunities and challenges, mainly in developing countries like South Africa, where access to technology remains in the reach of a few. It is worth remembering that the history of apartheid limited access to scarce skills for the majority of South Africa and former higher learning institutions, mainly among blacks, where resources and the library and the quality thereof and understanding leadership competencies in academic libraries is key if one is to understand how academic libraries are adapting to the digital age.

The study is significant to leaders of academic libraries and human resources (HR) in the university as it indicates the key competencies that need to be developed if library leaders are to lead effectively and provide services to the university community in the digital age. The study is also significant as it closes the literature gap on leadership competencies and their development in the academic library, not only at UKZN, but also in South Africa and other contexts in developing countries. The study is valuable for trainers of library leaders in the university because it improves a competence framework of what matters most for one who wants to lead an academic library in a digital era. The study will improve knowledge and awareness of the expanding leadership abilities required in a digital era, which is expected to be helpful to library leadership in the digital age and how best these can be learned or developed in the university library.

### **1.8. Delimitation of the study**

Delimitations have significance as they enable scholars to define their research's scope by describing what will be included and omitted from the study. "They are concerned with the definitions that researchers decide to set as the boundaries or limits of their work so that the study's aims and objectives do not become impossible to achieve" (Theofanidis and Fountouki, 2018: 157). The researcher controls the restrictions, and the reasons for selecting a particular sampling technique from amongst several available should be provided for the reader's

advantage. This study's delimitations are based on three main criteria. The first is that this study is exploratory and qualitative. The study will also focus on the professional experiences of UKZN Library leaders and the expectations for their leadership capabilities to address the challenges of the digital era successfully.

The other delimitation is a geographical choice, with the UKZN library located on five campuses in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, SA. The study further focuses on Library leaders who are members of the library executive as they have hands-on experience in leading the library in their practices regarding leadership competencies in a digital age. The study will only cover academic library leadership competencies, but not public library leadership competencies. The study excluded other employees who are not members of the Executive Committee and have fewer than five years of experience in their leadership roles since they may be less involved in strategic concerns. Future studies may need to broaden their scope to cover leadership competencies at multiple national South African academic library levels. The sample size of this exploratory study is minimal because it is confined to members of the Library Executive at one academic institution only.

## **1.9. Study structure**

**Chapter 1: General introduction-** Chapter One provides the foundation information on which the entire dissertation is built. It includes the study background, problem statement, research aims and objectives, research questions and the significance of the study.

**Chapter 2: Literature review-** This chapter reviews literature on studies in the field of the academic library, with specific focus on leadership and the necessary competences in the library. It also provides definitions of key concepts relevant to the study.

**Chapter 3: Research methodology-** This chapter gives an overview of the methodological approach adopted in the study.

**Chapter 4: Findings of the study-** This chapter is key. It provides the analysis of the data as indicated in the research objectives.

**Chapter 5: Discussion of the findings-** This chapter discusses the research findings, focusing on the interpretation and implications of the findings, comparing them to existing literature, and addressing their significance in the study question.

**Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations-** This chapter summarises the findings of each chapter of this study and the overall study findings. It also provides recommendations and suggests areas for future research.

### **1.10 Summary**

This chapter has clearly illuminated that digitalization as a megatrend has created threats but also opportunities for academic libraries, such that there is a need for new competences in the academic libraries and in terms of leading these libraries. The introductory chapter has provided a foundation for this qualitative study, which seeks to explore leadership competencies at the UKZN Library in a digital age. The chapter has provided details on the digital context of this study and its focus on the UKZN library. It is equally important to note that this chapter is clear that while the megatrend of digitalization is creating opportunities, it is also bringing challenges which demand new leadership competencies for those leading academic libraries. The chapter has clarified the research problems, research objectives and research questions, as well as the delimitation of this qualitative study.

The chapter was explicit that this study is confined to the leaders of the main academic library at UKZN in order to specifically understand the leadership competences necessary to excel in leading a library during the digital era. The next chapter focuses on a review of relevant literature for this qualitative study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter reviews the existing literature in the field of library and leadership competences within the context of the digital age. The chapter begins by providing a broader understanding of the history, concept and nature of the academic library. The chapter also discusses the types and functions of the academic library, as well as trends in the digital era in the domain of the academic library. Furthermore, the chapter focuses on the concept of leadership and its evolution, before focusing on the upper echelon as the root of strategic leadership and digital leadership.

Lastly, the chapter concludes by exploring the concept of competence and competence frameworks, which are key in this study, before highlighting previous empirical research on library leadership in a digital context and competences of Academic library leadership.

### **2.2. Understanding the history and concept of the Academic Library**

The production and storage of information dates back to the existence of humankind (Emmanuel, 2020). Oral tradition through storytelling was passed onto the next generation through different channels, and these were preserved and stored in different forms of archives (Emmanuel, 2020). The history of libraries dates back to ancient civilizations where collections of clay tablets, scrolls and other written materials were housed in temples, palaces and educational institutions. One of the earliest known libraries is the Library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh, which dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Haque, 2023). In ancient Greece, notable libraries included the Library of Alexandria, a renowned center of knowledge that attracted scholars from around the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, it was destroyed, and its exact location remains a subject of historical debate (Mardon, Mohammad and Shah, 2021).

During the Middle Ages, monastic and cathedral libraries became important repositories of manuscripts, preserving knowledge through the painstaking process of copying texts by hand. The priority of the library was to protect the books, not to allow patrons to use them. Hence, access to these libraries was restricted to faculty members and a few students. The Renaissance saw the rise of private libraries owned by wealthy individuals and institutions, fostering a

culture of learning and intellectual exchange. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, public libraries became widespread, providing free access to books and information for communities around the world (Haque, 2023). A library is a collection of books, magazines, newspapers, and other materials made available for people to borrow or use for reference. UNESCO (2024) defines a library as an *“Organisation, or part of an organisation, whose main aims are to build and maintain a collection and to facilitate the use of such information resources and facilities as are required to meet the informational, research, educational, cultural or recreational needs of its users; these are the basic requirements for a library and do not exclude any additional resources and services incidental to its main purpose”*.

In simple terms, an academic library is a library that is attached to a higher education institution and serves two complementary purposes: to support the curriculum and the research of the university faculty and students. Firstly, the primary audience of an academic library is not the wider community around the school, but the faculty and students who teach and study at that specific institution.

According to Sain and Negi (2023) academic libraries have transformed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to focus less on physical collection development, information access, and digital resources. Unlike public libraries, academic libraries are tailored to meet the specific needs of students, faculty, researchers and other members of the academic community. Examining the academic library in Pakistan, Khan Scholar and Bhatti (2012) revealed that there was a lack of computer literacy skills amongst library professionals, compounded by the lack of adequate library infrastructure and necessary leadership competences for the effective functioning of the academic library. In Kenya, the library sector is witnessing advancement and global attention. While there are some advancements in the library sector in Kenya, studies conducted by Wawire and Messah (2010) indicated that libraries in Kenya still face numerous challenges, including advanced access to technological tools, appropriate skills, limited funding, as well as appropriate infrastructures. This means that combined factors hamper the proper functioning of the library in Kenya.

In SA, examining the state of the library and its history, there are many reasons to believe that access to the academic library was unevenly distributed. According to Strand and Britz (2018), for institutions of higher learning, mainly those in formerly disadvantaged communities

including those of Bantu education, access to an adequate library remained one of the major challenges and hampered research, teaching and learning in these institutions of higher learning. Post-apartheid SA has witnessed significant progress in the education sector, including advancements in the library sector. Political change in SA, which is a country in transition, has invariably implied a change to library structures. Davis (2009) stated that, being at the center of education, libraries could not be excluded from the democratic process. This means that promoting access to libraries and addressing inequality, libraries are seen as centers of emancipation.

While significant transformation has been made in all sectors of development, including education as well as in the libraries sector, both public and academic, there are many reasons to believe that libraries are still experiencing challenges. There is growing inequality in the distribution of education and libraries in particular between institutions of higher learning. Strand and Britz (2018) further note that there is also a growing demand for access to the library, which is not able to cater for the needs of all citizens, mainly those from rural areas as well as those in informal settlements. There is also a lack of funding and required skills amongst some librarians in institutions that are under-resourced, which makes it challenging for libraries to effectively deliver on their mandates.

In a study on the challenges of managing University Libraries in a Contemporary Digital Environment, Enweani (2018:2) was explicit on the variety of challenges, which include “demands for new skills, cost/funding, managing of a new generation of learners, lack of skilled manpower, lack of confidence in the face of increasing information technology, lack of a maintenance culture, and resistance to change”. More importantly, Enweani (2018:2) asserted that the strategies for the effective management of university libraries in a digital environment include adequate funding of university libraries, effective communication, adopting a good leadership style, recruitment of adequate/skilled staff and training/re-training of library staff.

Academic libraries as part of higher education institutions have also experienced increased competition for resources, new user expectations and service demands, the need for a more global outlook, and an imperative to harness technology effectively (Cox, 2023).

### **2.2.1. Nature and status of the Academic Library in the university**

An academic library is a dynamic and indispensable hub of knowledge, learning and intellectual exploration within educational institutions. It is a repository of scholarly resources, carefully curated to support the diverse academic pursuits of students, faculty and researchers Enweani (2018). Librarians, as experts in information retrieval and research methodologies, provide valuable assistance to library patrons, guiding them in locating relevant resources; refining research strategies; and maximizing library tools and technologies.

It is important to illuminate that the academic library has traditionally been considered as occupying a central position on campus and is often referred to as the “heart of the university”. “The academic library is the heart of the university” (Salisbury and Peseta, 2023: 169). Moreover, an academic library serves as a space for intellectual engagement and academic collaboration. It offers a conducive environment for students to study, work on assignments, and engage in group discussions. Quiet study areas, collaborative workspaces, computer labs and meeting rooms are often available to accommodate various learning and research preferences (Cox, 2023). The academic library’s “heart of the university” status is now disputed in a digital era of greater user choice and self-sufficiency regarding access to information. Academics, researchers, and students are also getting information online and from other digital sources.

### **2.2.2. Types of Academic Libraries**

Academic libraries encompass a variety of types, each tailored to the specific needs of their respective educational institutions and user communities (Gabbay, 2017). Firstly, university libraries play a crucial role within higher education, serving as vital hubs for information, learning and research. They are typically categorized under academic libraries and are established and funded by universities to support teaching, learning and research activities. Gabbay (2017) further stated that secondly, college libraries are essential components of educational institutions, catering to the academic needs of students and faculty.

Unlike larger research universities, college libraries are usually tailored to the specific curriculum and programs offered by the institution, fostering a culture of learning and research within undergraduate education. Thirdly, school libraries serve as dynamic learning centers

within primary and secondary educational institutions, providing invaluable resources for students' educational growth and personal development. Fourthly, libraries within research institutions are specialized repositories of knowledge, catering to the unique needs of advanced academic and scientific research within research-focused organisations (Gabbay and Shoham, 2017).

Gabbay and Shoham (2017) outline that several trends are evident within academic libraries. Firstly, they are increasingly focusing on collaboration and partnership to better serve various stakeholders, resulting in benefits such as cost savings and strengthened institutional missions. Secondly, academic libraries are embracing flexibility by sharing their space with other units, albeit sometimes at the expense of their own identity and recognition. Lastly, academic libraries are re-positioning themselves by measuring their contributions to the academic mission diversely and emphasizing digital literacy, teaching and research support (Martzoukou, 2020). Despite the opportunities presented by increased online learning and digital resources, academic libraries face challenges such as funding constraints, staffing and recognition of their contributions to research (Gabbay and Shoham, 2017). Effective leadership in the digital era involves clear communication of library offerings and securing acceptance of new partnership roles as part of the library strategy. Understanding the functions of an academic library goes beyond knowing its nature and type, offering insights into its essential role within educational institutions.

### **2.2.3. Eleven Functions of an academic library**

Today, academic libraries play an active and leading role in the educational process since they help learners and researchers to continue education and research effectively. As Aljahan (2007: 23) states, libraries help "Learn how to teach yourself and search for information". Raja Srinivasan and Rajendran (2015) suggest that libraries and academic libraries in particular are now playing a relatively larger role in educating researchers in handling their research queries and fulfilling their objectives, as well as enhancing teaching and learning processes. According to Banting (2008), this means that academic libraries play a significant role in achieving the goals of tertiary institutions which can hardly be achieved without an efficient library, because a good library that provides access to information is noted to be an essential ingredient for academic research as well as successful teaching and learning. It is important to underscore that not everyone understands or views the role of the library and librarians in the university in

the same way. For example, two comprehensive United Kingdom (UK) surveys of libraries' research services by the Research Information Network (RIN) (2011) revealed differences between how researchers and librarians view the key responsibilities of a librarian in the University.

Researchers' feedback identifies seven core areas of expertise within libraries, including managing collections, overseeing repositories, administering information, providing subject-specific expertise, teaching information management skills, managing datasets, and specializing in technology" (Brown and Swan, 2007: 43-46). While librarians concur with these areas, they also emphasize additional responsibilities such as educating on information literacy, advising on intellectual property matters, and handling metadata. Interestingly, librarians seem to prioritize teaching research skills and disseminating research findings more than researchers do.

In his article, Ashikuzzaman (2023) acknowledges the multifaceted roles of academic libraries, which significantly contribute to the academic progress, intellectual growth and scholarly advancement of their institutions and communities. It is crucial to note that academic libraries go beyond mere book repositories. They fulfill various roles that collectively support the educational and research objectives of academic institutions. Table 1 below illustrates the diverse functions of academic libraries as dynamic centers of learning, discovery and collaboration, empowering students, faculty and researchers with the necessary tools for academic excellence.

**Table 1: Functions of an Academic Library**

<b>Type of function</b>	<b>Description of the function</b>
Resource Provision	Curate and maintain extensive collections of books, journals, periodicals, research papers, electronic databases, and multimedia resources to ensure that students, faculty, and researchers have access to comprehensive and up-to-date information relevant to their studies and research projects.
Research Support	Collaborate with researchers to help them identify and access relevant sources for their research (e.g. guide in using specialized databases, locating hard-to-find materials and ensuring that research is grounded in credible sources).
Information Literacy Education	Offer workshops and instructional sessions to enhance users' information literacy skills (e.g. sessions to evaluate sources critically, differentiate between reliable and unreliable information, and ethically use and cite sources in their academic work).
Collaborative Learning	Create spaces that encourage collaborative learning and group work (e.g. Group study rooms equipped with multimedia tools, discussion areas, and technology resources to enable students collaborate on projects, engage in peer discussions).
Technology Access	Provide access to technology and assist users in using digital tools effectively, such as conducting online research, managing references, and creating multimedia presentations.
Archiving and Special Collections	House unique and rare materials with historical, cultural, and scholarly significance.
Interlibrary Loan Services	Collaborate with other institutions to provide interlibrary loan services. Users can request materials not available in their own library and have them borrowed from other libraries, expanding the breadth of accessible resources.
Reference Services	offer personalized assistance to users seeking information. (e.g. help users navigate library catalogs, databases, and resources,

	guiding them toward relevant materials that match their research needs).
Promoting Open Access	Advocate for open access, which promotes unrestricted access to scholarly research. Librarians encourage researchers to publish their work in open-access journals or repositories, making their findings accessible to a global audience without subscription barriers.
Cultural and Intellectual Engagement	Host events, exhibitions, author talks, and lectures that promote intellectual engagement and cultural exploration. These activities enrich the academic community by fostering discussions, encouraging interdisciplinary connections, and celebrating the arts and sciences.
Remote Access	Provide remote access to electronic resources, enabling users to access materials from off-campus locations through digital platforms facilitating continuous learning and research regardless of physical proximity to the library.

Source: Adapted from Ashikuzzaman (2023: para. 7).

### **2.3. Library and information services in a digital age**

Digital technology has transformed how libraries function and deliver services. As a result, library services in the digital age have experienced substantial alterations to adapt to the changing needs. Zickuhr, Rainie and Purcell (2013) stated that an advancement in information technology has permuted all sectors of society's development, including the education sector. According to Zickuhr et al. (2013), access to technological gadgets such as smartphones, computers and the availability of the internet in both developed and developing countries made it easy to access, distribute and store information in various forms. In Africa, access to the internet and technological gadgets are growing, thus allowing access to information even to those in rural areas. This means that since library information is readily available on the internet, means that libraries can easily access anywhere depending on access and internet coverage.

In Africa, institutions of higher learning and libraries have made significant advancements in accessing the internet. Kaur (2015) states that the library's traditional role as a physical location

housing book racks is beginning to look more out of sync with the demands of learners and scholars as the digital age gradually changes the way one acquires knowledge and materials that have become available online and in digital formats. Examining the state of the library in the digital age in Africa, a study conducted by Okocha (2022) revealed that there is a need for sustainable funding, as the High Cost of Infrastructure, Digital Literacy, Copyright Issues and Equity of access are challenges facing digital libraries in Africa.

Raja (2015) suggested that solutions encouraging Library Consortia in Africa and promoting Open Access policies will provide benefits to the library sector in Africa and enhance accessibility to information. SA, being part of the developing world, experiences similar challenges despite advancements in technology, libraries still experience numerous challenges in the digital age. A study conducted by Masenya and Ngulube (2019) suggests that amongst librarians in SA, there was inadequate staff with expertise in digitizing resources and a knowledge and understanding of intellectual property rights and copyright issues, which are major challenges inhibiting the effective preservation of digital resources. This adds to the already existing challenges of funding and adequate infrastructure.

In addition, it is essential to acknowledge that the digital age will bring about changes that will affect knowledge for organisations like UKZN, and power and wealth dynamics. The current period of rapid technological change and its effects on different industries and society is called the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) or Industry 4.0. For this research, it will be called the digital age. Le (2015) stated that the digital revolution has presented challenges to higher education institutions, including academic libraries, budget shrinkage, transition to digital collections, relevance in a digital environment, shortages of capable leaders, and changing roles in the rapidly networked, digitized landscape.

#### **2.4. The Academic Library in a digital age**

In the digital age, academic libraries have undergone a profound transformation, adapting to the rapid advancements in technology and changing educational paradigms. The transition from traditional print collections to digital formats has been a defining feature of this evolution (Corpuz, 2020). Academic libraries now offer extensive electronic resources, including e-books, academic journals and databases, providing students and researchers with convenient and instant access to a wealth of information (Corpuz, 2020). The rise of the internet and online

databases has facilitated remote access to academic resources, enabling users to conduct research from virtually anywhere. This has expanded the reach of academic libraries beyond the physical confines of the institution, thereby fostering a more inclusive and global learning environment. Additionally, the digitization of archival materials and special collections has preserved rare and valuable resources while making them more widely available (Corpuz, 2020).

With a greater emphasis on digital content, academic libraries have become increasingly focused on digital preservation, as preserving digital materials ensures the long-term accessibility of scholarly resources, and preventing loss due to technological changes (Tšoenyo, Olatokun, 2012). They believe that modern academic libraries provide dynamic spaces for collaboration, group study and interactive learning. These spaces often incorporate technology, fostering a conducive environment for both individual study and group projects. Academic libraries play a crucial role in promoting information literacy skills. Librarians assist users in navigating the complex landscape of digital information, teaching them how to critically evaluate sources and effectively use digital tools for research (Tšoenyo and Olatokun, 2012).

In summary, academic libraries in the digital age have transformed into dynamic hubs that leverage technology to provide a wide range of digital resources, enhance user experiences, and support the evolving landscape of scholarly communication (Pietersen, 2015). While digital libraries offer numerous advantages, they also face several challenges that impact their effectiveness and sustainability (Sharma and Kumar 2019). Some of the key challenges include *Access Disparities*: Despite the increasing availability of digital resources, there are still significant disparities in access to technology and the internet. Sharma and Kumar (2019) add that this digital divide can limit the reach of digital libraries, particularly in underserved or developing regions where reliable internet connectivity may be lacking; and *Preservation and Sustainability*: Digital materials are susceptible to emerging format, hardware/software dependencies, and degradation over time.

Furthermore, digital libraries often face complex copyright and licensing challenges. Balancing the need for open access with the rights of content creators and publishers can be a challenging process. In addition, digital libraries deal with sensitive user data, hence ensuring the security

and privacy of this information is crucial (Sharma and Kumar 2019). Building and maintaining the technological infrastructure required for digital libraries can be expensive. This includes investments in servers, storage systems, software, and ongoing updates to keep up with evolving technologies. Financial constraints can pose challenges for institutions seeking to establish or expand their digital library services. User Training and Digital Literacy adds to some of the challenges experiencing digital library. Moreover, users need to be equipped with the necessary digital literacy skills to navigate and utilize digital library resources effectively.

This means that providing adequate training and support for users, especially in academic settings, is essential to ensure that the potential benefits of digital libraries are fully realized (Sharma and Kumar, 2019). Sharma and Kumar (2019) conclude that addressing digital library challenges requires collaboration amongst libraries, technology developers, policy-makers and other stakeholders to create sustainable and inclusive digital library environments. Given the clarity on the nature and status of academic librarians, functions and changes in the digital era in the domain of the academic library, it is imperative to delve into the phenomenon of leadership in general before situating it in the context of the academic library.

## **2.5. Defining and exploring the concept of leadership**

The general acceptance of the notion of leadership in social scientific research attests to the significance of leaders in society, and its investigation has a long history. The interesting issue is that there is no agreed-upon definition for leadership. “There is no widely accepted definition of leadership, no common consensus on how best to develop leadership and leaders, and remarkably little evidence of the impact of leadership or leadership development on performance and productivity” (Bolden, 2004: 3).

Given the variety of ways that it has been conceptualized. “They are (a) leadership in a process, (b) leadership involves influence, (c) leadership occurs within a group context, and (d) leadership goal attainment” (Northouse, 1997: 3). It is challenging to capture various distinctive intuitive senses of leadership in a brief definition because it is based on a combination of experience and education. “There are those who view leadership as the consequence of a set of traits or characteristics possessed by ‘leaders’, whilst others view leadership as a social process that emerges from group relationships” (Bolden, 2004: 4).

As a leader, one should ensure that those around one succeed and the organisation achieves its objectives, not a rank, that requires the other essential and distinctive qualities for leadership. “Although leaders and followers are closely linked, it is the leader who often initiates the relationship, creates the communication linkage and carries the burden for maintaining the relationship” (Northouse, 1997: 4). Anwar (2017) defines leadership as the ability to guide, empower and motivate others to contribute to the productivity and advancement of the organisation.

They may also re-organise workplace functions, such as the apportionment of resources and modifying communication patterns, to make it easier for employees to achieve organisational objectives (Ali, 2020). Kanyangale (2017) argues that leadership is a social process whereby a person can encourage others to support him in a common goal without force or threat. For instance, leaders are understood to be those who influence society, people are ready to follow, and people look up to for guidance or instruction. Other scholars formalise the definition by explaining that leadership is when a group of people come together to reach a shared objective (Kanyangale, 2017).

Different kinds of leadership styles mentioned in the literature, namely bureaucratic, autocratic, charismatic, laissez-faire, participative, relation oriented, task-oriented, transformational, servant leadership and transactional leadership, to name a few (Al-Thawabiya, Singh, Al-Lenjawi, and Alomari, 2023). Different leadership styles have a unique impact on an organisation's performance. Some leadership styles support organisations in reaching their objectives, while others result in low employee morale and inconducive workspaces, impeding progress (Kanyangale, 2017). Therefore, the performance of an organisation is highly dependent on the type of leadership and its principles, including beliefs, morals, expectations and constraints (Samimi, Cortes, Anderson, and Herrmann 2022).

Leadership styles refer to how leaders deliver their directives, implement plans, and motivate people towards shared objectives (Kanyangale, 2017). The leader and followers have one organisational goal, which implies that the leader is not better than the subordinate. It is crucial to comprehend that leadership is a complex topic that affects many social science fields. As a result, scholars and experts have their unique concepts. “In short, leadership is a complex phenomenon that touches on many other important organisational, social and personal

processes” (Bolden, 2004: 5). The premise underlying many leadership concepts entails a process of social influence in which one person exerts power over others to organise the interactions and relationships inside an entity.

“Most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to structure the activities and relationships in an organisation” (Yukl, 2013: 2). There is a notion that a manager would handle complexity while a leader would need to be able to promote change. It is also important to highlight that while the manager maintains business-as-usual through planning, organizing and control, the leader develops the vision and tone for change.

Managers work through systems and structures while leaders inspire and empower people to turn the vision into reality, and to also clear obstacles for people on the pathway to success.

One can get a clear understanding of leadership by understanding the difference between a leader and a manager. For example, the old but still useful work entitled “What leaders actually do” by Kotter (1990) illuminates who is a leader by comparing it with a manager, as shown in Table 2 below:

**Table 2: Leaders vs. Managers**

Manager	Leader
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on efficiency; doing things right:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Planning</li> <li>○ Budgeting</li> <li>○ Staffing</li> <li>○ Controlling</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on effectiveness; doing the right things:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Aligning</li> <li>○ Setting Direction</li> <li>○ Inspiring/Motivating</li> <li>○ Energizing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coping with complexities; promoting stability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging with change; promoting transformation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bottom Line: <i>“What am I <b>doing</b>?”</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bottom Line: <i>“How am I <b>being</b>?”</i></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>“What are my people doing, and How could they do it better?”</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>“Who are my people, and what are they really capable of?”</i></p>

Source: Kotter (1990: 13)

Since there are many different leadership philosophies and the concept of leadership constantly changes, it is essential to emphasise the difference between leaders and managers. Wong (2020) claims that leadership and management are interchangeable terms in the field of libraries because leadership is a component of management. Wong (2020) stated that according to other

scholars, leaders create visions and motivate others to take new directions, while managers monitor progress to maintain order and authority. “At times, it seems like every person writing about leadership has their definition of the concept” (Martin, 2020: 9).

Leadership is defined as the practice by leaders to influence, drive followers towards an organisational goal and manage change where everyone is involved. “Leadership is an influence relationship amongst leaders and followers who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes” (Daft and Lane, 2018: 5). People only saw leadership as a personal trait throughout several centuries. According to Silva (2016), the renowned Chinese scholar Confucius, who lived approximately 2 500 years ago, did not define leadership. Instead, he emphasised that leaders must be morally upright and considerate to those around them.

A workplace leader should inspire people to achieve goals and steer the company toward the desired state of the organisation. “Leadership may be considered as the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward the goal setting and goal achievement” (Stogdill, 1950: 4). The purpose of leadership, according to the definition, appears to be a group, a shared duty and a specialization of responsibilities. Others see leadership as a social process that develops out of group connections, while some see leadership as the result of a specific set of attributes or qualities held by leaders. “There are those who view leadership as the consequence of a set of traits or characteristics possessed by ‘leaders’, whilst others view leadership as a social process that emerges from group relationships” (Bolden, 2004: 4).

However, there is a need for more studies or research on African leadership. Furthermore, there is also a lack of leadership theories in an African context or evidence in practice that has resulted in poor administration, poverty, poor services and crime (de Boer, Bothma, Olwagen, 2012). “Although Africa provides us with examples of poor leadership, in both the private and public sectors of the economy, which leads to a general perception of leadership perception” (Iszatt-White, Saunders, Botha, Ladzani, Rudansky-Kloppers and Strydom, 2018: 6). There is a need for more leadership in Africa capable of understanding and responding to the dangers, challenges and opportunities in the society. However, the question remains whether leadership should be in a context based on geographic or demographic factors?

Authors such as Martin (2020) differ by stating that there is no universally accepted definition of leadership, which is one of the areas where the leadership sector falls short. It has been observed that Library leaders are accustomed to use leadership to persuade others to work towards a common objective, but leadership should not be limited to only leaders with a profile. “Leadership is not limited to those carrying managerial titles, as it happens at all levels of an organization” (Wong, 2020: 598). Even those leaders who must acquire theories and experience have adopted from the Western context to address Africans’ needs. “As much as leaders can learn from research and leadership theories developed in the Western world, we need to take cognisance of Africa’s unique environment and culture” (Iszatt-White et al., 2018: 7).

A leader requires a theory as well as an environment to exercise leadership in both his professional and personal life. “A good definition of leadership also needs a theory, a space in which the leader lives out the definition” (Martin, 2020: 10). Since power and management are sometimes confused with leadership, and a definition of leadership also calls for a conceptual distinction between the two. For this qualitative study, which focuses on academic libraries, leadership is an interaction between leaders and followers who desire fundamental changes and outcomes representing their shared goals. “Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes” (Daft and Lane, 2018: 5).

The definition is ideal as it recognizes that leaders do not force the desired changes but instead represent goals that leaders and followers share for the interest of the organisation they serve. However, the leader needs to make the first move in establishing communication channels and taking on the duty of maintaining the relationship. “Although leaders and followers are closely linked, it is the leader who often initiates the relationship, create the communication linkages, and carries the burden for maintaining the relationship” (Northouse, 1997: 5). In an academic library like the UKZN Library, the position of leader and follower should be a dynamic partnership characterized by different components combined to create a healthy academic library environment that promotes the institution's instructional mission. This definition is important and relevant in this study since it seeks fundamental leadership and results such as institutional mission alignment, change management, and innovation and technology integration.

## 2.6. Evolution of leadership theory

The question arises as to whether leadership comes naturally to some people, making them natural leaders, or if it develops through training, expertise, and external variables. Northouse (1997) expressed that it is common to hear statements like "He or she is born to be a leader" to convey this idea. The defining personal qualities of a leader, such as intelligence, honesty, self-confidence and looks, are known as leadership traits. "Research early in the twentieth century examined leaders who had achieved a level of greatness and hence became known as the Great Man approach" (Daft and Lane, 2015: 36).

According to the 'great man' idea, which focused on how male leaders attained and maintained positions of power, individuals were born to be leaders and would succeed based only on their personalities (Bolden, 2004). "This search was strongly influenced by the 'great man' theory that focused on how (primarily male) figures achieved and maintained positions of influence" (Bolden, 2004: 9). Over the years, some development led to process leadership, characterised by qualities and behaviours demonstrated by a leader who focuses on managing and controlling various organisational processes or groups. "The process viewpoint suggests it is a phenomenon that resides in the context and makes leadership available to everyone" (Northouse, 1997: 5). The trait position varies from the process leaders because process leadership is concerned with increasing efficiency, streamlining company procedures, and attaining corporate objectives.

The study discovered only an inconsistent link between personal characteristics and leader effectiveness, and the variety of characteristics that good leaders exhibit suggests that leadership ability is not a natural gift. For the purpose of this research, the process definition is consistent with this section. Successful leadership qualities can be inherited or learned through experience and training. "Today, psychometric tools are an example of trait theory principles in action and are often used in staff recruitment" (Benmira and Agboola, 2021: 3). Figure 3 below is helpful to gain a quick understanding of the main theories of leadership which have unfolded over the years.

**Table 3: Summary of the main leadership theories**

<b>Era</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Theory</b>	<b>Description</b>
Trait	1840s 1930s–1940s	Great Man Trait	Focuses on the natural born leader Focus on identifying traits and characteristics of effective leaders
Behavioural	1940s–1950s	Behavioural	Focus on the actions and skills of leaders
Situational	1960s	Contingent and Situational	Focus on leaders adapting their style considering the environment
New leadership	1990s 1990s 2000s 2000s 2000s	Transactional Transformational Shared Collaborative Collective Servant Inclusive Complexity	Focus on leadership as a cost–benefit exchange. Focus on an inspirational style pushing followers to higher and higher levels of achievement Focus on followers leading each other Focus on engaging followers. Person-centred style Focus on the whole system of an organisation

The Learning Zone by Benmira and Agboola (2021: 4)

## **2.7. The Upper Echelons theory**

According to Wangrow, Schepker, and Barker (2015), by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the study of leadership had hit a roadblock: there was little progress in developing new theories, and serious scholars were questioning whether leadership was even relevant. During this period, opinions on the influence of leadership on performance varied widely. Wangrow ...et al. further stated that some scholars, particularly from the field of organisational sociology, argued that leadership behaviours had a minimal impact on organisational performance compared to environmental or organisational factors. On the other hand, Danisman, S. Tosunta and Karadag (2015) suggest that advocates of leadership importance asserted that leaders' attitudes significantly affected organisational performance. In the mid-1980s, there was a notable shift in focus from examining "supervisory" leadership to exploring strategic leadership.

This change brought about a renewed interest, initially concentrating on the upper echelons theory and the study of Top Management Teams (TMTs), as well as what are now known as "new" leadership theories. Early leadership researchers primarily focused on the actions and responsibilities of lower-level managers in guiding, supporting and giving feedback to their subordinates. However, due to doubts about the effectiveness of leaders, three distinct streams of leadership research emerged. Firstly, Hambrick (1984) introduced an ambitious research agenda aimed at bolstering the importance of leadership within the strategic management field, termed the "upper echelons perspective". According to Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996), this perspective significantly influenced the comprehension of organisational processes and outcomes. Despite broadening the understanding of strategic leadership, the upper echelons perspective has faced criticism for not directly examining actual strategic leadership behaviours. Instead, it relied on demographic indicators and inferred strategic leadership actions.

Hambrick and Mason (1984) introduced the concept of the Upper Echelon theory, which garnered considerable attention for its exploration of how demographic and psychological factors influence the decisions made by senior managers, often referred to as the "upper echelons" (Wangrow, Schepker and Barker, 2015). "This theory posits that organizational outcomes are shaped by the values and cognitive processes of these influential figures within the organization" (Hambrick and Mason, 1984: 193). Strategic leadership, accordingly,

encompasses not only the symbolic role but also the relational and social dimensions of top executives (Hambrick and Mason, 1984:193-195).

However, it is worth considering that organizational outcomes may not solely reflect the values and cognitive bases of top management, as suggested by the upper-echelon theory. Factors such as resource availability can significantly impact the attainment of goals, suggesting a broader array of influences on organizational outcomes beyond the actions of senior leadership alone. The upper echelon theory posits that the unique traits of top managers, like their age or career background, influence the decisions they make regarding a company's strategy and structure. These decisions, in turn, directly impact the strategic direction and performance of the organization (Nielsen, 2010).

The origin of the upper echelon theory is in the seminal works of Hambrick and Mason (1984). This seminal work is clear that the Upper echelon theory suggests that "organisational outcomes – both strategies and effectiveness – are viewed as reflections of the values and cognitive bases of powerful actors in the organisation" (Hambrick and Mason 1984:193). Strategic leadership is about the symbolic role and the relational and social construction of top executives (Hambrick and Mason 1984:193-195). The Upper echelon theory focuses on the relationship between managers, organisational processes, and performance outcomes. This study will use this theory to understand how the leaders in the top management team of the library at UKZN display or fail to display leadership practices.

The theory is grounded on the assumption that key senior leaders at the UKZN library influence the library's outcomes depending on their backgrounds, knowledge, expertise, experience and individual traits or characteristics (Hambrick and Mason, 1984). Hambrick and Mason (1984) further argued that emergent issues in organisations are handled by senior managers whose strategic choices are highly influenced by their unique characteristics, knowledge, and experience. The Upper echelons theory seeks to understand why organisations behave or act as they do (Hambrick and Mason, 1984: 193). As a result, the strategies and organisational performance at the UKZN library will reflect the values and cognitive bases of the top leadership within the library. However, the upper echelon theory is criticised in many ways.

First is the criticism for using demographic proxies (e.g., age, functional background, top team size and characteristics) to infer strategic leadership behaviours. In this way, critics are not convinced that the upper echelon theory is strategic in the leadership study. The seminal work on the Upper echelon theory is also faulted as a "theory of group composition", which fails to focus on the behaviour of strategic leaders and their effect on the organisational outcomes. With these criticisms in mind, the current study focuses on practices of ports executives related to sustainability in a port environment. Samimi et al. (2019) maintained that the senior leaders' ability or kind of influence and support is controlled by team processes, incentives, environments and integration with others.

Therefore, the external environment is not the only determining factor of organisational actions and outcomes, as the individual senior managers also play a key role. This theory is beneficial in understanding the organisational outcomes by simply studying the leadership of that institution, as competitors may also predict the strategic plans of their rival firms and selection of competent leaders (Hambrick and Mason, 1984). According to Hambrick and Mason (1984), strategic decisions and choices are usually subjective and biased because they are made by humans whose ability to perceive the environment is limited to what they can see, belief, value, preferences, education and experience.

Therefore, those individual leaders' characteristics are mirrored by their strategic choices, which influence the strategic performance of organisations (Hambrick and Mason, 1984). However, Hambrick (2007) criticised the theory, arguing that it was not conclusive on the relationship between the traits of managers and the organisational outcome. Moreover, the assumption that similar characteristics yield similar strategic actions has not been confirmed. Despite these limitations, the theory explains how managerial perceptions and characteristics can influence the organisation's performance.

### **2.7.1. Strategic Leadership**

The library environment is constantly changing rapidly. Therefore, organisations need competent leaders with advanced strategic leadership competencies. The study and scope of strategic leadership focus on a limited number of executives known as top management teams (TMT), board of directors and chief executive officers (CEO), who discharges an organisation's overall duties (Lord, Hannah, Jennings, and Hall, 2016). In their Upper Echelons theory, Mason

and Hambrick (1984) identified strategic leadership as the absolute responsibility and reflection of top management teams (TMTs), focusing on these individuals (Hambrick, 2016). The upper echelon theory (UET), which is based on strategic leadership, is used in this study. Bass (2007) describes strategic leaders as a group of chief executive officers (CEOs) who develop policies for obtaining and integrating resources for a company. Kanyangale (2017) hypothesise a set of distinct capabilities that include anticipating, envisioning, strategic thinking, remaining flexible and empowering individuals to generate innovative ideas that contribute to high performance. Pitelis and Wagner (2018) defined strategic leadership as the ability to anticipate, predict, strategic plan and inspire others to formulate innovations that support the organisation's sustainability.

According to Kanyangale (2017), strategic leaders are vital in setting the long-term strategic direction of an organisation and ensuring that it is achieved. A strategic leader ensures the alignment of strategy with the mission and vision of the organisation, including its goals and objectives (Bailey, Mankin, Kelliher and Garavan, 2018). Pitelis and Wager (2018) define strategic leadership as an activity of clearly communicating and articulating the shared values and vision of the organisation down to low-level workers and decision-making ability with minimal supervision. Therefore, strategic leadership emphasises a leader's ability to anticipate, envisage, maintain flexibility and think strategically while encouraging employees to create new ideas that lead to organisational transformations or change, and performance improvement (Kanyangale, 2017).

Samimi et al. (2019) argue that strategic leadership involves particular competencies within a leader that enables them to assimilate new information and ideas through different learning processes and apply this knowledge to effectively provide solutions to complex situations in the external business environment. They further explain that such competencies will allow flexibility, enabling strategic leaders to re-adjust the organisation in response to uncertainties. The widespread consensus amongst scholars summarises strategic leadership as a combination of practices that include formulation of the long-term goals of the organisation; maximising the organisation's resources; human resources management, social responsibility, developing a culture of organisational sustainability and emphasising ethical values to support the long-term future of the business (Samimi et al., 2019).

This definition encompasses most characteristics of strategic leadership and was therefore used for this study. According to Samimi et al. (2019), it is common that studies on competences as a critical differentiator of performance have focused on determining which characteristics of managers are related to effective performance and how these different competencies interact and affect each. Often, these result in generic competences with little effort to embrace contextual differences. In focusing on the strategic level and context of academic libraries in a particular university, the current study does not seek to unravel generic but rather the specific leadership competencies necessary to excel in the digital era. This entails defining the behaviours that depict typical behaviours associated with identified competencies which distinguish outstanding performance as a leader of an academic library at UKZN.

### **2.7.2. Levels and scope of leadership**

The seminal work of Katz and Kahn (1966) brings to the fore the notion of levels or categories of leadership in organisations – the strategic, operational and tactical. Firstly, "strategic theories of leadership are concerned with leadership 'of' organisations... and are marked by a concern for the evolution of the organisation as a whole, including its changing aims and capabilities ...". A slightly different view is that strategic leadership theory also focuses on the dominant coalition or top "executives who have overall responsibility for an organisation, their characteristics, what they do, and how they affect organisational outcomes" (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 2009: 4). Tochman Campbell, Bilgili and Ajay (2021) further argue that strategic leadership is involved in strategic decisions.

Tochman Campbell, Bilgili and Ajay (2021) noted that the characteristics of strategic decisions show that these decisions are about the long term, complex in nature, affect the entire organisation in terms of scope of activities and involve considerable change. Tochman Campbell, Bilgili and Ajay (2021) also stated that it is crucial to note that strategic leadership refers to the overall leadership of an organisation or division. Scholars such as Swan (2023) suggest that strategic leaders may use transactional punishments and incentives to achieve their company goals while focusing on the longer term. Therefore, building strategic leadership based on transformational factors is far more effective and efficient. Swan (2023) further stated that while a strategic leader must provide a vision of the future and the idealised company, he or she does not need to be highly charismatic and strategic leaders engage in strategy work.

Swan (2023) stated that the word strategy has different definitions. Strategy refers to the art that generals use in military operations as a military phrase, and "strategos" is the Greek equivalent of the English word strategy (Heuser, 2023). "Researchers and consultants have provided numerous models and frameworks to analyse strategic choice. "The word "strategy" is derived from the Greek word "stratēgos", stratus (meaning army) and "before" (meaning leadership/movement)" (Mjaku, 2020: 914). Sun Tzu, the Chinese military philosopher, addressed the critical role of strategy in obtaining success, encouraging leaders to understand their opponents and capitalise on their strengths. Sun Tzu felt that one must plan, adapt, and deceive to obtain an advantage in a fight.

"To this practical consideration of managing and directing a large complex force, the importance of strategy was highlighted by the Chinese military philosopher Sun Tzu, who defined strategy as 'the great work of the organization' (Johnson, Whittington, Scholes, Angwin and Regné, 2017: 5). Authors such as Craig and Grant (1997) argue that strategic leadership involves the development and implementation of organisational strategy. "There are times when it pays to manage the details and let the strategies emerge for themselves" (Mintzberg, 1987: 14). Two definitions of strategy are further mentioned. "First, the long-term direction of an organisation can include both deliberate, logical strategy and more incremental, emergent patterns of strategy" (Johnson et al., 2017: 6).

"Second, long-term direction can include both strategies that emphasise difference and competition, and strategies that recognise the roles of cooperation and even imitation" (Johnson et al., 2017: 6). The strategy definition has three components, namely long-term, direction, and organisation. Leaders need to understand the complexities of the chaotic environment, and using great forces for personal gain are both aspects of strategic thinking. "It means utilizing tools of analysis and tactics to take decisive and prudent action that gives us the best possible chance of achieving our objective whether those objectives are personal or professional" (Priem, 2018: 1).

Secondly, tactical leadership focuses on the "here and now", with short-term decisions and risk management for immediate gains. This is a transactional situation. At the tactical level, leaders must balance team members' needs and mission or situation needs. This frequently entails negotiating and cajoling followers to participate in order to attain the aim. It also entails

building an environment in which they are willing to make sacrifices or contribute to the team because they have a strong sense of loyalty to the leader and the other team members. As a result, tactical leadership is highly transactional. This is because the leader does not have many transformative leadership tools at his or her disposal. At the coalface, the tactical leader works, and the tactical leader's level of idealised influence or charisma is the only factor truly under his or her control.

Lastly, building the systems and structures that enable the strategic leader's vision and objectives to become a reality is what operational leadership is all about. Organisations' unsung heroes are operational leaders. Why? Because they create the systems and structures that enable the strategic leader(s) to achieve their vision and objectives while also providing a framework for inspired action by the tactical leaders of the organisation. In other words, they develop systems to support the organisation's values and leadership and encourage a culture and behaviour patterns consistent with these values and leadership.

Operational leaders guide teams in analysing and comprehending the organisation's strategic and tactical realities. They must design the infrastructure and framework that will enable everyone to work tactically toward the organisation's strategy through the operational framework of processes, structures, systems, and incentives. To do so, they must comprehend the organisation's business and its technical and financial characteristics and limits. This study focuses on the strategic level of leadership in the UKZN library. As such, it is imperative to understand the generic functions of strategic leaders in an organisation.

### **2.7.3. Functions of strategic leaders**

In research on strategic leadership, there is a lack of consensus on the nature and variety of functions of strategic leaders. Strategic leaders act, think and behave in specific proper ways to achieve particular *ends, perform executive, relational and symbolic work*. Scholars such as Ireland and Hitt (2005), Boal and Hooijberg, (2000), Hart and Quinn (1993), Kanyangale (2017), Samimi et al. (2020), BC Public Service Agency (2021), Richardson (1994) and Covey (1996) highlight different functions of strategic leaders, which are indicated in Table 4.

**Table 4: Selected views on the variety and number of functions of strategic leadership**

Authors	Strategic leaders` functions
Ireland and Hitt (2005)	<p>Five different functions:</p> <p>Defining strategic direction, investing strategic capabilities, developing human capital, promoting organisational culture with ethical practices, implementing balanced organisational control</p>
Boal and Hooijberg (2000:516-518)	<p>Three functions</p> <p>Crete and maintain absorptive capacity Creates and maintains adaptive capacity Demonstrate managerial wisdom</p>
Hart and Quinn (1993)	<p>Four competing functions:</p> <p>Vision setter, Motivator, Analyzer, Task master.</p>
Kanyangale (2017)	<p>Three Organisational level functions:</p> <p>Strategically iterate between humanising and commodifying organisational members; align priorities and resources to create value; shape and exploit competitive advantage and promote entrepreneurial culture.</p> <p>Four different Individual level functions:</p> <p>Display Opportunity-seeking wisdom; build appropriate social capital; entrepreneurial</p>

	resilience; and curiosity and practice led learning
Samimi et al. (2022)	<p>Eight different functions:</p> <p>Making strategic decisions, engaging with external stakeholders, performing human resource management activities, motivating, and influencing, and managing information, overseeing operations and administration, managing social and ethical issues, and managing conflicting demands.</p>
BC Public Service Agency (2021)	<p>Six different functions:</p> <p>Building Strategic Alliances, Vision and Goal Setting, Creating and Managing Change, Solving Problems Creatively, Promoting Empowerment, Executive Presence</p>
Richardson (1994).	<p>Eight roles/functions:</p> <p>(a) classical administrator, (b) design school planner, (c) role playing manager, (d) political contingency responder, (e) competitive positioner, (f) visionary transformer, (g) self-organising facilitator, (h) turnaround strategist, and (i) crisis-avoider</p>
Covey (1996)	<p>Three basic roles/functions</p> <p>(a) path finding, (b) aligning, and (c) empowering.</p>

Source: Researcher's Own

To illustrate the lack of consensus on the functions of strategic leaders, a look at randomly selected views of scholars is helpful. For example, Boal and Hooijberg (2000:516-518) propose three complex functions of strategic leadership which occur throughout the entire life of the organisation, irrespective of the stage of growth. According to Boal and Hooijberg (2000:516-518), the first function requires strategic leaders to create and maintain absorptive capacity (the ability of the organisation and its members to keep on learning). Kolb (1984) further states that this involves recognising, assimilating, and applying new information towards new goals. Szemzo, Mosquera, Polyak and Hayes (2022) stated that the second function is creating and maintaining adaptive capacity or strategic flexibility. This involves the ability to change due to variations in conditions.

Szemzo (2022) commented that in a different vein, thirdly, the strategic leader requires *managerial wisdom* – a combination of discernment and “Kairos time”. Discernment is fundamental to managerial wisdom and refers to the ability to “perceive variation in the environment and an understanding of the social actors and their relationships” (Boal and Hooijberg, 2000: 518). Discernment is also labelled as social intelligence or interpersonal intelligence when discussed to mean understanding of others. Kairos time is the capacity to take the “right action at a critical moment” or “kairotic moment” (Boal and Hooijberg, 2000: 518). While Boal and Hooijberg (2000: 518) mention absorptive capacity, adaptive capacity and managerial wisdom, it is noteworthy that these are different from Covey’s (1996) three basic roles/functions, namely (a) path finding, (b) aligning, and (c) empowering.

Ireland and Hitt (2005) suggest that there are more than three functions constituting the scope of functions of strategic leaders. According to Ireland and Hitt (2005), there are five different functions of strategic leaders which include defining strategic direction, investing strategic capabilities, developing human capital, promoting organisational culture with ethical practices, implementing balanced organisational control. In a different vein, Kanyangale (2017) focused on Entrepreneurial Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (ESMES) to identify eight complementary functions of local strategic leaders of ESMEs in Malawi.

This study found that the local strategic leaders have the organisational ability to: Strategically iterate between humanising and commodifying organisational members; align priorities and

resources to create value; shape and exploit competitive advantage and promote entrepreneurial culture. Additionally, entrepreneurs as strategic leaders also display opportunity-seeking wisdom; build appropriate social capital; entrepreneurial resilience; and curiosity and practice led learning. It can be argued that this will fit well in ESMES and not public universities since the two have different governance. For example, in public institutions decision-making is long, there is a lot of bureaucracy.

In a different vein, Samimi et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review of research on strategic leaders to conclude that the functions of strategic leaders include making strategic decisions, engaging with external stakeholders, performing human resource management activities, motivating, and influencing, and managing information, overseeing operations and administration, managing social and ethical issues, and managing conflicting demands. These functions are generalised as they can be found in any institution or organisation.

For the purposes of this exploratory study, the functions proposed by Samimi et al. (2022) are insightful in understanding academic library leadership as they are more refined to capture the complexity and variety of functions of strategic leaders. Two key reasons have influenced the choice of the eight functions of strategic leadership (Samimi et al., 2022). Firstly, using functions of strategic leaders conceived long ago is not helpful as roles and responsibilities may have changed in the past half century, making them less relevant for strategic leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The eight functions by Samimi et al. (2022) are not only recent, but also embrace most functions by other scholars such as Ireland and Hitt (2005). In adopting the functions by Samimi et al. (2022), it is prudent to underline that implementing balanced organisational control, which is pronounced in the work of Ireland and Hitt (2005), needs to be carefully integrated into managing conflicting demands.

Secondly, the functions of strategic leadership proposed by Samimi et al. (2020) are developed after a review of the work by previous scholars done between January 2000 to October 2018. The question of what strategic leaders do was key in identifying functions in the systematic literature review by Samimi et al. (2022). The functions of strategic leadership were deciphered at the time COVID-19 disruption to various organisations including the university were more prominent, which is the context of the current study. The eight functions of strategic leadership proposed by Samimi et al. (2020) are therefore relevant and comprehensive to inform the

current study in exploring the functions of strategic leadership in a university library setting and digital environment.

In the article entitled “*What is strategic leadership? Developing a framework for future research*”, Samimi et al., (2019) classified the responsibilities of leaders into eight (8) managerial roles, which were mainly adopted from what scholars have discussed in existing literature. These eight leading roles and functions of strategic leadership as follows:

### **2.7.3.1        *Making strategic decisions***

Scholars have explored the roles of strategic leaders in making decisions regarding acquisitions, innovation and strategic change. Strategic leaders influence organisations through their participation in high-level decision-making processes (Hambrick and Mason, 1984). Upper echelons are involved in crucial organisational functions of planning, human resources management and budgets allocations; these are key and consequential to the organisation's health (Wang et al., 2016).

It is necessary to examine changing patterns in strategic decision processes to acquire an in-depth understanding of strategic leadership, as these changes in an organisation's strategy could signify substantial efforts by leaders to change the organisation's direction.

### **2.7.3.2        *Engaging with external stakeholders***

The external leadership role involves interacting and cooperating with external partners crucial to the firm in providing strategic advantages (Westphal et al., 2012). External relationships create a rapport with stakeholders, which is critical to avoid, mitigate or navigate crises (Jabbour, 2016). Strategic leaders are responsible for building and managing partnerships with external stakeholders outside the organisation and perform ambassadorial roles to promote the brand and image of the organisation (Samimi et al., 2019).

### **2.7.3.3      *Performing human resource management activities***

Top-level managers are responsible for making the necessary appointments, delegating and evaluating work, and, if need be, dismissals where appropriate (Samimi et al., 2019). They also control and manage compensation and reward systems that influence their subordinates' behaviour and organisational-level outcomes (Anwar et al., 2020). These compensation incentives are administered differently depending on employee ranking, and therefore, inequalities may emerge amongst employees, affecting morale and negatively impacting firm performance (Ridge et al., 2015). Strategic leaders influence corporate performance through strategic human resource management systems (Samimi et al., 2019). They are also involved in fundamental human resources functions such as recruitment and selection, evaluation, compensation, and development of other employees (Anwar et al., 2020).

### **2.7.3.4      *Motivating and influencing***

Strategic leaders are also responsible for inspiring and motivating others in lower levels of management to achieve organisational goals and objectives (Kanyangale, 2017). These leaders are more likely to gain a following from their subordinates through setting performance and ethical standards. This conduct is critical in unifying teams to work around a common purpose, motivating others, and encouraging followers to pursue a strategic vision of green sustainability (Samimi et al., 2019). This leadership style is a characteristic of transformational leadership and may impact organisational performance, innovation, or environmental sustainability (Kanyangale, 2017).

### **2.7.3.5      *Managing information***

Strategic leaders are involved in collecting data, processing this data, and providing feedback to people within the internal or external environments of the business (Kanyangale, 2017). Information management is a vital function for any organisation; it helps communicate the vision and mission of the organisation to employees and external parties clearly and effectively (Samimi et al., 2019).

### **2.7.3.6 *Overseeing operations and administration***

Strategic leaders may establish policies and procedures to keep track of other organisation members (Kanyangale, 2017). This oversight is essential in ensuring that low-level employees comply with rules and regulations and achieve ethical and performance standards. The ability of these initiatives to influence reporting relationships, procedures and controls can have a significant impact on strategy implementation, adapting to changing environments, and company performance (Wang et al., 2016). These oversight activities are essential to this function and crucial for strategic leadership because they set the organisational framework and influence the execution of initiatives (Kanyangale, 2017).

### **2.7.3.7 *Managing social and ethical issues***

In addition to performing oversight functions, strategic leaders are also responsible for guiding social or ethical issues, including environmental sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Renko et al., 2015). These initiatives are essential in attracting stakeholder funding, reputation, and organisational performance (Tang et al., 2017). According to Ghanem and Castelli (2017), a major ethical scandal is the accountability of strategic leaders. This function is therefore necessitated by increasing stakeholders' demands for higher ethical standards from organisations.

### **2.7.3.8 *Managing conflicting demands***

Strategic leaders also include conflict management and conflict resolution, whose outcomes promote collaborations amongst teams, which may increase employees' involvement in decision-making processes and ultimately improve firm performance (Samimi et al., 2019). Some conflict strategies employed by leaders include behavioural integration, transactive memory, leadership styles, and TMT and CEO shared experience (Kanyangale, 2017). Eisenhardt's (2017) research on power imbalances between Garg and co-CEOs and qualitative inquiry into CEO/BOD relationships may be valuable in understanding how strategic leaders perceive and reconcile conflicting information to make firm-level decisions.

## **2.8. The meaning and complexity of Digital leadership**

As this study seeks to explore leadership competences in the digital context of an academic library, it is insightful to unravel the concept of digital leadership and its complexity. The dimensions as well as characteristics of a digital leader are also discussed in this section to enrich our understanding of the concept of digital leadership. Before focusing on the concept of digitalization, it is key to initially unpack the meaning of digitization, digitalization and digital transformation.

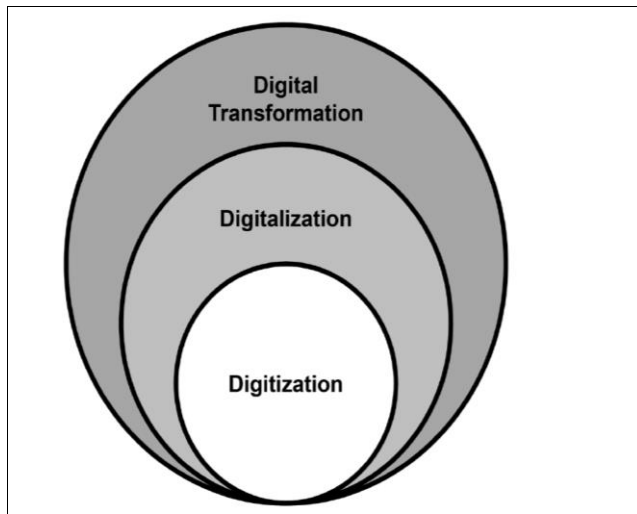
### **2.8.1. The meaning and concept of digitization, digitalization and digital transformation**

The meaning of the concept of digital leadership cannot be understood without first clearly understanding what is digitization, digitalization and digital transformation. In the recent article by Tagscherer and Carbon (2023), there is clarity on digitization, digitalization and digital transformation. Firstly, the term digitization can be defined as converting analog information into digital data. Digitized information can be transferred quickly, cheaply and accurately (Brennen and Kreiss, 2016). Digitization does not change value-creation activities (Verhoefetal, 2021). Previously considered as a subordinate support function within the organisation, the role of IT has changed tremendously in the digital era.

Digital technologies are embedded in products and services. Secondly, digitalization describes the change in existing processes, business models and revenue streams that arise from digital technologies. With the change in business processes, products or business models based on digital technologies, businesses move to the stage of digitalization. Thus, digitalization enhances the customer experience, streamlines operational processes, and changes entire business models. Thirdly, digital transformation is the overarching concept that includes the digitalization process but goes beyond it. It has implications for the overall business strategy, organisational structure, and company culture (Bloomberg, 2022; Gartner, 2022).

Besides integrating digital technologies, digital transformation results in organisational and social changes within companies (Reis et al., 2018; Tagscherer and Carbon, 2022). It is crucial to underscore that digitalization is different as it is about the application of digitalization efforts to specific areas of an organisation to improve and add additional value to the organisation's operation. While digital transformation does not focus a specific area, it encompasses the

continued efforts to change the organisation's strategy, culture and mindset. Digital transformation as the continual process of increasing the extent of digitalization. Figure 2 below depicts the scope, relationship and differences between digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation.



**Fig 1: Digitization, Digitalization and Digital Transformation**

Source: Tagscherer and Carbon (2023:2)

Digital technologies and digitalization have been acknowledged as enablers and drivers of servitization (Tagscherer and Carbon (2023)).

Creating new market offerings, products or business processes from technologies can be described as digital innovations. It is insightful to understand whether the innovation is directly associated with customer contact to distinguish between the internal and external dimensions of an organisation's digitalization activities.

Internal innovations such as manufacturing, e-recruitment, or set up of the IT backbone are indirectly associated with the customer and are therefore declared internally focused. From the external perspective, servitization can be seen as the process of increasing value through service and transforming an organisation's offering from product-centered to product-service systems (Kowalkowski et al., 2017).

### **2.8.2. The meaning and concept of Digital Leadership**

Given the above clarity of digitization, digitalization and digital transformation, digital leadership can be understood purely and technically as the conversion of analogue data into digital information (Phillip, 2021). In this regard, Digital Leadership is defined by some writers as accomplishing a goal connected to information communication technology, leading the digital transformation phase, and demonstrating a leadership style appropriate for digital surroundings. It is important to realise that digital leadership has been referred to in the management literature as e-leadership (Phillip, 2021).

In terms of publication year, the first contribution to digital leadership dates all the way back to Avolio in 2002. In the view of Avolio, B. J. and Yammarino, F. J. (2002), digital leadership is a "process of social transformation in which advanced information technology mediates in order to affect individuals, groups, and/or organisations' manners, attitudes, emotions, thoughts, and behaviours". This definition depicts some similarities between digital leadership and transformative leadership as they both push for change, emphasize the capability of uniting the organisation's ideas and objectives, and capable of connecting firms through partnerships/joint ventures/outsourcing and creating new opportunities.

The concept of digital leadership has become critical in determining an organisation's ability to fulfill its digitalization goal. The concept of digital leadership is frequently used interchangeably with the concept of e-leadership which first appeared in the work of Avolio (2000). However, it is Peter Fisk (2002) who pioneered the idea of "digital leadership" independent of e-leadership. In the view of Fisk (2002), digital leaders are visionary, motivators of change, capable of combining ideas within the business for projects, and establish connections through the creation of new opportunities for partnerships/joint ventures/outsourcing and other forms of collaboration.

On the other hand, digital leadership can be seen holistically as a development of society as a whole that is driven by technological developments in electronic data processing. According to Zhong (2017), digital leadership is about leading and inspiring digital transformation, establishing and maintaining a digital learning culture, facilitating and improving professional growth based on technology, as well as providing and maintaining a digital organisation. Thus, evolutions in the digital era have pushed digitalisation in every area, bringing about a variety

of adjustments in nearly every industry (Pasolong and Setini, 2021) and compelling businesses of all sizes and industries to become digital workplaces (Cortellazzo, Bruni and Zampieri, 2019). In this regard, Stana (2018) defines digital leadership as a social influence process facilitated by technology that can occur at any organisational level and is intended to affect an individual's, group's or organisation's attitude, emotion, thinking, behavior and performance.

Workers today typically stay in touch with their employers for extended periods of time using mobile devices and applications, even in less digitally advanced institutions. This engagement is becoming increasingly sustainable. Gilson et al. (2015) stated that individuals are collaborating via online teams, and digital platforms are used to communicate information. In light of this, leaders in a large number of businesses throughout the world now blend traditional and digital leadership skills in the digital age. One new type of leadership linked to industry 4.0 is digital leadership (Bach and Sulíková, 2021). Machine manufacturing (mechanization), electricity, and information technology comprised the first three industrial revolutions, in that order. The incorporation of the internet of things into manufacturing and the development of new business models relating to human-to-device and device-to-device communication are associated with the fourth industrial revolution (Oberer and Erkollar, 2018, Xu, Qu and Yang, 2016).

Industry 4.0, recognized as a technology-focused project and new production style, has been significant in the beginning of digitalization and digital transformation in addition to fostering the rise of digital leadership (Lu, 2017; Doshmanli, Salamzadeh and Salamzadeh, 2018). Although many businesses have seen changes as a result of digitalization, organisations never undergo self-transformation. Kane, Palmer, Phillips, Kiron and Buckley (2015) stated that the leaders' vision of an organisation's digitization is the most critical element that makes such technical transformation or change possible. According to Pilat and Lasher (2018), digital transformation focuses on the social and economic impacts of digitalization, whereas digitization is the process of converting analogue data and processes into a machine-readable format.

According to Mayakova (2019), the integration of physical and digital systems through the use of cutting-edge technology, as well as the development of creative business models and intelligent goods and services, are characteristics of digital transformation. This viewpoint holds

that because digital transformation affects stakeholder relations, work processes and even value generation processes, it has become significant for enterprises in all industries.

Zaoui and Souissi (2020) stated that Stakeholders in this change are primarily concerned with developing a vision and road map that represents a workable course of action.

According to Kollmann and Schmidt (2016), firms that adopt digital leadership hesitantly or with insufficient vigor will not be able to withstand the disruptive potential of digitalization. Therefore, it is crucial to consider digital leadership as a holistic concept and implement it throughout the entire organisation. As digitalization and its impacts have had, and will continue to have, significant repercussions for society at large, future research should examine digital leadership that is, political digital leadership in greater detail. This is even if it was only partially discussed above. For instance, it calls into question the development of infrastructure and complicated social concerns like the possibility of a basic income in the post-digitalization period.

According to Bharadwaj, El Sawy, Pavlou and Venkatraman (2013), digitalization has a significant influence on this situation. Fitzgerald, Kruschwitz, Bonnet and Welch (2014) stated that, on the one hand, creates a more dynamic and complicated environment in which leaders must navigate their organisations and modify their styles of leadership. It also provides fresh approaches to leadership and work. According to Renko et al., (2015), employees at lower levels can now have more freedom and even exercise some degree of self-leadership when digital technologies are used in conjunction with contemporary leadership styles like entrepreneurial leadership. Digital technologies offer leaders additional channels for organisation and communication.

A quick look at the variety of existing definitions of digital leadership is very important to gain a rich understanding of this concept from views of different scholars. In a recent systematic literature review on the concept of digital leadership by Sağbaşı and Erdoğan (2022), it is clear that there is no consensus on what is digital leadership. As a result of this systematic literature review, Sağbaşı and Erdoğan (2022:17) assert that “a digital leader is defined as a leader who has innovative ideas on a digital level, motivates his employees in a digital environment, is capable of establishing sustainable communication with his employees in a digital environment and developing digital strategies”. The variety of definitions of digital leadership identified by

Sağbaşı and Erdoğan (2022:17) are depicted below in Table 4.

**Table 5: Selected definitions of the Digital Leadership concept**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Keywords</b>	<b>Variables</b>
Avolio	2000	Research Paper	Stage of social change mediated by Advanced Information Technology to produce a change in attitude, emotion, thought, behavior and/or performance with individuals, groups and/or organizations	e-leadership, information technology.	Information Technology, Social Change
Fisk	2002	Research Paper	Visionary, motivating for transformation, ability to combine ideas within the organization for initiatives, ability to connect partnerships/ joint ventures/outsourcing and all collaborations by creating new possibilities	Digital Transformation,	Vision, Transformation, Connection, Unity
Wilson III	2004	Book chapter	Leadership in the basic sectors of the Information Society and its contributions to the transition to the information society	Transformational Leadership,	Information Society, Leadership
Duan	2005	Thesis	Leadership in key sectors of information technology (internet service providers, internet content providers, internet application providers and other technology-based areas such as computing, communications and content).	Digital leadership	Information Society, Leadership
Kurubacak	2006	Research paper	Maintaining strong partnerships of power sufficient for their purpose, respecting civic democratic practices,	Information society	Online interaction

			ensuring that their policies are ostensibly consistent so that they can be represented and playing independent roles for the purposes of their own online interactions, interacting with multicultural unions and engaging with various inquiries into the complex nature of digital youth leaderships It is a form of leadership that has the task of representing the diversity of its ideologies		
Borrins	2010	Book chapter	A leadership style with a mix of channel (Virtual World) selection, IT (Information Technology) procurement and organizational integration of ITs	Leadership	Information Technologies, Virtual World, Integration
Sheninge r	2014	Research paper	Being able to establish relationships to set direction, influence others, and initiate sustainable change through access to information and to anticipate changes necessary for future school success		Sustainable Change, School Success
Altina	2016	Research paper	Managers defined the digital leader as organizers who follow modern technology to reconstruct knowledge.	China, Leadership	Information, Modern Technology
Van Wart	2016	Research paper	Ability to effectively select and use Information Communication Technologies to achieve personal and corporate goals	Information Technology, Information Technology Leadership	Information Technologies, Goals
Narbona	2016	Research paper	Leadership style applied with digital tools in the virtual world	Digital Youth Leadership, Politics, social media, Social Activism	Digital Tools, Virtual World, Leadership
Larjovuori	2016	Conference paper	The ability to involve all members of the	Online interaction	Digitization, organization,

			organization in the digitization process and to recognize and develop the skills and abilities needed to achieve i		
El Sawy	2016	Research paper	To exhibit the right behaviors in order to ensure the digitalization of the business and business ecosystem strategically	Information Technologies, Social Media, Politics, Digital Leadership	Right Behaviors, digitalization
Zhong	2017	Research paper	Inspiring and leading its digital transformation, creating and maintaining a digital learning culture, supporting and developing technology based professional development, providing and maintaining digital organization management	Digital Leadership, Sustainable Change, School Success, Education	Digital Transformation, management
Tanniru	2018	Book chapter	A fast, cross-hierarchical, team oriented and collaborative approach with a strong focus on innovation	Knowledge construction	Innovation, business architecture, Information Technology
Stana	2018	Conference Paper	A process of social influence mediated by technology that can occur at any hierarchical level in an organization and to bring about a change in attitude, emotion, thought, behavior and/or performance in individuals, groups and/or organizations	Leadership	Technology, Social Impact
Mihardjo	2019	Research paper	A combination between digital culture and digital competence	Technology-assisted learning	Digital Culture, Digital Competence
Antonopoulou	2019	Research paper	To reach a goal related to Information Communication Technologies in line with the use of human resources and Information Communication Technologies	E-leadership, ICT adoption, Government ICTs	Information Communication Technologies

Schiama	2021	Research Paper	Competence that leaders need to develop in today's digital age	Digital Leadership, Pope Francis, Transcendent Leadership, Twitter	Digital Age, Competence
Peng	2021	Research Paper	In the age of digital technology, individuals or organizations have the ability to guide teams, entire organizations, employees to fully embrace digital thinking, using digital insight, digital decision making, digital implementation and digital guidance to ensure their goals are met.	Digital Leadership, Digitization, Organization, Digital Competence, Employee Welfare	Digital Thinking

Adapted from: Sagbas and Erdogan (2022: 22)

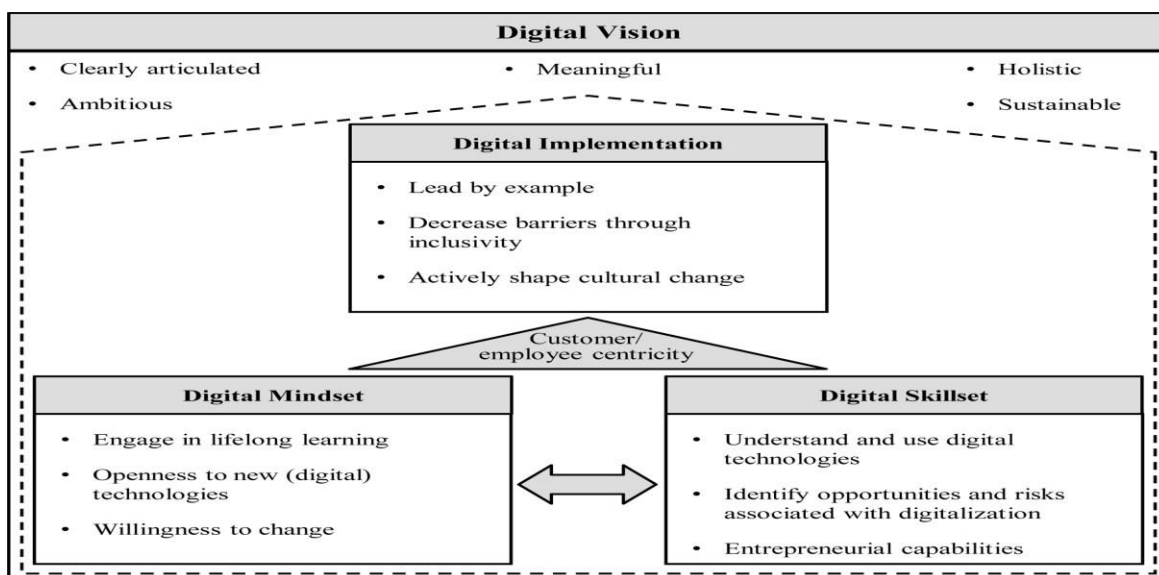
### 2.8.3. Components of leading digitally

Against this background, the current literature argues that while digitalization is the key to an organisation's success going forward, traditional leadership approaches fall short in addressing the opportunities and problems brought about by digitalization. Firstly, the argument is that digital leaders must have a comprehensive digital vision for the future and have the abilities and attitude required to facilitate the implementation of this vision in a way that prioritizes people. Secondly, Westerman et al. (2014) were explicit that there are four key components of leading digitally, namely digital vision, digital implementation, digital mindset and digital skillset. Digital vision needs to be meaningful, ambitious, clearly articulated, but also holistic and sustainable. It is critical to underline that the foundation necessary to achieve the digital vision require not only a digital mindset (e.g. engage in lifelong learning, open to new technologies, willing to change) but also digital skillsets (e.g. understand and use technologies, identify opportunities and threats related to digital, entrepreneurial capability). Customer and employee centricity is also a key aspect of leading digitally in an organisation.

To become an effective digital leader, one must learn when to step back and give people more autonomy while still depending on their knowledge, much like an entrepreneurial or transformational leader (Promsri, 2019). Digital leaders possess digital literacy and knowledge,

vision, the capacity to design customer-centric strategies, agility (the ability to adapt to changing market conditions), a willingness to take risks (creating an experimental environment), and the ability to collaborate (Promsri, 2019). Individuals who will lead digital transformation should be willing and skilled to learn new technologies, according to Kazim (2019). Organisations that are unable to keep up with the current digitalization trend are predicted to become less flexible, slower, and ultimately less competitive in the modern day than those who are leading the way in digital innovation (Westerman, Bonnet and McAfee, 2014). The following figure 2.1 summarizes the successful digital leadership framework that include: Digital vision, digital implementation, digital mindset and digital skillset.

**Figure 2: Digital vision, digital implementation, digital mindset and digital skillset**



Adapted from: Westerman et al. (2014: 97)

Pietersen (2015) asserted that it is no secret that educational institutions are evolving, and thinking about the future of higher education is just as important as observing the changes occurring in academic libraries. Presently, nearly all educational establishments, including colleges, universities and their libraries, have automated their library systems with library software, connected to the Internet, intranet and extranet, and use proxy server-based networks to give users access to pertinent e-journals and e-books (Pietersen, 2015).

#### **2.8.4. Dimensions and characteristics of a Digital Leader**

When it comes to dimensions of digital leadership, there is a variety of views, overlaps and also differences. For example, Kane, Phillips, Copulsky and Andrus (2019) conducted long-term research on digital transformation with over 20 000 business executives, managers and analysts around the world to conclude that there are four main foci points of digital leadership, namely Transformative Vision, Forward-Looking Perspectives, Digital Literacy, and Adaptability.

Firstly, Transformative Vision includes knowledge of market and trends, business acumen and problem-solving skills. Secondly, forward-looking perspectives is specified as clear vision, sound strategy and foresight. Thirdly, digital literacy means the pre-existing experience and knowledge about digital technologies (e.g. Data and Analytics, Artificial Intelligence, Block Chain etc. Digital literacy helps leaders and managers to anticipate crucial emerging trends. It is evident that the three greatest leadership skills—Transformative Vision, Forward-Looking Perspective, Digital Literacy—can be categorized as competencies while Adaptability as the fourth component represent Character. Digital leadership is a fast, cross-hierarchical, team-oriented and cooperative approach, with a strong focus on innovation. The personal competence of the leader, their mindset as well as their ability to apply new methods and instruments are critical dimensions for digital leaders (Kane, Phillips, Copulsky and Andrus 2019).

In a different vein, Abbu, Mugge and Gudergan (2022) have written an article that underscores that in a digital landscape, leadership must change from an emphasis on competency to a focus on trust. Trust is “the willingness to be vulnerable to another party when that party cannot be controlled or monitored” (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995: 724). “Trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviors of another” (Rousseau, D. M. Sitkin, S. B. Burt, R. S. and Camerer, C, 1998: 395). Without trust, leaders cannot manage a future that is being constantly disrupted, altered, and re-invented by digital trends. Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt and Camerer, (1998) stated that leaders are expected to lead their companies into a future that is fast-changing and uncertain and characterized by an unprecedented degree of digitization in products, processes, and work structures.

Abbu, Mugge, and Gudergan (2022) stated that some authors highlight traits that they consider

essential for successful digital leadership but do not mention trust or its connection to the need for speed. Scott, Snyder and Barnakova (2020), for example, write that the new critical digital skills required are digital strategist, digital innovator, and digital driver.

Abbu, Mugge and Gudergan (2022) stated that the difference between the organisations that succeed at digital transformation and those that lag—or fail—goes back to the ability of their leaders to build and maintain their employees' trust.

Trust is built on two foundations—character and competence (Covey, 2006). The two fundamental components of character (integrity and intent) and the two core aspects of competence (capabilities and results) work in tandem in building trust (Covey, 2006). Trust enables companies to succeed in their communications, interactions and decisions, and to move with incredible speed. Without trust, leaders cannot empower employees. To respond to changes with speed, leaders must empower their employees and create the conditions necessary for them to realize their capacity and power. Without trust, leaders cannot create a growth mindset.

Moreover, it is important to realise that Digital Leadership stands for everything that a lot of organisations currently lack: “innovative spirit, value orientation, the potential for disruption and contradiction, flexibility in the matter at hand, but also steadfastness in essence, a high level of social competence and a great deal of courage”. The abilities and characteristics required for digital leadership are generally change-related and refer to managers' and organisations' transition and digital preparedness to pursue digital vision (McCarthy, 2021:27).

Digital leaders are able to adapt to changing technological, political and sectoral requirements. They have always guided the company in adapting to changing times, connecting people to open working ecosystems, balancing human and technological participation in work, thinking innovatively and holistically (Asri, 2020), promoting sharing through the use of digital resources (Westerman, 2014: 148), and communicating timely and openly (Asri, 2020). According to Abbu (2020), they should be able to adapt their business to changing requirements as a result of external influences. Digital leaders should have a clear objective in positioning themselves and their followers for the main goal of their organisations.

Abbu et al. (2022) noted that the objective of digital leaders can be defined as bringing digital transformation to life and allowing businesses to maximize their potential in the digital

environment.

The competitive, demand, technological and governmental landscapes have evolved quickly in the digital age, adding volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) to a company's environment. Kokot (2021) suggested that digital transformation reveals several important facets: a constant process, modifications to business concepts, technology usage, and corporate culture. “The concept of digital transformation is formed by the merger of personal and corporate IT environments and encapsulates the transformational effect of new digital technologies such as social, mobile, analytical, cloud technologies and the Internet of Things (SMACIT)” (Ziyadin, Suiubayeva and Utegenova, 2020: 409).

Schiama (2021) is explicit that leaders of digital transformation must cultivate critical thinking, create problem-based learning settings to improve people's thinking abilities and knowledge acquisition, and care for people's progress through personal and professional development programs and trust. Schiama (2021) states that digital leaders prioritize participative behaviours above authoritarian behaviours in order to demonstrate the organisation's knowledge of digitalization. Digital leaders are continually developing forward-thinking goals and strategies to assure continuity in the digital realm or throughout digital transformation, and digital literacy, expertise, and experience are critical for achieving the goals and successfully implementing the strategies.

Leaders who are willing to empower other employees to accomplish the transformation objective and who are able to respond to setbacks with understanding and empathy will be able to avert employee demoralization and motivation in the digital world. Successful digital leaders of the future will possess great coaching abilities, enabling them to foster dynamic, empowering, and high-performance cultures (Brett, 2019: 32). Given the above issues and variety of dimensions and characteristics, one can decipher that Digital leaders are characterized by an inventive mindset, networking intelligence, adaptability, motivational coaching, digital intelligence, democratic compromise behaviors, and a capacity to learn from their failures (Klein, 2020). Digital leadership practices are inextricably linked to emotional intelligence and leadership types such as transformational and transactional leadership (Aldawood, 2019).

For an organisation to succeed in the digital era, it should be led by a visionary figure, who promotes a digital-age learning culture, professional development, systematic improvement, and digital citizenship (Agustina, 2020). To overcome obstacles and seize opportunities, digital leaders must demonstrate a high level of entrepreneurial leadership success, maintain service workers' effectiveness in a "virtual environment" and balance between "task and relationship-oriented leadership" (Bartsch, Weber, Buttgen, and Huber, 2020). More democratic leadership styles, more consistent leadership behavior in pursuit of the firm's objective, and more effective strategic management processes all contribute to the growth of digital transformation processes (Porfrio, 2021).

Academic library in the digital era requires digital leaders to meet customers' needs and stay current while embracing digital technologies. "Digital transformation, however, entails a considerable change in organisational management as well as technology adoption" (Mihu, Pitic and Bayraktar, 2023: 151). A more coherent and in-depth comprehension of digital transformation is necessary for practical analysis and creation of strategies for library leadership. "The transformation of business processes involves automating research and development, production, and distribution processes, while business model transformation involves translating traditional models into the digital environment to provide virtual content to customers" (Mihu et al., 2023: 152).

Academic libraries, like many other organisations, find the World Wide Web to be a useful resource. "The Internet and the World Wide Web are now our tools" (Marcum, 2016: 105). To improve user experiences and satisfy changing information demands, libraries should embrace digital transformation such as online databases, virtual services, and digital catalogues. "To adapt to the impact of the digital age, individuals also need to set their expectations in various ways, such as convenient digital recruitment, training through artificial intelligence for individual needs, and better performance evaluation and feedback mechanisms based on digital platforms" (Corti, Van Den Eynden, Bishop and Woollard, 2019: 4).

Digital transformations in libraries have resulted in the development and application of technology that has affected people's working environments, and academic libraries are no exception. Professionals in libraries and information need to be ready for the profound shifts the digital age will bring if they do not accept it. The attempt to transform the digital age will fail. "The era of confining ourselves to ancient forms of librarianship are gone, if there must be

a shift in services offered, there must first be a shift in our professional mind-set” (Enweani and Eke, 2018: 5). The digital age poses several issues for library and information professionals due to the rapidly evolving nature of technology and shifting expectations from patrons. “The transition and the transformation are accompanied with sophistication in the changing pattern in the information needs of users which is growing rapidly” (Enweani and Eke, 2018: 8).

### **2.8.5. Academic library leadership in the digital age**

The digital era brings vast challenges for library leadership, but it also offers chances to increase the influence and reach of libraries. Successful library leaders are flexible, forward-thinking, and dedicated to serving their communities' changing needs in the digital age. Marcum 2016 stated that leaders of digital libraries must be ready to assist experienced staff members in confidently and enthusiastically transitioning into the digital world, as new generational librarians may expect a digital library and may not be patient with outdated policies. Library leadership also should have accepted change and be ready to adjust to it and senior leader must accept new normal. “Experienced senior executives who did not grow up in a digital world must be willing to invest the time to learn about digital technologies and the opportunities they present” (Marcum, 2016: 110).

Since the digital revolution has brought about change, every institution, even one as old as libraries, must assess its role in a world where people spend more and more time online to stay relevant. Le (2015) stated that technology is transforming conventional forms of information; digitalization is altering the environment in which information is accessed and used; new information processes are transforming libraries, library services, and librarians; cooperation is the way of the future. It may be necessary to have different talents for managing in a digital age and leading a transformational process than for a predictable one. “Today, effective library leadership requires an extraordinary ability to maintain a delicate and continually shifting balance in the management of technical, financial, and human resources to serve the academic mission of our colleges and universities” (Hernon, Powell and Young, 2002: 75). “The successful transformation of an organisation in this digital era largely depends on how leaders of that organisation accept and infuse work culture where digital technology is used as a tool for synthesising information in real time rather than being solely dependent on technology” (Sainger, 2018: 2).

## **2.9. The significance of Strategic Leadership in an Academic Library**

Given recent digital advances and rivalry from rival organisations, there is a need for strategies to reach shared objectives and goals, as well as clear guidance to align an academic library. “To achieve strategic alignment, the library leadership must constantly monitor the university’s vision, strategy and goals” (Harland, Stewart and Bruce, 2021: 5). Senior library executives concentrate on their stakeholders by supporting university strategies such as teaching, learning, and research. “Today’s post-modern reality requires leaders to understand their strategic conditions and to be confident, talented and flexible leaders to adapt their institutions to these conditions” (Tetik, 2020: 198). Strategic leadership may be appropriate for academic library leadership to serve as a bridge between the academic library and the environment.

Senior library executives are less valued, involved and strategically connected to their supervisors and other senior academic leadership compared to the past. The organisation's purpose ought to address two linked questions: how does the organisation make a difference, and for whom does the organisation make that difference? With grand ambitions and turning them into significant strategic actions, leaders can use vision with action and make an impact in their workplace. “You can make a difference for your team or organisation by both having big dreams and transforming them into significant strategic action” (Daft and Lane, 2018: 396).

## **2.10. The digital environment and changes in the library environment**

Abbu (2022) stated that the digital age offers numerous advantages but presents challenges like the digital divide, privacy concerns, collection management issues, and copyright and intellectual property issues. Changes in technology have been the most prevalent type of change initiative embarked upon by academic libraries. The activities of libraries have undergone tremendous change due to the digital environment, and more recently, the COVID-19 epidemic has created volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). According to Franken, Plimmer, Malinen and Bryson (2022) stated that for leaders to flourish, they must ensure that

organisations evolve as necessary to adapt, and staff must receive new ways of doing things. “It is the job of the leader to make sure organisations change as needed to respond to threats, opportunities, or shifts in the environment” (Daft and Lane, 2018: 464).

An academic library's ability to adapt to change is essential to its growth since it reduces the possibility of disaster and increases its chances of sustainability. According to Shan and Shaheen (2013), a strategy for changing an existing situation is known as change management. The library has developed into a growing, competitive organisation that keeps up with the demands of its patrons and the shifting digital age. “The library can be likened to a living organism that grows and dies” (Appiah, Adams and Adu, 2016: 26). The organisational shift is crucial since it entails forging new ground and adopting a fresh strategy, which could have different meanings for various organisations or employees. According to Appiah (2016), change may allow some people to take on new tasks, advance in their careers, and get promoted, but for others, it may mean a reduction in responsibilities, a loss of prestige, or even a forced professional sabbatical. “The implementation of change management programs in academic libraries can be categorized as: organisational structural change, technological change, tasks change, people change, and organisational cultural change” (Makanga, 2019: 20). “Interviewees also revealed their institutional intentions to focus more on buying online resources, particularly textbooks” (Rafiq, Batool, Ali and Ullah, 2021: 8).

According to Glynn, Giorgi and Lockwood (2013) the importance of organisational structure, technology, task, people, and culture changes in implementing and achieving success in change management programs in academic libraries. The success of change management programs in academic libraries includes staff understanding of the change, which can be challenging to achieve for various reasons. The reason may vary based on the interest of employees and how it may affect them. “These may include: fear of the unknown, loss of position, lack of prerequisite qualifications for the job, preferring the comfort zone and so on” (Makanga, 2019: 24).

## **2.11. Library Leadership crisis on leading during the digital age**

Academic libraries experience crises of various types, which requires effective leadership. For example, “the tide of COVID-19 and its concomitant effects on library leadership and operations requires that there should be intellectual works to address this pertinent problem that

has a significant impact on library services during an emergency period” (Arapasopo and Adekoya, 2022: 235). African libraries faced unexpected challenges during the pandemic, underscoring the critical importance of investing in infrastructure, policy improvements, and capacity building.

The academic library faced difficulties due to the digital age demand since more users are turning to online services rather than the physical library. The future effects of the physical library's sudden reliance on online resources are uncertain because library patrons may continue working remotely. Altman (2022) stated that the results demonstrated that, while Bridgewater State University faced difficulties, they heavily relied on technology and used creativity to accomplish their goals. During the pandemic, even in Africa, nations like Nigeria had to explore alternative services for the majority of libraries, leading many to shift their focus toward providing online services. “However, the leadership of some of the universities responded brilliantly as some academic institutions in Nigeria that have the necessary e-learning infrastructure such as Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti; Technical University (Tech- U), Ibadan; Elizade University, and Ilara- Mokin, among others. “University were able to deliver online lectures to their students throughout the pandemic periods using their Learning Management Systems platforms” (Arapasopo and Adekoya, 2022: 236). Given the clarity on the nature of strategic leadership, dimensions and characteristics of a digital leader, as well as library leadership in crisis, it is salient to understand the meaning of competency.

## **2.12. Defining competency and competence framework**

It is important to initially understand the history of the term “competence”, which originated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to mean “to strive for the attainment of something”. McClelland (1973) states that the term “competency” is associated with the meaning “sufficiency to satisfy the wants of life”. The term is derived from the Latin “*competentia*”, which means “agreement” or “symmetry”. In human resources, the term "competence" first appeared in an article by White in 1959 as a concept for performance motivation.

The competency concept was first introduced by McClelland (1973), who argued that competency assessment should be developed as an alternative to academic-type intelligence testing, which was failing to account for successful performance, especially in high-level executive positions. After the publication of McClelland’s article in the *American Psychologist*,

numerous authors have shed their light on the competency concept. The concept of competency refers to the combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes that individuals possess and utilize to perform tasks, solve problems, and achieve specific outcomes. Competence includes both means and an end.

Means comprise knowledge, skills or abilities, and the end refers to an effective performance of the activities of a given occupation or function to the standards expected in employment. Obviously, the concept of competence loses its true meaning if the end is ignored (Youn, Stepich and Cox, 2006). Competences are essential in various aspects of life, including education, employment, personal development and social interactions (Wong, 2020). In semantic terms, competence is seen as a *work-related concept* (the tasks at which a person must be competent), while competency is a *person-related concept* defining the behaviours underlying competent performance (Woodruffe, 1991). It is important to also figure out that competence is sometimes viewed as capability or ability, integrated set of capabilities or a disposition.

There are instances when competence is understood as an integrated set of capabilities that arises from clusters of knowledge, skills and attitudes. “It could be a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one`s self-image or social role, or a body of knowledge which he or she uses” (Woodruffe, 1993: 29). In a different vein, competence is also sometimes understood as a disposition. Roeger (2016:125) thinks disposition refers to a characteristic “that is manifest only under specific conditions”. In the definition of Klieme et al. (2008), the concept of disposition is clarified in that it is learnable, contextualized and cognitive. As competency is broadly defined, however, an author like Woodruffe (1993) has stated that some persons are more adept at performing the behavioural repertoires known as "competencies".

Hoffmann (1999) suggests that “competency” refers to a person's fundamental qualities, such as knowledge, skills, or abilities. Another definition of competency is the collection of interconnected, yet diverse patterns of behaviour organized around a core idea. “Competence is a set of related but different sets of behaviour organized around an underlying construct, which we call the “intent” (Boyatzis, 2008: 6). “The workplace definition of 'competency' refers to a person's fitness with reference to his or her job” (Palan, 2003: 5). There are instances when competence is used as output or achievement of standard and competency as input or individual personality characteristics needed for the achievement of outcome.

While competence refers to behaviour a person should be able to demonstrate, competency is defined as an underlying set of personal characteristics that facilitate superior performance (e.g. Boyatzis, 1982, 2008). In spite of that, many authors consistently treat competence and competency as synonymous (Brown, 1993) resulting in lots of different definition. Firstly, it is important to highlight that the term competence can be defined on at least three levels. The first level involves an attribute of individuals. In this view, competence is specified as the responsibilities and authorities of individuals together with their potentials. At the second level, the focus is the internal organisation of resources, such as knowledge (systems), routines, procedures and production technologies. At the third level, competence is viewed as an attribute of the organisation, meaning that the unique combination of knowledge, skills, structures, technologies and processes enables a competitive advantage in relation to rivals (Boyatzis, 1982).

Wong (2020) believes that competence involves a set of requirements, including technical skills and soft skills. He adds that competences are dynamic and may evolve over time. Continuous learning, adaptability, and a proactive approach to personal and professional development are crucial for maintaining and enhancing competences in a rapidly changing world. In the library context, “the top ten leadership attributes identified include success in securing resources in terms of funding, technology and staffing, good interpersonal skills, an honest, articulated vision that inspire others, builds partnerships within the library or across the campus, a passion for libraries and librarianship, builds working relationships, comfortable with change, strong communication skills, and personally approachable” (Wong, 2020: 57).

The concept of competency has its roots in the fields of psychology and education. The term "competency" emerged as a way to describe an individual's ability to perform specific tasks or functions effectively. The development of competency-based approaches can be traced back to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Hodge, 2007:32). One of the earliest influences on the concept of competency was the work of David McClelland, an American psychologist. In the 1970s, McClelland and his colleagues proposed the idea of competency-based assessment, emphasizing the importance of identifying and measuring specific skills and abilities related to job performance. In the realm of education, competency-based education (CBE) gained traction as a model that focuses on learners mastering specific skills and knowledge at their own pace, rather than adhering to a traditional time-based structure.

This approach aims to ensure that individuals are proficient in a particular area before progressing to the next level of learning. Over time, the concept of competency has evolved and expanded into various fields, including business, human resources, and healthcare. Competency frameworks are now commonly used in organisations to define and assess the skills, knowledge, and behaviours required for successful job performance. In summary, the origin of the concept of competency can be linked to the works of psychologists and educators in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with its application expanding into different domains over the years (Hodge, 2007).

Competency is an evaluation of an individual's overall preparation and capability to perform a specific task or function, and it can be benchmarked or quality. According to the second definition by Hoffmann (1999), competency is a benchmark or quality of the result, and it can be used to pursue increases in productivity or efficiency at work. “A third definition of competency referred to the underlying attributes of a person such as their knowledge, skills or abilities” (Hoffmann, 1999: 276). Another definition by Palan (2003) suggests that a superior worker brings motivation, attributes, a positive self-concept, values, knowledge, and abilities to the job, and these are the behaviours that make them competent.

Competency has the advantage that human potential can be nurtured throughout one’s life. “One of the benefits of the competency, or behavioural approach to talent is that we enter a domain of human talent that can be developed in adulthood” (Boyatzis, 2008: 6). Since the term has a broad definition, it is unclear whether it refers to personality traits or other characteristics of people. Furthermore, while the above definitions first appear to lack congruence, there are three common components to these definitions. Firstly, most of these definitions suggest that competencies are the characteristics that underlie effective or successful job performance; Secondly, these underlying attributes must be observable or measurable; and Thirdly, these underlying attributes must distinguish between superior and other performers. Given the above similarities, one is tempted to conclude that competency is: an underlying attribute that distinguish outstanding performers from others in a defined job context. Such attributes can be measured against certain standards and can be developed through training and development programs. Below is a table 6 which depicts the differences between the concepts of competence and competency.

**Table 6: The comparison between ‘competency’ and ‘competence**

<b>Competence</b>	<b>Competency</b>
Focus on the results	Focus on a person’s behaviours
Describe the features of the area of work tasks or job outputs	Describe the attributes of the person
Constitute of the various skills and knowledge needed for performing the job	Constitute of the underlying attributes of a person for superior work performance
Not transferable as each skill and knowledge is more specific to perform the job	Not directly transferable from one person to another, as everyone possesses unique underlying attributes that contribute to their superior work performance
Assessed by performance on the job	Assessed in terms of behaviours and attitude
Task-oriented	People-oriented

Source: Wong (2020: 49-61)

**2.12.1. Core competency and role competency**

Another way to further enrich the understanding of academic library leadership competence is to unpack the terms of "core competency" and "role competency" and how they apply to the workplace. Kawshala (2017) stated that Prahalad and Hamel, two business writers, introduced the notion of a Core Competency in management theory. Palan (2003) noted that the term "core competency" describes the organisational traits that offer a company a competitive advantage, typically a collection of talents and technology. Core competency may also refer to a company or person's unique talents and assets, offering them a competitive edge in their industry. “Therefore, core competence is considered as one of the main assets an organisation could possess” (Kawshala, 2017: 253).

Moreover, “role competencies are those associated with contributors to a team effort, in roles such as team leaders and members; and may include managers, and supervisors” (Prahalad and Hamel, 2003: 17). The responsibilities of an organisation may differ depending on the titles and skill levels required of each employee, some of which may be higher than those of subordinates. For example, the role-based levels of competency expected of a senior manager

is higher than those expected of a middle manager” (Prahalad and Hamel, 2003: 18). The essential skills or abilities needed to succeed in a specific function defines role competency.

It is crucial to realise that competence also depicts a relation between abilities/capabilities and the completion of a task. In this regard, role competency is “a set of social setting-specific transaction process behaviours that are instrumental in the delivery of results and outcomes that satisfy the demands made by social relationships within that setting” (Kurz and Bartram, 2002:248). “Role competency is central in the analysis of team interactions, and where organisations are interested in group activity that aims to increase productivity, coherence and identity, or reduce conflict, stress and strain” (Kurz and Bartram, 2002: 248). Although competencies may differ significantly according to the situation, some fundamental competency traits do exist.

Competencies are critical for an institution such as the UKZN Library as they can drive actions and enhance performance in the digital context. Winston and Dunkley (2002) further state that the purpose of the leadership competencies is to identify a small set of characteristics for the benefit of all leaders and develop leadership experiences for future leaders to maintain those characteristics. There is limited literature on Library leadership competencies to date. “Although a vast amount of literature addressing leadership competencies is available for many professions, and numerous professional organisations have developed lists of competencies for practitioners in their respective fields, there is little in the library literature addressing competencies for library leaders” (Ammons-Stephens, Cole, Jenkins-Gibbs, Riehle and Weare Jr, 2009: 63). “Having identified what a competency is, and is not, it is now important to ensure that competences are presented in a format which can be applied and used by the practitioner” (Woodruffe, 1993).

### **2.12.2 What is a Competency Model?**

Dubois (1993:9) defines a competency model as “those competencies that are required for satisfactory or exemplary job performance within the context of a person’s job roles, responsibilities and relationships in an organisation and its internal and external environments”. Over the past 25 years, the competency literature has presented competencies in generic form, in scales designed to cover behaviour in a wide range of jobs, and to be adapted for many applications. The main reasons for the success of competency models include: a) they can provide identification of the skills, knowledge, behaviours and capabilities needed to meet

current and future personnel selection needs, in alignment with the differentiations in strategies and organisational priorities, and b) they can focus the individual and group development plans to eliminate the gap between the competencies required for a job and those available.

To use competencies as a strategic Human Resource Management (HRM) tool, they need to be integrated into a competency model or framework. A competency framework is a narrative description of the critical competencies required for fully successful or exemplary performance in a job, role, or an organisation. To further understand competency-based approaches, it is prudent to differentiate these from traditional job analysis in several ways. Firstly, job analysis focuses on understanding tasks needed to perform each task while competency approaches focus on personal characteristics needed for success in a job role. Secondly, job analysis also focuses on effective performance, while competency approaches focus on outstanding performance. Finally, while job analysis often led to long lists of tasks and their associated skill requirements, competency approaches distilled the results of their studies into a relatively small set of underlying personal characteristics.

A competency model is developed through competency profiling. In a nutshell, competency profiling is the process of breaking the job into its constituent parts and identify specific skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours needed to perform the same successfully. According to Lucian Cernusca and Cristina Dima (2007), a competency model is a valid, observable and measurable list of the knowledge, skills and attributes demonstrated through behaviour that results in an outstanding performance in a particular work context. In this regard, the question is what is the competency model of academic library leadership which depicts a set of competencies that include the key behaviours required for excellent performance in the role of leading an academic library in a digital era.

In a nutshell, a competency framework describes the various levels of knowledge, skills and attitudes that individuals must show to advance the goals and objectives of the organisation or sector. Concisely, a competency framework clarifies both organisation-wide and job-specific expectations to ensure consistent performance, measurement, and results. The constitutive components of a competency framework include (a) competency domains that describe sets of related competencies; (b) individual competencies that fall under each domain; (c) behavioural indicators that demonstrate proficiency for each competency at each of three performance

levels; (d) core values of a competency framework are often represented within the individual competencies; and (e) limited behaviours can also be included and they define unconstructive behaviour that needs to be changed.

To outline the attributes that library leaders should have, library organisations such as the library leadership and management association (LLAMA) established competency criteria. The establishment of a set of competencies for library leaders fell under the purview of five ALA emerging leaders' program, which was established in 2008. "The result of their work was the well-researched and thoughtful article "Developing Core Leadership Competencies for the Library Profession," published in the Spring 2009 issue of *Library Leadership and Management*" (Bartlett, 2019: 1). The five-person team identified four key library leadership competencies, including managerial effectiveness, interpersonal effectiveness, cognitive capacity, and vision. Nevertheless, seventeen broad competencies were created by further dissecting the four categories.

The focus on how competent library leadership on libraries, particularly in SA has led to the establishment of Carnegie Library Leadership Academy (CLLA) and LIASA. "The CLLA programme (presented at what became known as 'Academies') is designed to give librarians the opportunity to meet colleagues as well as senior professionals from different backgrounds, provinces and institutions and so initiate a paradigm shift for leading the profession" (De Boer, Bothma and Olwagen, 2012: 88). Wong (2020) suggests that strategic leaders of an academic library need unique leadership competencies, mindsets, and expertise to operate a digital library effectively.

### **2.13. Academic Library leadership competencies in digital age**

Academic libraries currently must meet new user expectations due to results of the significant change in the digital age. "Traditionally, these libraries fulfil their traditional roles by providing access to information resources predominantly in print by acquiring, cataloguing, circulating, guiding their use, and curating them in supporting the scholarship, teaching, and learning mission of their parent institutions" (Wong, 2020: 15). Before the Coronavirus pandemic users' demand for digital resources grew, the bulk of academic libraries were slowly migrating to digital. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for online information access acerbated to the demand that libraries such as UKZN libraries could not maintain.

Most institutions found it difficult to adapt during COVID-19, so leaders had to exercise their skills to meet the demand of key stakeholders. “Despite an agreement among scholars that a new set of leadership competencies are needed for the twenty-first century, the specificity of these competencies and how they can be demonstrated, are still not clear” (Ngayo Fotso, 2021: 567). There is a need for contemporary research on library leadership competency to uncover the set of role and core competences for library leadership in an ever-changing digital environment. In the library context, there is insufficient literature discussing what leadership competencies are required by library leaders such as directors and upper-level administrators, as most studies focus on discussing competencies for librarians and information specialists (Wong, 2020: 51). There is also sentiment that leadership competencies are required to address for twenty-first (21<sup>st</sup>) century. “In the existing reviews, there is an agreement that new sets of leadership competencies are needed to respond to the requirements of the twenty-first century” (Ngayo Fotso, 2021: 567).

There is no agreement on what leadership competencies to deal with the digital age or 21<sup>st</sup> century. “Thus, it appears that there is a problem of missing consensus on the required leadership competencies for the twenty-first century in terms of the number of competencies, the type of competencies, the frameworks and the terminologies used” (Ngayo Fotso, 2021: 568). There is a need for skills and competencies curriculum for Library profession students to be prepared for this digital age or 21<sup>st</sup> century. “The LIS school should integrate these required skills and competencies into the course curriculum for preparing professionals in the digital age” (Yadav, 2022: 50).

University libraries in SA are leading the way in the African region to a new era of creative and effective library services by gradually incorporating robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) into their operations. “For example, the University of Pretoria Library in 2019 started using a popular robot, by the name “Libby”, which is reported by Van De Walt to be originally from China and is efficient. Southy a new library employee” (Ocholla and Ocholla, 2020: 364). While it might appear highly advanced for Africa, Libby is regarded as the continent's first humanoid librarian. Academic libraries need to be better resourced and accessible, and it would be a good start to use AI so that services are available almost anywhere, at any time. Such innovation and library website will allow libraries to keep up with changing trends. “The university library website should be the virtual gateway to the library, and it, therefore, has to be well-designed

with valuable contents and strong visibility and customer orientation” (Ocholla and Ocholla, 2020: 34). “A smart leadership that is creative, innovative, adaptive, sensitive, and visionary is essential to making the academic library 4.0 work” (Ocholla and Ocholla, 2020: 236).

#### **2.14. Previous empirical research on library leadership in a digital context outside South Africa**

Research on library leadership in a digital context has evolved significantly over the past decade, reflecting the profound impact of technology on library services and operations. To better understand the role of library leadership in the digital age, Le (2015) conducted a survey throughout university libraries in the United States. The survey involved individuals who hold senior library leadership position. The findings from the survey demonstrate that to adapt to the digital context, library leadership experienced the top five major challenges. The first challenge revealed that the library operated under fiscal uncertainty, retrofitting of outdated library facilities to accommodate new services, striking a balance between digital and print materials, and keeping the library staff trained and current.

In addition, the study found that there were five top essential academic library leadership attributes for the top of library leadership in the US, which include clarity of “vision, integrity, management skills, collaboration skills and communication skills”. Another study was conducted in Tennessee by Harris-Keith (2015:45). The research surveyed academic library directors at Carnegie-designated Master’s granting institutions about their previous library positions, and what skills and qualities they ‘perceived to have exercised in those positions. Findings from the study demonstrated that participants shared the view that there were opportunities to exercise leadership qualities in previous positions, but few opportunities to develop more empirically measurable leadership skills.

Examining digital leadership in the corporate context, Price (2018:78) conducted a mixed methods study with corporate CEOs in Australia. The aim of the study was to develop a Digital Leadership framework to define Digital Leadership and further develop a Digital Leadership Conceptual Model to explain Digital Leaders' influence on digital transformation processes. The findings from the study demonstrated that the best leadership approach in the digital age is a combination of leadership approaches with broad leadership strategies and skill sets. The finding again proposes that a digital leadership framework encompasses a combination of three

macro leadership approaches: “authentic, transactional, and transformational”.

Aslam (2019) conducted a qualitative study in Lincoln, Nebraska, in the US, with the aim of exploring and determining academic library leaders’ perspectives regarding the key challenges facing academic libraries and leadership and how library professionals can meet these challenges effectively. Semi-structured, telephonic and face-to-face interviews were used as means of data collection. Participants included library directors, managers and most senior librarians. In total, there were 16 library leaders and administrators. The findings from the study demonstrated that a shared vision is key to leadership in the academic library.

Library leadership prepares and empowers employees for organisational change and reduces resistance whenever a change occurs in an organisation. In addition, Arnold, Nickel and Williams (2008) conducted a survey through mixed method Librarians who attended leadership institutes in Washington DC; the study found that skills development must remain the central priority for library leaders and should be supported at all levels of the organisation. The majority of attendees find their library leadership experience professionally valuable and would recommend it to others. Furthermore, the findings of the study indicated that in order for library leadership to remain effective and relevant, there is a need for sufficient and sustainable financial resources that can facilitate library leaders to implement attended goals.

Carter (2014) conducted a study using a qualitative desk-based approach to assess change leadership in an academic library department. The findings demonstrated that, combined, assessment and change leadership enable academic library departments to adapt to evolving trends, meet the needs of their users, and demonstrate their value within the broader educational community. Weiner (2023) and Delaney and Bates (2015) conducted a desk-based study on leadership of academic libraries. The review synthesized what was known about the characteristics and leadership style of university librarians and academic library directors. The review was apparent that the characteristics of academic library leadership include a clear philosophy and vision articulated and to what extent they are implemented.

Macauley (2011:51) conducted a qualitative study entitled “taking library leadership personally”. The study was conducted amongst library leaders across Australia. The aims of the study were to outline the emerging trends for leadership in the knowledge era. According

to Macauley (2011:51) the findings from the study concluded that “taking library leadership personally is something relevant to all work in libraries and information agencies whether we have formal leadership responsibilities or not”.

Fagan (2012), in his desk-based study titled “The effectiveness of academic library deans and directors” reviewed some of the core theories of leadership effectiveness in the mainstream management literature and examines recent publications related to effective library leadership. The findings from the study demonstrated a gap in literature on the role and effectiveness of academic library deans. This suggests that future researchers should ground investigations of library leadership effectiveness within existing leadership theories.

In his study titled “A Phenomenological Study of Effective Leadership in Academic Health Sciences Libraries in the United States”, Fought (2016:205) examined how academic health sciences library directors experience leadership and how their experience related to their understanding of effective leadership. The findings from the study by Fought (2016) concluded that “developing new leaders and improving leadership effectiveness in academic health sciences libraries would assist in proving the value of the library to their campuses and ensure a promising future”.

### **2.15. Previous empirical research on the competences of Academic Library Leadership**

As this study is also about competences, it is important to understand what is already known in the domain of competences of academic library leadership from empirical research. In their study, Narang and Kumar (2016) explored the trends of library science practices in India toward managerialism instead of dynamic leadership. The study involved librarians and those in library leadership positions. The findings from the study demonstrated that there are no clear distinctions between managerialism and dynamic leadership, which resulted in libraries not achieving the intended goals of serving their users.

To understand the effects that change has brought to the library and information science profession, a typology of skills and competencies required of library and information science professionals in Israel was developed by Bronstein (2015). The development of the model resulted from the analysis of three different sets of data: job advertisements, course descriptions

from LIS departments, and data collected from a survey administered to directors of libraries and information centres in Israel (Bronstein, 2018). The model suggested that “Job listings were found to emphasize skills related to the provision of information services as well as personal competencies, while results from the survey revealed that skills related to the organisation of information perceived as essential by library directors” (Bronstein, 2015: 130).

Alhlimpuii (2022) conducted a study at Moram University in India. The aims of the study were to assess the existing information and technology skills and competencies, Managerial skills and Personality Development and Communication skills acquired by the leaders in information system professionals working in college libraries of Mizoram. To achieve its objective, they used a qualitative approach, which is descriptive in nature, to assess the skills and competencies of College Library professionals who are working in Institutes/Colleges affiliated with Mizoram University. The study by Alhlimpuii (2022), involved “Library professionals ranging from College Librarians to Library Assistants”. According to Alhlimpuii (2022), in total, there were 54 participants, including librarians, deputy librarians, assistant librarians, library and information officers, and professional assistants.

The study concluded that although the majority of library professionals have some level of computer education, there are still some library professionals who need to pursue formal or informal computer education. This means that library competencies must move and adapt to technological advancement. Ashiq, Rehman and Batool (2018) conducted a qualitative study in Pakistan to examine the perceptions of academic library leaders about leadership and required competencies. Data were collected through in-depth interviews from 15 senior academic library leaders. The findings from the study demonstrated that lack of self-development culture and technological issues were the competency challenges faced with library leaders.

A study was conducted at the University of Malaysia by Goh, Sok, Boon and Kiran (2018:7) to explore and examine the perceptions of library leaders and librarians on leadership competences for academic library leaders and identifying the degree of differences in their perception. “Two separate questionnaires were designed based on an adaptation of the MySkillsProfile@2012 and Gorman’s Competence Inventory to examine what leadership competencies were considered to be most important among the two groups” Goh, Sok, Boon

and Kiran (2018:1). The study by Goh, Sok, Boon and Kiran (2018) the findings from the study concluded that there were missing necessary library competences amongst librarians. Which means there was a need for an increase in librarians training in management and strategic planning as librarians feel these competencies can be further enhanced.

Thamaraiselvi (2018) conducted a study in Tamal Naidu, India. The aim of the study was to explore and examine leadership management skills and competencies for academic library leaders in the digital environment. This was a qualitative study involving library leaders as well as librarians. The findings from the study revealed that effective leadership depended on three basic personal skills, and these included technical, human, and conceptual.

Another study was conducted in Hong Kong by Wong (2020:163). This was a qualitative study. The aims of the study were to explore and examine how library leaders of Hong Kong self-financing higher education institutions perceive and experience the expanding necessary core leadership competencies in the digital age, and how they make sense of acquiring and applying these competencies to lead successfully. “The findings of this study identified 16 core leadership competencies, with five of them being the most valued by participants: Collaboration/Teamwork, Communication Skills, Adaptability/Flexibility, Being Knowledgeable, and Problem-Solving” (Wong 2020: 163).

Moreover, the study revealed library leaders make use of these core leadership competencies in their profession for better positioning to stay relevant and demonstrate value to their parent institutions and with key stakeholders. “Participants described the ‘various adaptations they made and confirmed that adaptation has become an important aspect of their leadership” Aslam (2019) conducted a qualitative study in Nebraska-Lincoln in the US. The study involved semi-structured, telephonic and face-to-face interviews with library directors, managers and most senior librarians. The aim of the study was to determine academic library leaders’ perspectives regarding the key challenges facing academic libraries and leadership, and how library professionals can meet these challenges effectively. In response to the research objectives, the findings from the study demonstrated that necessary skills and competences remained a challenge for an effective library leadership. The study concluded that information and technology competences were among challenges and as well as managerial competences.

Esmailzadeh, Bahrami and Soleymani (2020:12) conducted a study at Isfahan University to explore and examine competences of academic librarians in providing health research services. According to the findings, there were “two major categories were recognized, including general competencies and specialized competencies. The general competencies category included three subcategories of communication skill, professional ethics, and basic abilities. The specialized competencies category included six subcategories of information resource retrieval and evaluation, using research software, research assistance, intellectual property literacy, scientific publication literacy, scientometrics, and altimetric” (Esmailzadeh, Bahrami and Soleymani (2020:12).

Ashiq, Rehman, Safdar, and Ali (2021) conducted qualitative desk-based research to systematically collect and analyze the literature on academic library leaders focusing on the challenges faced by them, the set of skills needed to overcome these challenges, and ways for them to develop these leadership skills. The findings from the study by Ashiq, Rehman, Safdar and Ali (2021), noted that to cultivate a collaborative and adaptive culture in universities, library executives must have a forward-thinking vision, an inventive mindset, and good communication skills.

## **2.16. Summary**

This chapter has discussed the nature, characteristics and functions of an academic library. The chapter is clear that while there are different levels of leadership, this study focuses on strategic leadership leading an academic library in the digital era. As this study focuses on the leadership competences of leaders in the strategic position, it is important to highlight that this chapter has delved into the Upper Echelon Theory, as well as the functions of strategic leaders. The chapter has unpacked the notion of Digital Leadership as strategic leaders of academic libraries are working in a digital environment which requires new competencies. More importantly, the chapter has discussed previous empirical research on library leadership in a digital context and previous empirical research on the competences of academic library leadership. The next chapter will discuss the research methodology used in this study.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Introduction

This study aims to explore and examine library leadership competencies within the context of the digital age at the UKZN, SA. This chapter describes the methodology used in the study. It begins by providing the research Philosophy, followed by the Research design, Research approach, Target population, sample and sampling methods, data collection, Data collection instrument and procedure, Method of data analysis, Research quality and Ethical considerations.

### 3.2. Research Philosophy

Al-Ababneh (2020) asserts that a research philosophy is a set of beliefs or principles that guide the manner in which researchers approach their work, and the nature of knowledge they seek to acquire. It reflects the underlying assumptions about the nature of reality, the role of the researcher, and the methods used to investigate phenomena. The research philosophy serves as the foundation for the entire research process and influences the design, methods and interpretation of the study. There are three pillars to the research paradigm, namely ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontology refers to assumptions about the nature of reality. Ontology addresses the question, “What is reality?”. Ontology is the study of being, focusing on what the study seeks to research. The aspect of subjectivism emphasizes that reality is socially constructed and different people may have different viewpoints. This ontological position views social phenomena as constantly getting revised through continuous social interaction. On the other hand, objectivism believes that social entities exist in a reality external to social actors.

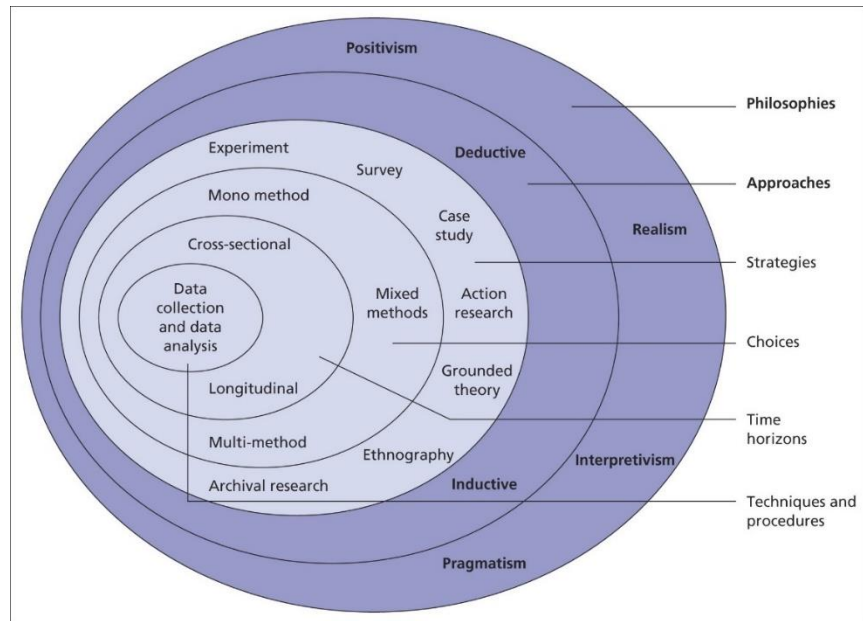
In addition, epistemology is the study of knowledge. It asks, “How do you know reality?”. Epistemology concerns assumptions about knowledge, what constitutes acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge, and how one can communicate knowledge to others (Burrell and Morgan 1979). While ontology is what is real or not, epistemology is the approach by which one determines what is real or not. There are basically two types of epistemologies. Firstly, finding things out by measuring things, when arms-length relationships between the researcher and the

researched is key to eliminate any bias. This is adopted in quantitative research. Secondly, there is finding things out by interpreting things, when the researcher interacts closely with the participants to understand reality. This is common in qualitative research. The last pillar of the research paradigm is methodology, which involves the system in which a researcher chooses to investigate, measure and analyze the research's aims and objectives. Research methodology is essentially about "how" one finds out the reality. In other words, how does the researcher design the study to not only accomplish the research's aims and objectives but also to ensure that the results are reliable and valid?

Three main research philosophies or paradigms are commonly recognised in social science research, namely positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism. Positivism is based on the belief that the social world can be studied using methods similar to those used in the natural sciences. It emphasizes objectivity, empirical observation, and the idea that there is an objective reality that can be discovered through systematic observation and measurement. Interpretivism, on the other hand, rejects the idea of an objective reality and emphasizes the importance of understanding the subjective meanings and interpretations people give to their experiences.

Researchers adopting an interpretive approach often use qualitative methods to explore the complexities of human behaviour and social phenomena. Pragmatism takes a more flexible stance, emphasizing the practical aspects of research and the use of methods that are most suitable for answering specific research questions. Pragmatists believe that the choice of research methods should be driven by the research problem and the goals of the study rather than adherence to a particular philosophical perspective. In order to present research philosophy, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) developed what they termed the "research onion". The Research Onion (see Figure 3.1) is also known as the Research Methodology Onion they believed that a research onion is a metaphorical model that represents the layers of research methods and approaches that can be employed in a research project, ranging from broad philosophical assumptions to specific data collection techniques. It provides a structured framework for researchers to design and conduct their studies.

**Figure 1.1: The Research Onion**



Source: Adopted from Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009: 129,130)

Choosing a research philosophy depends on the nature of the research question, the context of the study, and the researcher's ontological and epistemological beliefs. Considering the above research philosophy as presented in the figure, this study used the interpretive research philosophy to get a subjective understanding of the nature of the competencies which distinguishes outstanding academic library leadership at UKZN during the digital era. It emphasizes the subjective experiences, beliefs and values of individuals, and the importance of context in shaping these interpretations. Interpretive researchers assume that reality is not objective as different people may view the same reality in different ways, hence the pursuit of multiple realities. According to the interpretivist approach, it is important for the researcher as a social actor to appreciate differences between people. Interpretivists believe that different people in society experience and understand reality in different ways. While there may be only “one” reality, everyone interprets it according to their own view. Table 6 below depicts the assumptions that guide the interpretivism research philosophy.

**Table 6: Assumptions of Interpretivism**

<b>Assumptions</b>	<b>Elements of the Interpretivism Research Philosophy</b>
Ontology ( <i>What can we know</i> )	<p>Realities are socially constructed, there can be multiple constructions and realities, accessible through shared meaning.</p> <p>Subjective reality-There is no single, external reality The social world does not “exist” independently of human knowledge</p>
Epistemology ( <i>How can we know</i> )	<p>Knowledge of the world is socially constructed through a person`s lived experience</p> <p>The researcher is attached and internal, rather than a detached external observer</p> <p>Seeking to understand a specific context</p>
Methodology ( <i>How can we find out</i> )	<p>The way to find out and understand social phenomenon is through the perspective of participants with lived experiences, not to predict or control it.</p>
Focus of the study	<p>Concentration on understanding and interpretation phenomenon, hence weak on prediction</p>
Focus of interest	<p>What is specific, unique, deviant in the context</p>
Subject/Researcher relationship	<p>Researcher interact with participants- Interactive, cooperative, participative</p> <p>The researcher and the researched are inseparable</p>
Aim of the knowledge	<p>To gain deep, rich and context specific understanding of phenomenon</p>
Possibility of generalisation	<p>Only time and context bound transferring of findings to similar context</p>

Source: Researcher’s Own

In using Interpretivism as the guiding paradigm, the current study seeks to gain a deep and rich understanding of the nature of leadership competences in the digital environment of an academic library from the viewpoint of strategic leaders.

### **3.3. Research design**

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012), research design refers to the overall structure, plan or blueprint that guides a research study. It is a systematic and organized approach to investigating a research problem, answering research questions, or testing hypotheses. A well-defined research design helps researchers collect relevant data, analyse it effectively, and draw meaningful conclusions. Similarly, Akhtar (2016) asserts that a research design refers to the overall plan or structure that guides the researcher in the systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data to answer a research question or test a hypothesis. It outlines the framework for the entire research process, including the methods and procedures that will be used to gather and analyze data. A well-designed research study typically includes considerations such as: purpose, type of data, sampling, data collection methods, data analysis, time frame and ethical consideration. The purpose of the research must clearly state the research objectives or questions, while data allows the researcher to decide on the type of data to be collected (qualitative, quantitative, or a mix of both).

Sampling allows the researcher to determine the target population and the methods for selecting participants, while data collection methods gives the researcher the choice of tools and techniques for gathering data (surveys, interviews, experiments, etc.). Data Analysis allows the researcher to define the methods for analyzing the collected data (statistical analysis, thematic analysis, content analysis, etc.), while ethical considerations address ethical concerns related to the research. According to Saunders, ...et al., (2012). In brief, researchers develop a research design based on the nature of the research question and the goals of the study, and it serves as a roadmap for conducting the research in a systematic and organized manner. Moreover, it helps ensure that the study is rigorous, credible and capable of providing meaningful insights.

### **3.4. Research method**

There are three broad and well-known methods to research: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. In nature, this research is a qualitative study employing an interpretative approach.

According to Moriarty (2011), a qualitative research method provides an in-depth subjective understanding, perception and interpretation of the social world. This means that perceptions and understanding are influenced by a lived experience and the context in which those holding it come from (Ulin, 2002). Qualitative research aims to provide detailed textual information generated from the views and interactions with participants towards understanding a particular phenomenon. Adopting a qualitative study using the interpretative approach was preferred because it offers a systematic, controlled, valid and rigorous establishment of associations of methods which permit the accurate prediction of outcomes under certain conditions (Kumar, 2005: 16). Since the qualitative study examines perceptions of lived experiences, it also allows the researcher to capture a complete picture of the lived experience and the meaning made by the participants, and variations in participants from their own context and experience (Ulin, 2002).

It is worth noting that a qualitative approach is important because it also examines why the observed patterns exist, and the interpretations and implications attached to these (Babbie, Mouton and Mouton, 2001). As in most qualitative studies, the aim of this study was not only to investigate in some depth library leadership competencies at the UKZN, but also to elicit what Geertz (1973) referred to as “thick descriptions” of actions and events in individuals’ lives. This means that this study explored and examined the lived experiences, attitudes and understanding of library leaders, and their interpretation of such lived experiences with regard to library leadership competences within the context of the digital age.

### **3.5. Target population**

The UKZN has 5 campuses, each with numerous academic libraries. The target population is 16 library leaders at an academic library of the UKZN. While each campus of the 5 campuses of the UKZN possesses multiple libraries, due to the research scope and cost, the research was only limited to the main libraries. It was believed that leaders in these libraries have knowledge and a good understanding of the academic library landscape at the UKZN. The target population was initially 15 UKZN library executive members as it was adapted from the organogram and the library secretary. However, when the study began, the researcher found that there were 13 executive library members.

Furthermore, this study had only 9 participants. The unforeseen shift was a challenge because it

affected the feasible sample size and could have biased this research. “A study with strong and clear communication between researcher and participants requires fewer participants to offer sufficient information power than a study with ambiguous or unfocused dialogues” (Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora, 2016: 3). Assessing information power is crucial in research to avoid wasting time and resources on unneeded data collection. “An extremely large number of articles, book chapters, and books recommend guidance and suggest anywhere from 5 to 50 participants as adequate” (Dworkin, 2012: 1329).

### **3.6. Sample and sampling method**

The strategy for choosing participants, also known as the sample framework or sampling procedure, is essential in determining the breadth and richness of the data gathered for this project. “Sampling is a technique (procedure or device) employed by a researcher to systematically select a relatively smaller number of representative items or individuals (a subset) from a pre-defined population to serve as subjects (data source) for observation or experimentation as per objectives of his or her study” (Lakens, 2022: 749). The main objective of these kinds of research population explanations is to make it clear how the collected data would produce practical knowledge given the inferential goals of the researcher.

In research, sampling techniques fall into two main categories: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. When using probability sampling, each participant has an equal chance of being chosen. Probability sampling minimises selection bias due to the random selection process, which guarantees that any characteristic of the population has an equal chance of being reflected in the sample. Non-probability sampling, on the other hand, offers a variety of alternative methods for choosing a sample in which it is unknown how likely each participant will be chosen. To this study a non-probability sampling method was used because it offered the opportunity to all academic library senior leaders at the main library of KwaZulu-Natal to take part in the research.

Initially, the study planned and identified 13 participants, specifically from the UKZN library management executive, to ensure a comprehensive examination of leadership styles within the institution. However, when the study took place, it was discovered that four executive team members were no longer part of the institution, and their positions had become vacant. So, it was not a true reflection of the UKZN library organogram received from the Library Director's

secretary. From 9 participants in total for this study, 4 of whom were men and 5 of whom were women. The unforeseen shift was a challenge because it affected the feasible sample size and could have biased for this research.

To best address the research questions and achieve the study's goals, the researcher employed a purposive sampling strategy, in which used own judgement to pick participants based on their unique characteristics, experiences, and job profile. Purposive sampling is a technique used in qualitative research to select a specific group of individuals or units for analysis. Participants are chosen “on purpose”, not randomly. It is also known as judgmental sampling or selective sampling. In purposive sampling, the researcher has a specific purpose or objective in mind when selecting the sample. Therefore, the sample is selected based on the characteristics or attributes that the researcher is interested in studying. The following were the selection criteria for this study: (1) the participant had to be employed by the UKZN library and have the role of strategic leadership, between the age of 30 and 65 years old. As the study focuses on the leadership of the entire academic library, the researcher focused on those people in the top management team of the library. The participants at UKZN Library were between 30-65 years old. Below is table 7 which provides the profile of the selected participants in this qualitative study.

**Table 7: Participants (Sample size) and number**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Number</b>
1	Library Director	1
2	Portfolio Managers	2
3	Principal librarian (Library and information Services)	2
5	Principal (Special collection)	1
6	Principal (Cataloguing and Acquisition)	1
7	Principal (Circulation services)	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>

### **3.7. Data collection methods**

There are a variety of methods of data collection in qualitative research, including observations, textual or visual analysis (e.g. from books or videos) and interviews (individual or group) (Gill,

Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick, 2008: 291). Interviews are a conversation-based inquiry whereby questions are used to inquire relevant study information from participants to respond to the key objectives of the researcher. An interview can be “informal, unstructured, conversational, and even spontaneous [as if talking to a friend], or it can be semi-structured and standardized to a certain extent” (Jovancic, 2019). Given the prevalence of remote work and the researcher's requirement for flexibility, virtual platforms such as Microsoft Teams were used to conduct interviews during the data collection phase of this study. The virtual interviews using Microsoft Teams were conducted from 29 November 2023 to 12 January 2024. Planning and flexibility are necessary for research interviews to get participants to provide detailed information and ideas effectively. As part of rigorous data collection, this section provides detailed information about the actual data collection instrument used in this study.

In order to learn more about how university library leaders deal with the digital age and leadership issues, the researcher conducted interviews using an interview guide with a set of questions based on the competencies of library leaders at UKZN. The interview guide may be found in Appendix 1. The first step in preparation was to choose an isolated, calm area for the interview, ensure there were not be any interruptions, and reduce background noise. The interview was scheduled on teams with the agreement with the participant and they used their offices or quiet venue. The researcher used the quiet Stellenbosch University Library seminar.

The purposes of the interviews were communicated to the participants at the beginning of each virtual interview (see introductory letter in Appendix 2). In this study, the researcher began each interview by thanking the participants for their time in contributing and briefly explaining the purpose of the interview. Furthermore, it was ensured that every participant in this research was given a copy of the end product of the study. A little before the meeting started, the participants were given a copy of the informed consent form in advance of the interview, which every one of them signed before the interview.

The researcher outlined to the participants the aim of the study, ensured voluntary participation and advised each participant that he or she was free to stop participating in the study at any time. The researcher clarified that the final report for this qualitative study was going to include quotes from the interview. However, guarantees were made that the data would be cleansed to remove any discernible or identifying details to ensure anonymity. In addition, the researcher clarified that the data collected would only be accessible to him and his supervisor as part of

confidentiality. The researcher sought consent from participants to have interviews audio recorded to ensure data accuracy. The consent form was filled out by the participants, who signed it acknowledging that they agreed to participate in the study, and giving the researcher permission to record the interviews.

Each interview began with an explanation of the Academic Library leadership competencies and how the goal of the interview was to contribute to the body of knowledge exploring the competencies of library leaders at UKZN, an academic institution, to comprehend how university library leaders navigate the challenges of leading in the digital age. Each interview began with an explanation to participants about the expected length of the session. All participants were informed in the first correspondence that the interview would run for about forty minutes. However, the duration of the interviews was 35 minutes on average. The researcher asked the participants if they had any questions before starting the interview. Each participant received the researcher's contact information so they could follow up with them later when there was a need.

Furthermore, the researcher reminded the participants that they could contact them or the researcher's supervisor with any queries or worries they might have had regarding the study. Semi-structured interviews, often qualitative, were used extensively to acquire data. But it is also called guided and semi-structured. "When making a guide or semi-structured interview, you take a prepared outline of topics, issues, or themes with you, but still have a possibility to vary the wording and order of questions in each interview" Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008: 82). According to Creswell (2009), two recommended practices for conducting semi-structured interviews are recording the interviews on audiotape and transcribing them. The study involved conducting audio-recorded interviews with each participant and creating transcriptions. The interviewer encouraged participants to express themselves freely by asking open-ended, comprehensive questions, where participants may not be aware of the nature of the interview or the secrets they might reveal. "However, with the semi-structured interview, the interviewer is prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics are considered, and, perhaps more significantly, to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues by the researcher" (Denscombe, 2010: 175).

### **3.8. Method of data analysis**

According to Bhatia (2017), data analysis in quantitative research is the process of inspecting,

cleaning, transforming and modelling data with the goal of discovering useful information, drawing conclusions, and supporting decision-making. It involves a variety of techniques and methods to extract meaningful insights from raw data. In a qualitative study, there are four major steps in the data analysis process, namely: Define the problem or question, data collection, data cleaning and processes sing, interpretation, and inference. Define the problem or question involves a clear articulation of the goal or question one wants to address through data analysis. Data collection involves gathering data from various sources. Cleaning and organizing the data ensure accuracy and completeness.

This may involve handling missing values, removing outliers, and transforming variables. Moreover, interpretation and inference analyse the results of the models and draw meaningful conclusions. This step involves connecting the findings to the original problem or question (Bhatia, 2017). In this study, data analysis was interpretive by means of thematic analytic methods. Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data. It is usually applied to a set of texts, such as an interview or transcripts. The researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly. According to Braun, and Clarke (2006) there are various approaches to conducting thematic analysis, but the most common form follows a six-step process: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. Since this is an interpretive study, it is assumed that meanings and perceptions of the participants are derived from own experiences and perceptions and their reality that is subjective rather than objective. This means that the perceptions of participants with regard to library leadership competences at UKZN may differ from those of the interviewer. It is worth mentioning that this has important implications for research analysis and therefore thematic analysis was used.

It is important to note that although the steps outlined by theorists largely overlap, the five steps outlined by Terre Blanche *et al.* (2006) were primarily used for analysis in this study, with some reference to other authors where applicable. A number of steps were considered in the analysis of the data. The first step of data analysis was reading and developing an intimate relationship with the data. This process allowed the researcher to be involved and becoming familiar and immersing oneself in the content to be analyzed.

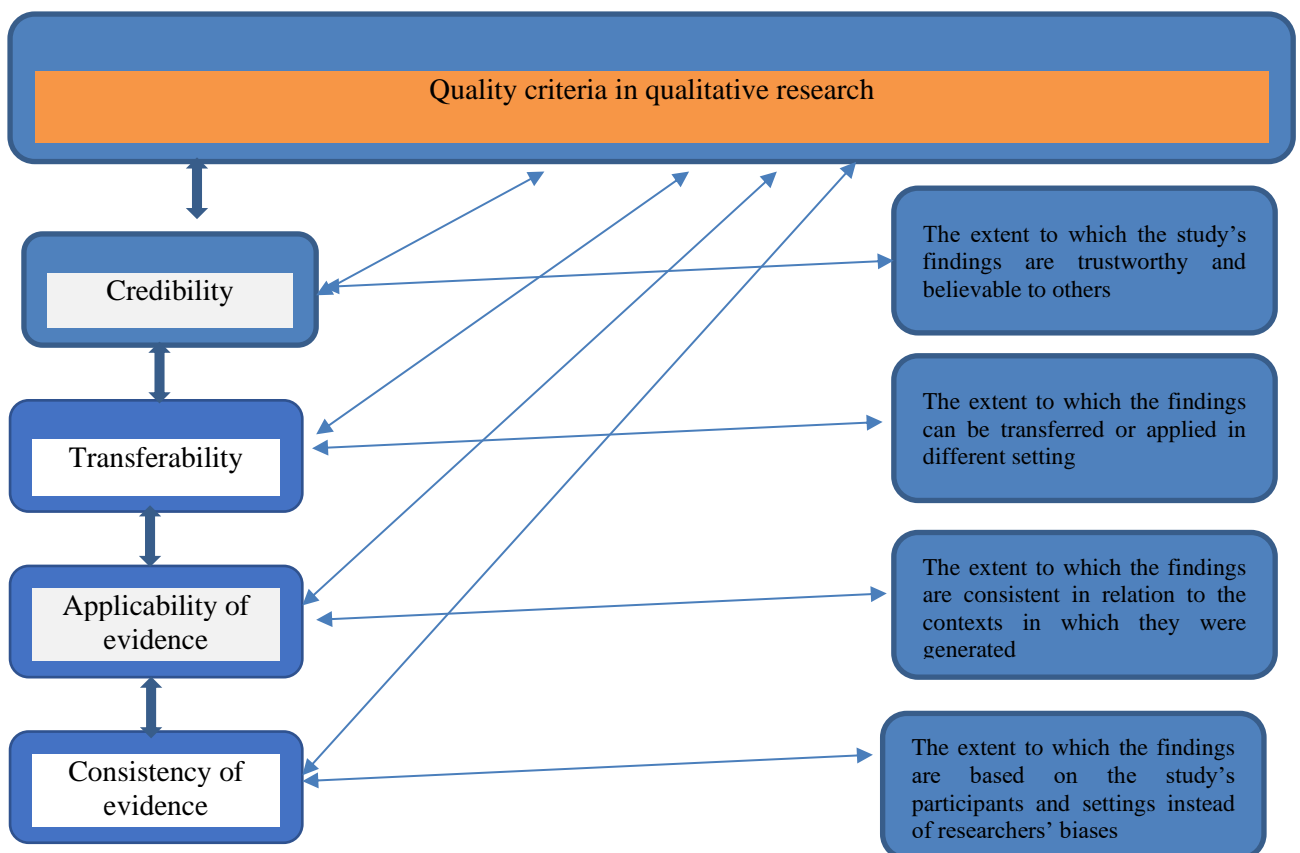
The second step was to use the same words, style or terms used by the participants themselves. These were then used to establish connections and infer general rules or classes from specific

occurrences. The third step of data analysis was according to Durrheim, Painter and Terre Blanche (2004), namely coding. In this step, data was marked at relevant instances as pertaining to one or more themes. The four-step data was broken down into themes and coded. Common topics, some of which were expressed in several ways were organized and grouped together under a single theme and then elaboration occurred. The last and final step of data analysis was, according to Durrheim et al. (2004), bringing together the interpretation of the data, and checking it.

### 3.9. Research quality

According to Groot and Valderrama, (2006), research quality refers to the standard of research conducted in terms of its credibility, transferability, applicability of evidence and consistency of evidence. Figure 3.2 below outlines quality the criteria in a qualitative research.

**Figure 3.2: Quality criteria in qualitative research**



Adapted from: Groot and Valderrama (2006: 1369)

Firstly, credibility establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information

drawn from the participants 'original data and that there is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views. In short, credibility relates to how the research findings are plausible and trustworthy. The member checks allowed participants to review, validate the accuracy or correct any inaccuracies in the transcripts. In this qualitative study, there is a thick description and concrete details which does not only provide an audit trail but also illuminates the origin of data and themes.

Second, transferability in qualitative research refers to the degree to which the results of a study can be generalized or transferred to other contexts, situations, times, and populations. In this case, the current study, has provided a detailed description of the context in which the research was performed and how this shaped the finding for readers to transfer findings from case to case or group to group. This addresses whether the findings apply to another context.

Third, the extent to which the findings are consistent in relation to the contexts in which they were generated is key as it depicts the applicability of evidence. Other scholars label this aspect of research quality as confirmability. Confirmability is a criterion of trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the degree of confidence that the research study's findings are based on the participants' narratives and words rather than potential researcher biases. Confirmability focuses on the clarity of the whole process—including data collection and analysis that was used in a study. To ensure that this criterion of research quality was adhered to in this study, there are details which reveal the processes used and also clarity of how the findings are derived through detailed descriptions and the use of quotes from the academic library leaders to express their views. Themes are derived from data and captures the views of participants which are depicted through various direct quotations used in reporting results. Data and interpretations are grounded in events and not in the researcher's assumptions or point of view. Confirmability includes judgement about the appropriateness of the labelling of themes or categories as well as the quality of the analysis and how the findings fit the data.

Authors such as Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009) stated that lastly, consistency of evidence in research refers to the reliability and coherence of findings across different studies or within a single study over time. It was further noted by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009) that to the consistency of evidence as dependability and concise, dependability in qualitative research is the measure of the extent to which a research study could be repeated by a separate researcher and reveal the same findings. It is an evaluation of the quality of the data

collection, data analysis, and theory generation processes. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009) dependability is important to trustworthiness because it establishes the research study's findings as consistent and repeatable. The current thesis has provided sufficient and detailed audit trail and information that another researcher could follow the same procedural steps, albeit possibly reaching a similar or different conclusion.

### **3.10. Ethical consideration**

According to Moriarty (2011), all research raises ethical issues. Therefore, it is crucial for researchers to firstly seek ethical approval. The researcher of this study also fully understood that when conducting research using human beings, there are some important research ethical guidelines that must be adhered to, and research may not be conducted if any of these ethical guidelines are violated.

#### **3.10.1. Voluntary participation, anonymity, informed consent and confidentiality**

The proposed research was guided by standard ethical considerations, including participant informed consent and UKZN. The consent form clearly outlined the aim of the research project. The form emphasized the right to voluntary participation and the withdrawal at any time as the participant wishes, the use of pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of the participants, confidentiality, and contact details or both the researcher and his institution (UKZN) were included in the informed consent form. It is important to highlight that no identifying details are reported in this study to ensure anonymity.

To maintain confidentiality, the researcher was restricted from sharing the information communicated by participants to a third party or using it for another purpose except for the research.

#### **3.10.2. Ethical clearance**

Furthermore, data collection only commenced once ethical clearance approval for this study was obtained from the UKZN's Ethics Committee. The researcher made sure that the research was carried out in an ethical manner. A copy of the ethical clearance certificate is attached to this dissertation (see Appendix 30. Also attached is a gatekeepers' letter, which was obtained

to ensure that permission was granted to conduct this study at the UKZN library.

### **3.11. Summary**

This chapter has provided the research philosophy and methodology used in this qualitative study, which seeks to explore the leadership competences of leaders of the academic library in the digital era at UKZN. In the chapter, it is clear that the interpretive that paradigm and research philosophy guided this study which explored the leadership competences at the UKZN Library in a digital age. The chapter has also presented how participants in this study who are leaders of the academic library at UKZN were selected. The chapter is clear that purposive sampling was used to select participants, while in-depth data was collected through virtual interviews using an interview guide.

Interview data was analysed using thematic data analysis to decipher themes which reveal a variety of leadership competences in the context of an academic library at UKZN in the digital era. The chapter has also discussed how this qualitative study has met the criteria of trustworthiness but also adhered to research ethics.

The following chapter examines leadership competencies at UKZN Libraries in a digital age. It explores leadership styles, competencies used for adaptive change, and critical competencies for influential academic library leaders in the digital era. The study provides a framework for effective leadership.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a variety of themes as results of this qualitative study which explored and examined leadership competencies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Library in a digital age. Firstly, the chapter presents themes that depict the nature and variety of leadership styles practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead self and others in the digital age. Secondly, the chapter presents a theme on the nature of leadership competencies used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive change and provide services in a digital age. Lastly, the chapter presents constitutive themes of the identified key competences, tasks and roles for a framework of effective academic library leaders in the digital era, which is presented in section 3.4.

### 4.2. Theme on the nature and variety of leadership styles practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead self and others in the digital age

In this qualitative study, the first research objective was to establish the nature and variety of leadership styles practised by leaders at the UKZN Library to lead themselves and others in the digital era.

In this regard, the findings of this exploratory qualitative revealed five different leadership styles are practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead themselves and others in the digital era. Firstly, the results depict *friendly leadership* struggling with clarity of direction at UKZN as each individual leader has their own leadership style characterized by too much friendliness and a failure to reprimand followers. Secondly, the results also reveal instances of a *collective and shared leadership* style guided by a general understanding of collective and delegated responsibility in governing the library. Thirdly, participants were also clear that their senior leaders at UKZN library were practicing an *inclusive, partnership and alignment* style to pursue the vision in a collaborative fashion. The fourth and fifth patterns of leadership styles found in this study were *autocratic and adaptive* in nature. In this exploratory study, the nature and variety of leadership styles practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead themselves and others in the digital era are depicted in Table 4.1 below and subsequently presented in detail.

**Table 4.1: Theme on the nature and variety of leadership styles practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead self and others in the digital age**

Themes depicting the nature and variety of leadership styles practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead self and others in the digital age	Frequency
1. Friendly leadership struggling with clarity of direction at UKZN library	2
2. Collective and shared leadership style	2
3. Inclusive, partnership and alignment style to pursue vision	3
4. Autocratic leadership style	2
5. Adaptive leadership style	1

#### **4.2.1. Friendly leadership struggling with clarity of direction at UKZN library**

Two of the nine participants believed that there is a friendly leadership style at the UKZN library characterized by a unique style as each leader has their own leadership style. Participants believed that each leadership style is influenced by a number of factors, including individual personality as well as education background and personal understanding of the library and required leadership. Below is what Participant 2 had to say about the unique and different styles of friendly leadership, shaped by the expectations and vision of each leader, evident at the UKZN library:

*I have been a librarian for more than 10 years. I have seen library leaders coming and going. I can say that each of these leaders, had unique leadership style but we are commonly friendly. In my view, I think as human being each one of us has unique personality and therefore can influence how we lead others and the organisation. We all have different educational background and have different expectation and vision as leaders and this shapes how we lead the library and its employees (Participant 2).*

In a slightly different vein, participants also revealed that some senior academic library leaders are too friendly and consequently fail to provide direction and discipline staff at the UKZN library. Participants were clear that some leaders apply their own leadership style with less consideration of the policies and rules governing libraries. The lack of direction and supervision

by some leaders was construed as arising from too much friendship between the leader and followers, which creates difficulty in disciplining people in the library, as reflected below by Participant 8:

*We have leaders like that. Where there is a lack of supervision and lack of direction. Yeah, people do. I do not know, maybe it is because when you made too much friends or you made people that you are supervising to be more of your friends than your subordinates, tend to do what they want to do or can do whatever they want to do or tell you what to do. You find it difficult as a leader to reprimand them and sometimes you do not understand which direction is the organisation taking (Participant 8).*

#### **4.2.2. Collective and shared leadership style**

Another theme revealing the nature and variety of leadership styles practised by leaders at UKZN Library to lead themselves and others in the digital era is the collective and shared leadership style. Participants expressed the belief that collective leadership was evident in how everyone was given not only space to participate in decision-making but also to share in the responsibilities and accountabilities for decisions made and their results. Below is an extract from the interview transcripts which illustrates the various aspects, such as decision space, delegation of decision power, collaborative and team approach, as parts of collective and shared leadership at UKZN library in the digital era:

*Now we look at the university as the whole and the library management, they have some lab, they share the responsibility of leadership. For example, in this layer UKZN library we have 13 managers. In terms for example, you have the director and you have a senior 3 senior managers and then you have a whole group of managers that form part of the management team (Library Executive). So that is sort of collective, it's shared, it's actually shared leadership where the responsibility is taken by each and every individual. For example, if the director is not around, then the person who is the principal librarian can take decisions at each and every campus. So, this is a shared leadership. When something goes well is celebrated collectively and when something goes wrong, it is the entire team that suffers consequences. Leaders play the role of serving rather than serving own agenda. I would say that we do have a servant leadership takes into consideration the view and aspiration of employees and at the same time the vision of the university*

*(Participant 3).*

*In my view, we there is a collective leadership at the university of KwaZulu-Natal. If you look how library work, each librarian is part of the daily functioning of the library. Furthermore, library held weekly meeting and everyone is expected to contribute to the discussion and give his or her view on what to happen. I think, there is a collective leadership (Participant 4).*

#### **4.2.3. Inclusive, partnership and alignment style to pursue vision**

In this exploratory qualitative study, participants were clear that the senior leaders were mindful of how to align themselves and people with the mission and vision of the university in how they lead at the UKZN library. Additionally, meetings involving the library community were critical in not only discussing operational issues but also reinforcing the alignment of the library with the university and changes in the technological environment. Below is what Participant 7 elaborated regarding the style of trying to align staff, leaders and the vision of the university operating in the digital era:

*And we also have a visional leadership style, since leaders are a minute uh also aligning themselves with the mission and vision of the university. And we always I mean emphasize to our staff, to align themselves with the mission and vision of the university in a digital era. I mean adopted the coaching style and this kind of leadership style, encouraging collaborations promote partnership as technology changes very fast (Participant 7).*

It is also notable that participants illuminated on how leaders were reinforcing inclusive and collaborative aspects through regular meetings of all members of the library community to play a full role in decision-making and giving direction on how the library can function and achieve its intended objectives. The quote below demonstrates the views of participant 3, 6, and 7 regarding inclusive leadership which permitted employees to express their views, buy in to ideas but also promoted a bottom-up approach in the library at UKZN:

*UM, it's our leadership style at UKZN libraries, is very participatory and in the sense that its decisions are taken collectively and we have meetings where issues are discussed, we've got and the library management meetings where issues are*

*raised and discussed and decisions are taken and we've got staff meetings where we also give staff the opportunity to not just buy in but also to hear and discuss operational issues that have taken place in Library and technology environment. This is how we build internal collective decisions and build partnerships with other departments. So, our leadership style at UKZN is very inclusive and participatory, and we avoid the proxies of making top-down decisions (Participant 7).*

*We prefer a bottom-up approach because that guarantees the cooperation of everyone and partnerships (Participant 3).*

*Looking at our library system and leadership style, one can believe that the participation of all members in decision-making is present here. Most of the decisions that are taken by leaders come from ordinary librarians. They have the power to influence the decisions and they are accountable when anything goes wrong (Participant 6).*

#### **4.2.4. Autocratic leadership style**

A total of two participants shared the perception of an autocratic leadership style at UKZN library . Participants expressed the view that there are instances when some of those in positions of leadership impose decisions on subordinates without taking into consideration their views and full participation in the process of decision-making. The autocratic leadership style manifests the ‘do as I say’ attitude ‘or get a warning’ approach which exemplifies the autocratic nature of leadership at the library at UKZN:

*We have a situation to do as they say so. Either you do it, or you don't do it, or you are going to sign a warning or something like that (Participant 5).*

*When expressing your view opposing the leaders, there is always consequences. Either you are sidelined or they make your life difficult. I can say that it is not dictatorship per say, but something close to that that does not leave a space for a different opinion (Participant 8).*

#### **4.2.5. Adaptive leadership style**

This exploratory qualitative study found that an adaptive leadership style was practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead self and others in the digital age. The study revealed that senior library leaders acknowledged that change was inevitable and that leaders were adapting their strategies according to context. Below is a direct quote which exemplifies how library leadership was trying to adapt to the new situation, navigate through complex challenges, and also mobilize wide support from others:

*But where I am seeing that this situation now you find that there are changes that are taking place and we have to adapt to those changes. Then we need to apply and adapt leadership style that is suitable to the specific situation or change the leadership style due to that situation that we're going through at that moment. Leadership style matches the situation being faced as there is no uniform style for every situation. I look at uh dealership whereby they inspire colleagues to work or to do more in each situation. And I think they do inspire. So, I will look at your transformation now, collective. Yeah, collective, and inclusive leadership helps to get creative solutions to pressing issues. Will consult while making or taking decisions, so it's in consultation with the other colleagues as well within the unit, but please feel free to probe more or to give directions where you feel like it's not properly addressing the question (Participant 2).*

*Yes, there are many changes happening in the university's setting, but at the same time in library sector. As you know, technology has come with new ways of doing things. What was relevant yesterday is no longer relevant. This means as library leaders we need to adapt to any changes as they occur. I can say that at the University of KwaZulu-Natal library, leaders try by all means to adapt to changes (Participant 4).*

#### **4.3. Themes on the nature of leadership competencies used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive change and provide services in a digital age**

In this qualitative study, the second research objective was to identify the nature of leadership competencies used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive change and provide services in a digital age. In this regard, results reveal that three leadership

competences were used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive change and provide services in a digital age. These leadership competencies include developing people and programmes to achieve change within rules, strategic thinking competencies and leading teams. Table 4.2 below depicts these three leadership competencies used by leaders to deal with adaptive change and provide service in the digital age

**Table 4.2: Theme on the nature of leadership competencies used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive change and provide services in a digital age**

Theme depicting the nature of leadership competencies used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive change and provide services in a digital age	Frequency
1. Developing people and programmes to achieve change within rules	2
2. Strategic thinking competences	4
3. Leading teams	3

**4.3.1. 1. Developing people and programmes to achieve change within rules**

Participants in this study were clear that the dynamic environment in which the academic library operates requires not only adaptation and new programmes, but also people with skills to deliver digital library services in pursuit of the vision of UKZN. Participants expressed the view that while the vision of the university was central, well-developed people were important to avoid a lack of innovation to adapt to and cope with technological changes and the policies and rules already set by the university structures. Below is how Participant 8 expressed their views regarding the role of strategic leadership in not only developing programmes, but also developing people to predominantly adhere to rules than pursue innovation:

*I do not know if I captured your question correctly, but let me answer and you will correct me. In my view, I think at UKZN library, we have strategic leadership which develops programmes and people to ensure innovation in the library spaces. Whiles things are changing faster these days, our leaders always stick to rules and that's why there is little innovation. There are many programs aligned to the vision of the university and in order to achieve this vision, library leadership develop a number of programs including training workshops and meetings which very much help in a space*

*where its more about adhering to rules and no innovation. All these are strategies aimed at positioning the university and library in particular to live up to its mandate in a changing environment. The leaders also ensure others are developed to provide digital services to students and researchers who may be off campus sometimes (Participant 8).*

*UKZN is a bigger institution, this means that working for an institution is this caliber you need to be strategic. In addition, library is changing and in order to remain on the top of the task, you need strategic leadership. Here I mean that when there is a strategy, vision of an organisation can be achieved. You see, library at UKZN can compete with any library globally, this to say without strategic leadership it is difficult to achieve what UKZN library is achieving now (Participant 7).*

#### **4.3.2. Strategic thinking competences**

This exploratory study reveals that while leaders of the library at UKZN engage in strategic thinking when dealing and considering adaptive changes as part of the entire university, they are less innovative, which is a problem. These leaders rely on the ability to analyse situations, identify patterns and anticipate potential outcomes with a long-term perspective, but without a focus on innovation. One participant had the much to say regarding how the library was anticipating and strategizing for the long-term direction up to 2030 within the broader vision of UKZN, considering the immediate and future implications of actions and decisions. Below is how Participant 7 and 9 highlighted the nature of strategic thinking capabilities which were being undermined or constrained by a strong emphasis on adherence to rules and the lack of forward thinking grounded in an innovative culture in the library space.

*..... the University of KwaZulu-Natal as a public higher learning institution is working toward 2030 government agenda and library leadership is working toward achieving this vision. I can say that this is a good approach of thinking about the long term of the library and how it has to adapt to changes and technologies that are coming, but at the same time, there is no innovation on the side of library leaders, on the side of university IT teams collaborating with the library on the future issues. This is because in everything the library leaders do, they have to observe policies and you know!!!, if everything is about policies, it is difficult to bring about desired change and allow people to innovate. It is to communicate this vision to the teams properly and comprehensively (Participant*

9).

*In my view, strategic thinking without innovation is not enough. You can have strategy but if you are not innovative, it is like having a car only knowing to drive it and when it breaks down, one is not able to fix it. Innovation is an important aspect of strategic thinking. Coming back to library leaders, it is not only about possessing ideas, but it is about being pro-active and respond to changes as they occur and have effective solution (Participant 7).*

### **4.3.3. Leading teams**

In this study, participants revealed that the competence of leading teams in different contexts (e.g. online, offline) is crucial in reinforcing team cohesion, morale and the unity necessary to adapt to change and deliver library services in a digital era. Participant 4 articulated his views of team leadership by focusing particularly on the ability to lead teams in face-to-face and digital environments, as well as the benefits of paying attention to team dynamics, collective and individual motivations, and team performance, as depicted below:

*We work as a team in the library and this was demonstrated during COVID-19 when we were working online. These days we leaders bring together all member of the library to achieve the vision of the library and the university in general. We also attend functions and meetings on virtual platforms to ensure our teams perform well. One has to lead teams in various contexts. ..on-line and also face to face too. Achievements are celebrated as a collective effort and when we fail, we all fail, not saying that it is only the leader who failed but the entire team. Leading a team to adapt whenever there is change or to drive change is key for a library leader of today and tomorrow (Participant 4).*

Leading teams through optimizing the existing skills in delivering services also entails effective introduction of change and relevant technologies in the digital era. Participant 7 underscored how library leaders were introducing and institutionalizing innovative technologies, services, and practices to ensure proper and productive use of professional staff in the digital era in the library.

*Well, the significant changes would be the introduction of those technologies to better*

*serve our users. The very first one we heard that you can use in library services was the introduction of RFID. Which happened at the Medical Library and that was a technological development that so a change in our circulation functions where, the issuing and the returning of library material is no longer dependent on human intervention. With whether self-checkout system, there are plans to roll this out in all our other libraries and branch libraries. The second one, and that is still in the pipeline is engagements that are taking place with regards to this particular one is that of introducing robots in UKZN library services and the purpose of that is again to hence our services or our operations but also to better utilize the skills of our circulation staff because when the robots are introduced, they'll be taking care of the circulation functions which are currently performed by our circulation staff. And we have done a skills audit and, in our skills, audit we discovered that our circulation staff, the majority of them, are qualified and they are able to perform more professional tasks rather than the tasks that they are performing at the issue desk right now (Participant 7).*

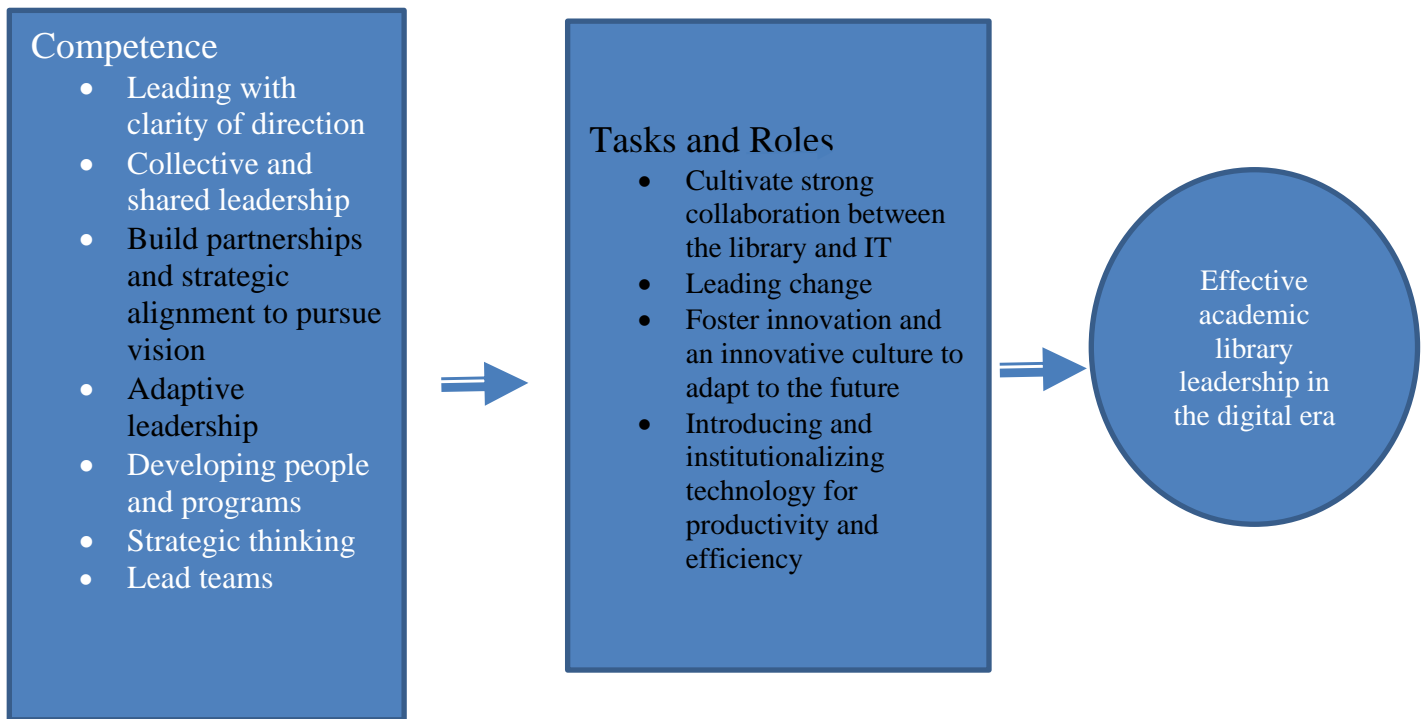
*Yes, competences are key, if library is to compete and offer the services to its customers. In order to achieve this, in my view we need competencies and in the changing world of technology, library leaders are challenged to acquire new skills a competency. This should include new competences in IT, leadership competencies (Participant 3).*

#### **4.4. Theme on the constitutive elements necessary for a Leadership Competence Framework for library leaders in the digital era at the UKZN Library**

In this exploratory qualitative study, the third research objective was to propose a Leadership Competence Framework for library leaders in the digital era at the UKZN library. In this regard, participants revealed that a variety of competences, tasks and roles are necessary for inclusion in a Leadership Competence Framework for leaders in the digital era at UKZN library.

Drawing from the findings reported in this study, it is decipherable that there are seven different leadership competences and four tasks and roles practiced by leaders at UKZN, which are necessary for effective academic library leadership in the digital era. Below in Figure 1 is the proposed Leadership Competencies Framework for library leaders in the digital age at UKZN and its constitute elements derived from the findings, which are elaborated upon thereafter.

**Figure 1: Proposed Leadership Competencies Framework for library leaders in the digital age at UKZN**



Source: Owner

#### 4.4.1 Seven Academic Senior Library Leadership Competences

**The first** leadership competence necessary for Academic Senior Library leadership is leading with clarity of direction within the library. While participants note that leaders practiced a friendly approach to leadership, there were some who were unable to reprimand followers, and hence perceived to lack direction and courage to discipline staff at UKZN library. **Secondly**, there is the leadership competence to demonstrate collective and shared responsibility in the digital era. The participants highlighted that collective leadership in the academic library was exemplified by the way everyone was given the space and opportunity to be part of decision-making, as well as sharing in the responsibilities and accountabilities for decisions. **Thirdly**, it is also evident in the results that the leadership competence of building partnerships and strategic alignment to pursue the vision is key in leading an academic library in the digital era. Participants were clear that the senior leaders were mindful of how to align themselves and people with the mission and vision of the university; reinforced alignment of the library with the university and changes in the technological environment; and promoted an inclusive and collaborative approach to issues by ensuring the involvement of all members of the library

community not only to play a full role in decision-making, but also be part of the bottom-up approach in the library at UKZN.

**Fourth**, the adaptive leadership competence practiced by leaders at UKZN Library was about adapting strategies to the new situation, navigating through complex challenges, and also mobilizing wide support from others. Participants echoed the need to apply and adapt a leadership style that is suitable to the specific situation, or change the leadership style due to changes in circumstances in the academic library at UKZN.

**Fifth**, developing people and programs to achieve and sustain change is a critical capability when leading in a digital era as change is the norm in the dynamic environment. Leaders are crucial to develop adaptive people with skills in order to deliver digital library services, pursue innovation to adapt and cope with technological changes and new policies and rules. However, the participants were clear that leaders need to balance between adherence and compliance to rules and innovation for the future in the academic library.

**Sixth**, strategic thinking is another competence which participants highlighted as important and helpful for senior leaders of the library, not only to practice future-oriented and systems thinking but also innovation, which links the current and the future. Participants revealed that leaders of the library at UKZN were strategizing for a long-term direction up to 2030, within the broader vision of UKZN. However, strategic thinking was less effective in a very rule-based culture, which constrained innovation in the library.

**Lastly**, the competence of leading a team both on and offline is crucial in reinforcing the team cohesion, morale and unity necessary to adapt to change and deliver library services in a digital era. Participants highlighted how team leadership in the academic library needs to focus on a variety of aspects such as team dynamics, collective and individual motivations, and team performance in the digital era, according Participants 4 and 7 for example.

The proposed Leadership Competencies Framework for library leaders in the digital age at UKZN depicts that the leadership competences are the foundation for these leaders to perform certain tasks and roles to succeed. Below are the tasks and roles identified in this study and included in the framework:

#### **4.4.2 Four tasks and roles**

### **First: Cultivate strong collaboration between the library and IT**

It was apparent that the role of collaboration between the library and IT is critical. This means that as the library is moving from manual to digital, library leaders are called upon to acquire new competences. Participants believed that while the UKZN Library is embracing new technology, it was apparent that there are insufficient resources. Hence the need to collaborate with other institutions with the ability to acquire advanced technology, which can advance library services at UKZN.

### **Second: Leading change is critical if an organisation is to adapt to change**

There are many reasons to believe that when change occurs, it affects all areas of the organization. Therefore, change management is critical. Exploring and examining participant views and what leading change means, it was apparent that as UKZN is moving to a digital library, this transition has to be managed.

### **Third: Foster innovation and an innovative culture to adapt to the future**

As demonstrated earlier, innovation and an innovative culture in an organization are critical. This means that if an organization is to survive and adapt to change, it must be innovative and such innovation must be part of the development process and should be embraced by all who belong to the organization.

### **Fourth: Introducing and institutionalizing technology for productivity and efficiency**

Introducing and institutionalizing technology for productivity and efficiency can be a transformative process for any organization. These were the views expressed by the participants. They further indicated that by following these steps and integrating technology strategically into the organization, one can drive significant improvements in productivity and efficiency while fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement.

## **4.5. Summary**

This chapter has presented the findings of this exploratory qualitative study, which focused on academic library leadership styles and competences. First and foremost, the chapter has clearly presented a variety of five different themes depicting the leadership styles practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead themselves and others in the digital era. These are friendly leadership

struggling with clarity of direction at UKZN; collective and shared leadership inclusive, partnership and alignment style, autocratic and adaptive leadership styles.

Furthermore, this study has revealed three leadership competences used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive change and provide services in a digital age. These leadership competences include developing people and programmes to achieve change **within rules**, strategic thinking competences and leading teams. Lastly, the chapter has provided a Leadership Competencies Framework for library leaders in the digital age at UKZN, which constitutes seven different leadership competences and four tasks and role practices by leaders at UKZN, all of which are necessary for effective academic library leadership in the digital era.

The next chapter discusses the findings of this study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to existing literature and previous studies. The chapter focuses on the three major themes guiding the research objectives, namely the nature and variety of leadership styles practiced by leaders at UKZN Library; the second theme on the Nature of leadership competencies used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN; and the third theme emphasized proposed a Leadership Competence Framework for library leaders in the digital era at the UKZN library.

### **5.2. Nature and variety of leadership styles practiced by leaders at UKZN Library**

One of the interesting findings of this exploratory qualitative study depicts a friendly leadership style struggling with clarity of direction at UKZN, as each individual leader has their own leadership style characterized by too much friendliness and a failure to reprimand followers. The finding that emphasizes the need for clarity of direction by the academic library leader for others to follow resonates with research on library leadership in a digital context conducted by Le (2015) throughout university libraries in the United States. This study found that the five top essential academic library leadership attributes include clarity of vision, while the others were integrity, management skills, collaboration skills and communication skills.

According to Karwan, Hariri and Ridwan (2021), visionary leadership competency refers to the ability of a leader to articulate a compelling vision for the future and inspire others to work towards achieving that vision. A leader with clarity of the future direction possesses the foresight to anticipate trends, identify opportunities and conceptualize innovative strategies to move an organization forward. This competency involves effectively communicating the vision to stakeholders; fostering a sense of shared purpose; and motivating individuals and teams to actively contribute to realizing the vision.

In addition to providing clarity of direction, it is important to ensure that the leadership style adopted creates and sustains a productive relationship and social influence between the leader and followers (Gutterman, 2023). Based on the findings of this qualitative study, it is arguable that the friendly approach adopted by some senior leaders of the library at UKZN is problematic,

especially when there is failure to provide clarity of direction and reprimand followers. In the digital era, it is expected that change will be prevalent and needs the provision of direction, ensuring the alignment of staff with changes and commitment, which requires leadership that is not just friendly, but that is able to influence others to excel in a turbulent and dynamic environment. Shukla and Sinha (2022) suggested that leadership provides the direction and vision of the organization and its achievement. Moreover, Tziner and Shkoler (2018), believed that transformational leadership style is key for community mobilization, initiation and the motivation of employees and involvement in their development.

Leadership entails a process of social influence in which one person exerts power over others to organise the interactions and relationships within an entity. “This is to note that leadership can reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to structure the activities and relationships in an organisation” (Yukl, 2013: 2). A desk-based review on the leadership of academic libraries by Weiner (2023) and Delaney and Bates (2015), which synthesized what was known about the characteristics and leadership style of university librarians and academic library directors, concurs with the current study that a clear philosophy and vision must be articulated, and the extent to which they are implemented is critical for effective leadership in the academic library. Hence, academic leaders need to develop their capability of crafting and showing others a clear vision of the library in the digital era.

It is equally interesting to underscore that this study has also revealed that a collective and shared leadership style guided by a general understanding of collective and delegated responsibility was practiced by senior leaders at UKZN library. In this study, participants believed that the process is more participatory and inclusive. It was apparent that leaders are accountable to the team and at the same time accountable to the vision of the university. With this finding in mind, it is crucial to delve into three key aspects to understand the essence of shared and collective leadership. Firstly, it is important that while shared and collective leadership are construed as two different aspects, it is commonly argued in literature that they are the same.

In an article entitled “Meta-Analysis of Shared Leadership: Antecedents, Consequences, and Moderators”, Wu, Cormican<sup>1</sup> and Chen (2020) provided a variety of definitions of shared leadership that may help to unravel this confusion.

The common thread running through various definitions of shared leadership is the focus on the importance of distributed, collective or mutual influence amongst multiple members within a group. For instance, Pearce and Sims (2002) conceptualized shared leadership as the sequential emergence of multiple leaders throughout a team's lifespan, highlighting how leadership influence is spread amongst team members. Authors such as Wu, Cormican and Chen (2022) and Day, Gronn and Salas (2006) perspective emphasize shared leadership as a condition or attribute characterized by mutual influence. In shared leadership settings, team members collectively wield leadership influence, participate in decision-making, take on tasks typically reserved for a single leader, and, when appropriate, offer guidance to fellow members to advance group objectives (Wu, Cormican and Chen, 2020).

The discovery that shared leadership is crucial in academic libraries during the digital age echoes research conducted by Aslam (2019) in Lincoln, Nebraska, USA. Aslam's study, which involved library directors, managers and senior librarians, found that having a shared vision is pivotal for effective leadership in academic libraries. Importantly, a shared vision is an integral component of collective library leadership, fostering readiness and empowerment amongst employees for organizational changes, and minimizing resistance during such transitions within academic library settings.

Another perspective proffered by Wu, Cormican, and Chen (2020) emphasised the importance of a shared purpose in fostering effective shared leadership within a team. Wu, Cormican, and Chen (2020) proposed that a team's internal environment comprises three key elements: shared purpose, social support, and voice. According to Boothby, Clark and Bargh (2014) these components collectively cultivate an atmosphere that encourages team members to exert leadership influence. *Shared purpose* entails a mutual understanding of team goals and a commitment to achieving them, thereby enhancing team commitment and motivation towards leadership activities. *Social support* involves offering emotional and psychological assistance amongst team members, facilitating collaboration and a sense of shared responsibility.

The dimension of *voice* encompasses constructive communication, participation in decision-making, and involvement in crucial processes, all of which contribute to increased leadership activity within a team. Research by Daspit, Justice, Boyd and McKee (2013) and Serban and Roberts (2016) supported the notion that the internal team environment positively correlates with shared leadership. According to Han, Lee, Beyerlein and Kolb (2018) therefore, when

shared purpose, social support and voice are present, team members are more likely to exhibit leadership behaviors and respond to others' leadership, ultimately promoting shared leadership within the team.

Given the positive impact that shared leadership has on teams—including enhanced performance, innovation, satisfaction, functioning and proactivity—it is vital to shift the perspective on leadership. Instead of focusing solely on individual leaders, one should view leadership as a dynamic, group-level phenomenon crucial for success in today's digital library landscape. Recognizing shared leadership as a collaborative effort amongst team members, where roles can be assumed by anyone, is essential. Additionally, understanding it as an emergent property of the team, with leadership responsibilities distributed across multiple individuals, is key. In academic library leadership, embracing shared leadership fosters a culture where members freely contribute ideas and share information.

Moreover, it reduces conflict, builds consensus, and strengthens trust and cohesion within teams. Leaders who emphasize collaboration, empathy and effective communication are particularly suited to facilitate shared leadership in academic libraries in the digital age.

This study highlights a significant discovery regarding the leadership approach within academic libraries amidst the digital age. Academic library senior leaders adopt an inclusive, collaborative and cohesive style to realize their vision. They not only foster cooperation within the library, but also extend their efforts to collaborate with external organizations, all aimed at achieving a unified objective (Zacher, 2020).

These leaders actively seek opportunities to enhance the library's role within the academic community by forging mutually beneficial partnerships, engaging stakeholders, and cultivating relationships. In an article by Drath, McCauley, Palus, Van Velsor, O'Connor and McGuire (2008), it is argued that effective leadership hinges on fostering direction, alignment and commitment amongst individuals. According to Pearce (2004), direction entails consensus on collective goals, while Alignment involves the seamless coordination and integration of various facets of work to support these shared objectives. Pearce (2004) stated that the last Commitment revolves around individuals prioritizing the success of the collective endeavour over personal gains.

Lastly, the study has shown that the adaptive leadership style was practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead self and others in the digital age. The study revealed that senior library leaders acknowledged that change was inevitable and that leaders were adapting their strategies according to contexts. While it is plausible that library leadership tries to adapt to the new situation, navigate through complex challenges and also mobilize wide support from others, this may be difficult in rule-based contexts with little flexibility (Esmailzadeh, Bahrami and Soleymani, 2020). This brings to the fore the two critical distinctions in the types of improvement efforts in any organisation, namely technical problems and adaptive challenges (Heifetz and Laurie, 1997).

In the words of Heifetz and Laurie (1997), a technical problem is one that can be solved with existing knowledge and skills. However, not all academic library-based improvement efforts in the digital era should be approached as technical problems. In VUCA, some improvement efforts are adaptive challenges. In this regard, adaptive challenges occur when leaders are moving beyond what they currently know, understand and do. In a nutshell, adaptive approaches are capable of dealing with VUCA as leaders mobilize people to take on tough challenges like inclusiveness, where solutions are not readily apparent (Ashiq, Rehman and Batool, 2018).

Adaptive leadership seeks to resolve recurring organizational problems through systematic change, enlists the creativity of an entire organization, and mobilises knowledge quickly, even when the path is unclear. A study by Carter (2014) demonstrated that change leadership enables academic library departments to adapt to evolving trends, meet the needs of their users, and demonstrate their value within the broader educational community.

### **5.3. Nature of leadership competencies used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive challenges**

This study has revealed three leadership competences used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive change and provide services in a digital age. According to Aslam (2020) developing people and programmes to achieve change within rules is one of the leadership competences that academic library leaders use to deal with adaptive changes. This result concurs with a study by Fought (2016) conducted in Academic Health Sciences Libraries in the United States, which concluded that library directors need the competence of developing

new leaders and improving leadership effectiveness to prove the value of the library to their campuses and ensure a promising future.

In a study of Librarians who attended leadership institutes in Washington DC, Arnold, Nickel and Williams (2008) emphasized that developing skills needs to be a central priority in the dynamic environment of the library. Some library professionals need to pursue formal or informal computer education to adapt to technological change (Alhlimpuii, 2022).

Ashiq, Rehman, Safdar and Ali (2021: 1) showed that “library leaders needed to be visionary and innovative with effective communication and social skills to encourage a collaborative and agile culture in academic institutions”.

Equally vital is the competence of strategic thinking and leading teams in a VUCA environment, which are salient to unify a group of individuals behind a commonly-shared vision and encourage dedication to mutual accountability, as well as support for the success of the team and its members. Goh, Sok, Boon and Kiran (2018) uphold that there is a need for an increase in librarians training in management and strategic planning as librarians feel that these competencies can be further enhanced.

## **5.5. Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the findings of the study. The study asserts that there is a variety of leadership styles and competences practiced by leaders of the academic library at UKZN. As friendly leadership struggles with clarity of direction and a failure to reprimand followers, it is prudent that clarity of vision is a key leadership competence. A compelling vision for the future and inspiration of others to work towards achieving that vision in the digital era depicts a necessary library competence. Academic leaders need to develop their capability of crafting and showing others a clear vision of the library in the digital era. It is equally important that shared leadership is promoted in the academic library to emphasis distributed, collective and/or mutual influence amongst multiple group members.

In developing shared leadership, it is key that academic library leaders develop the internal team environment, an essential antecedent for effective leadership. In an academic library, the likelihood of exercising leadership increases significantly when group members are willing to speak up and get involved. In leading the academic library, it is fruitful to be fully aware that

when shared leadership exists in groups, members are more likely to contribute ideas and make their unique information accessible to the other group members.

Inclusive, partnership and alignment styles practiced by academic library senior leaders are salient to create Direction, Alignment and Commitment as the leadership outcomes. An adaptive leadership style by leaders at an academic library in the digital era is pivotal to resolve complex and adaptive challenges through systematic change.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1. Introduction

This study's aim was to explore and examine library leadership style and competencies in the digital age at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, SA. This Chapter provides the conclusion and recommendations of this study. In pursuit of this aim, the chapter begins with an overview of the entire study by presenting the research objectives and methodological approach to the study, followed by a brief presentation of the key findings, conclusion, recommendations and suggestions for future research.

### 6.2. Overview of the study

This qualitative study aims to explore library leadership competencies in a digital age at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, SA. Central to the study was the aim to understand the nature and variety of leadership styles practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead self and others, and the leadership competences to deal with adaptive changes and provide services in a digital age. Below are the research objectives.

The objectives of this research were:

- ✓ To establish the nature and variety of leadership styles as practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead self and others in a digital age;
- ✓ To identify the nature of leadership competencies used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive change and provide services in a digital age; and
- ✓ To propose a leadership competence framework for library leaders in the digital era at the UKZN library.

This was a qualitative study using a non-probability sampling method. This method was used because it offered the opportunity to all academic library senior leaders at the main library of UKZN to take part in the research process.

Initially, the study planned and identified 13 participants, specifically from the UKZN library management executive, to ensure a comprehensive examination of leadership styles within the institution. When the study took place, it was discovered that four executive team members were no longer part of the institution, and their positions had become vacant. Hence, it was not

a true reflection of the UKZN library organogram received from the Library Director's secretary. Therefore, there were 9 participants in total for this study, 4 of whom were men and 5 women. The unforeseen shift was a challenge because it affected the feasible sample size and could have biased this research.

To best address the research questions and achieve the study's goals, the researcher employed a purposive sampling strategy in which he used his own judgement to choose participants based on their unique characteristics, experiences and job profile. The researcher had to also rely on the Director's secretary for verification. To be more precise, stratified purposive sampling was used in this investigation. The following were the selection criteria for this study: (i) the participant had to be employed by the UKZN library and have a managerial role and be between the age of 30 and 65 years old.

In order to learn more about how university library leaders deal with the digital age and leadership issues, the researcher conducted interviews using a set of questions based on the competencies of library leaders at UKZN. The first step in preparation was to choose an isolated, calm area for the interview, ensuring that there were no interruptions, and reducing background noise. The interview was scheduled on Microsoft Teams with the agreement of the participant, who used their offices or a quiet venue. The researcher used the quiet Stellenbosch University Library seminar room.

With regard to the nature and variety of leadership styles practiced by leaders at UKZN Library, the findings have shown a variety of leadership styles. *Five major leadership styles* were practised at the UKZN library, namely friendly leadership struggling with clarity of direction at UKZN; collective and shared leadership inclusive, partnership and alignment style, and autocratic and adaptive leadership styles.

In addition, this study has revealed *three leadership competences* used by leaders of the academic library at UKZN to deal with adaptive change and provide services in a digital age. These leadership competences include developing people and programmes to achieve change within rules; strategic thinking competences; and leading teams. Lastly, the study has provided a Leadership Competencies Framework for library leaders in the digital age at UKZN, which constitutes seven different leadership competences and four task and role practices by leaders at UKZN, necessary for effective academic library leadership in the digital era.

### **6.3. Recommendations**

Drawing from the findings of this exploratory research, three key recommendations are proffered as follows:

- There is a need for the systematic development of various leadership competences indicated in the proposed Library Academic Leadership Competence Framework. Amongst others, the leadership competences to be developed in academic libraries include shared leadership, adaptive leadership and strategic thinking in a digital era.
- Promote a culture of innovation must not only complement the strategic thinking competence of academic leaders, but also avoid the constraints arising from the rule-based approach common in the academic library.
- Build partnerships and reinforce strategic alignment to pursue the vision of the university and academic library in a digital era.

### **6.4. Areas for future study**

Three areas are proposed for future research, as follows:

- As the current study used a qualitative method and interview data, it is suggested that future researchers use a variety of research methods (e.g. mixed methods) to understand and examine library leadership competence both qualitatively and quantitatively at UKZN.
- It is noteworthy that the current study focused only on one university in SA such that the results are not generalizable. It is therefore important that future studies are conducted in other universities across SA to gain a more holistic and robust picture of the leadership competences for the academic library in the digital era.
- Future research needs to use a larger sample size from a variety of universities. A major limitation of this study is that it has used a small sample.
- It is important to also highlight that the focus on senior leaders alone to report about their leadership competences is one-sided. As such, future research needs to consider the inclusion of followers as well so that the competence framework embraces the views of those who lead as well as their followers. In light of these limitations, the findings of this qualitative study can only be transferred to a similar context.

- Future research is needed to operationalise and validate or refine the library leadership competence proposed in this study.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This exploratory qualitative study sought to explore the nature and variety of leadership styles practiced by leaders at UKZN Library to lead self and others, and the competences used to deal with adaptive changes and provide services in the digital age. The study identified leadership style, academic library leadership competences and a leadership competences framework for library leaders in a digital era. In conclusion, this chapter highlighted how the study objectives were met and also highlighted areas for future research. This research study is an important step towards clearly understanding the library leadership competences in a digital era at UKZN, in SA and beyond.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

### Exploring leadership competencies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Library in a digital age

To establish what leadership styles are practised at the UKZN Library.

- (A) According to your experiences, what are the leadership styles common at the UKZN library? Give me at least three examples which exemplify the common leadership style? Tell me why you think leaders use these styles.
- (B) When do the leaders at the UKZN library use the styles in the digital environment? Give me three occasions or circumstances which exemplify leadership style in a digital library environment. How have the styles changed with remote working?
- (C) According to you, what leadership style distinguishes an effective from an ineffective leader at the UKZN library in this digital age? Give me examples.

To assess the leadership competencies needed for library leaders at the UKZN Library.

- (D) According to the digital changes happening in the library environment, what leadership competencies are needed to succeed as a leader at UKZN Library? Give me at least three competencies that are needed.
- (E) If you look at *yourself* as a leader at UKZN, what are the gaps in your leadership arising from the new digital challenges? Give me at least three critical competence gaps.
- (F) According to you, what are the *common gaps* in leadership competencies in the UKZN Library leadership arising from the new digital challenges? Give me at least three areas where there is room for improvement. Why do you think so?
- (G) According to you, which leadership competencies are strong and do not need any improvement at the UKZN library? Give me at least three examples of these leadership competencies and why improvement is unnecessary.

**To identify the leadership requirements for development and training for UKZN Library leaders.**

- (H) According to you, as an experienced library leader, what should experience library leaders prioritise in developing and training future leaders? Give me three areas of developmental and training needed for UKZN Library leadership to be more effective.
- (I) What would be the best way to develop the identified leadership areas of the UKZN library?

**To establish how leadership competencies have been used to deal with change in a digital age.**

- (J) What are the significant changes in the library due to the digital age? Specify at least three changes affecting the way the library is led and provides services
- (K) What leadership competencies are being used to deal with the changes in the digital age? Please give three examples of how these are used and the positive/negative consequences.
- (L) Tell me the results of using the identified competencies according to library users and followers. Give me an example of the effects affecting library users. Also, think about results from the point of view of followers in the library.

## **Appendix 2: Application For Ethics Approval**

# **UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)**

## **APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL For research with human participants**

### **Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research**

Date: .....

Dear Madam/Sir

Our name are Mr Mbongiseni Magagula from the Graduate School of Business & Leadership at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa (UKZN). My contact number is +2731 260 4557, and my email address is [206515011@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:206515011@stu.ukzn.ac.za).

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that seeks exploring leadership competencies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Library in a digital age. We know that there has been a study exploring the competencies required by library managers to effectively manage change at UKZN. But there is no study that is aimed to explore leadership competencies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Library in a digital age.

The UKZN Library has granted support and approval to conduct the research (please see the attached approval letter.

You have been selected because you are a member of UKZN Library Executive which has ensures the library supports the institution's mission through strategic planning, management, and advocacy over five years in South Africa to provide insights on exploring leadership competencies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Library in a digital age, South Africa.

The questionnaire being used will take from 45 to 60 minutes at most to be administered. You have been purposively selected to participate in the interview since you are part of UKZN Library Executive. This study is being conducted for academic purposes only.

The study has no foreseen risks and/or discomforts that may be suffered by participants. The study might not provide direct benefits to the participants. However, the results of this study may primarily assist Library Leaders and Human resource professionals at an Academic institution, especial at UKZN Library to better insight them as they work to add value.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number \_\_\_\_\_).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at +2731 260 4557 and my email address is [206515011@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:206515011@stu.ukzn.ac.za) or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**  
Research Office, Westville Campus  
Govan Mbeki Building  
Private Bag X 54001  
Durban  
4000  
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA  
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609  
Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. In the event of withdrawal of participation, you will not incur penalty or loss of treatment or other benefit to which they are normally entitled.

All research will be conducted on site at your university. Therefore, I do not anticipate that you should incur any expenses to participate in this research. Furthermore, participants will not receive incentives or payment of any kind for taking part in this research project.

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research (this measure refers to confidentiality). Furthermore, your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give [this measure refers to anonymity]. Your answers will be given a code number, or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings [this measure refers to anonymity]. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. It is also possible that your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. In such instances, the data is contained in a report that used tables and graphs to present the data.

Electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. If necessary, information will also be destroyed [i.e., hard copies notes will be shredded, and/or electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer using a relevant software programme].

### Appendix 3: Informed Consent

#### CONSENT

I .....have been informed about the study entitled the Exploring Leadership Competencies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Library in a Digital Age by Mbongiseni Magagula. I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

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

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

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at (provide details).

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

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**  
Research Office, Westville Campus  
Govan Mbeki Building  
Private Bag X 54001  
Durban  
4000  
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA  
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609  
Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion	YES / NO
Video-record my interview / focus group discussion	YES / NO
Use of my photographs for research purposes	YES / NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## Appendix 4: Approval Notification - Ethics



13 November 2023

**Mbongiseni Phillip Magagula (206515011)**  
Grad School of Bus & Leadership  
Westville Campus

Dear MP Magagula,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00006126/2023

**Project title:** Exploring leadership competencies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal library in a digital age

**Degree:** Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 04 September 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

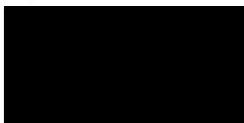
**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have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

This approval is valid until 13 November 2024.

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

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

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

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### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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

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

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

**INSPIRING GREATNESS**

## Appendix 5: Permission To Conduct Research



11 July 2023

Mr Mbongiseni Magagula (SN 206515011)  
Graduate School of Business and Leadership  
College of Law and Management Studies  
Westville Campus UKZN  
Email: [206515011@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:206515011@stu.ukzn.ac.za)

[Kanyangalem@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Kanyangalem@ukzn.ac.za)

Dear Mr Magagula

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

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

*"Exploring leadership competencies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Library."*

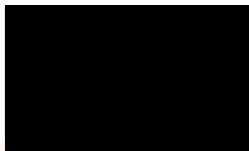
It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews with library leaders including managers and principal librarians (Zoom, Skype or telephone interviews recommended) at UKZN.

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

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

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

Yours sincerely



**Mr MA TUFTS: Director Governance & Administration**

**Office of the Registrar**

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

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 7971 Email: [registrar@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:registrar@ukzn.ac.za) Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)

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

**INSPIRING GREATNESS**

## Appendix 6: Editing Letter

### EDITING LETTER

696 Clare Road  
Clare Estate  
Durban  
4091  
5 May 2024

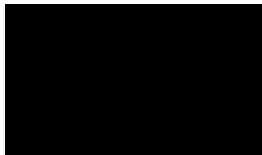
To: Whom it may concern

**Editing of Master's project: MP Magagula**

**Exploring leadership competencies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Library  
in a digital age**

This letter serves as confirmation that the aforementioned Master's has been language edited. The requisite grammatical conventions have been met. Suggestions have been made to the candidate.

Any queries may be directed to the author of this letter.



MP MATHEWS

Lecturer and Language Editor

[Mercimathews4@gmail.com](mailto:Mercimathews4@gmail.com)

083 676 4778