



College of Law and Management Studies

The Strategic Leadership for Academic Resilience: A Case Study of Graduate School of Business & Leadership of the University of KwaZulu-Natal during Covid-19

By

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to explore how strategic leaders influenced the direction and activities of the Graduate School of Business & Leadership at the University of KwaZulu Natal in leading through disruptive times to ensure academic resilience during Covid-19. Using purposive sampling, academic leaders at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Graduate School of Business were selected as strategic leaders. Sample size of seven senior leaders was used to collect data using semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. The results reveal seven themes of how strategic leaders influenced the direction and operation of the school, namely strategic thinking, redesigning of teaching and learning to online platforms, resource allocation, building strategic commitment, strategic communication, stakeholder engagement, policy adaptation and facilitation of student support services. coping practices to build academic resilience in crises and adaptive changes are discussed, along with policies adapted for supporting university education during the crisis and post-crisis times, resulting in recommendations for enhancing strategic leadership capabilities and resilience. The study highlights that success in responding to an organisational crisis in a business school is a function of effective strategic leadership supported by tactical and operational leadership commitment. It also brings to the fore the critical role and support that internal and external stakeholders contribute to managing a crisis and ensuring the resilience of business schools during and after a crisis event. The limitations, areas for future research, and recommendations for study regarding strategic leadership, academic resilience, and continuity in the Graduate School of Business of the University of KwaZulu-Natal are highlighted in this study.

Keywords: Strategic leadership, Academic resilience, Social capital

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The institutions of higher education and learning today face challenging, complex, competitive, and technologically advanced changes. According to Irtaimeh (2018), global education has become increasingly complex, necessitating acquiring intellectual capital and involvement in achieving strategic goals, including enhancing teaching and learning and education quality. In addition, strategic leaders and academic staff should be aware of these issues to make progress. As the environment worsens and the demand for better education increases, strategic leaders within the university must take strategic action and decisions that ensure the alignment of academic staff, students, university processes and university objectives, resulting in a successful organizational strategy benefiting the students and their future (Irtaimeh, 2018,169-180).

Strategic leadership has been recognized as critical and relevant for directing and navigating higher education institutions and learning towards success due to increased ambiguity, characterized by limited resources and unforgiving social ills, directly affecting students and academic programs (Jabbar and Hussein, 2017,99-106). According to Irtaimeh (2018,169-180), several social science researchers have debated whether strategic leadership may impact the organization. On the other hand, other researchers believe that the field of leadership has reached its limit. Therefore, to guide the institution's performance in achieving its competitive edge, academics and strategic leaders must evaluate how effective their approaches to strategic leadership, decision-making, building resilience, social capital, and management are. This qualitative and exploratory study aims to investigate the influence of strategic leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic within the Graduate School of Business (GSB) and Leadership of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). To achieve this, this introductory chapter will begin with an overview of the study, the problem statement, the rationale, and research questions before concluding with its purpose.

1.2 Background of the Study

Globally, the Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges and pressures for higher education institutions. It directly impacted teaching and learning,

resulting in the closure of many universities in different countries. This has created a backlog in teaching and learning and valuable time of contact learning that may never be recovered. However, the pandemic has led to a perception that university strategic leadership and management are insufficient, increasing pressure on universities to figure out effective strategies to maintain academic continuity and resilience in teaching and learning. As a result, strategic leadership has turned out to be critical to managing institutions of higher learning in adversity and uncertainty as it promotes sustainable advantage in how the organization implements its strategy (Kising'u, 2017).

Irtaimh (2018,169-180), states that leadership is vital to an organization, especially its strategic alignment. Today's leadership studies have been rebranded to make them capable of navigating and driving organizations during challenging times. Kising'u (2017), concur with this, asserting that effective strategic leadership requires strategic thinking, vigilance, shared values, and a clear vision for achieving much-needed alignment. In addition, when strategic leaders fail to respond to such changes, the organization's ability to remain competitive and achieve above-average performance is compromised.

The pandemic directly affected many universities in South Africa, including GSB and Leadership UKZN. The GSB and Leadership UKZN is undoubtedly one of the top-performing universities in research studies. This was because the coherent alignment and collaboration between academic staff and leadership management contributed to achieving this strategic objective. Moreover, the effectiveness of this collaboration enhanced the school's reputation, improved staff work ethics, and improved productivity.

In light of the global spread of Covid-19 infections, the good performance of the GSB and Leadership UKZN was under serious threat due to the unprecedented risks and challenges caused by the outbreak. However, despite the prevailing risks and uncertainty, the ever-increasing demand for academic continuation of teaching and learning in the university, and the need to increase employee productivity and performance to remain competitive and to achieve competitive advantage during this challenging time warranted that the strategic leaders within GSB and Leadership UKZN to take both long and short term strategic decisions, build resilience to cope and monitor their effectiveness to achieve excellent quality education, success and sustainability in teaching and learning while saving lives and livelihood.

1.3 Problem statement

The spread of the deadly Covid-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for universities worldwide, impacting various aspects of their operations (Khalil et al., 2021,257-269). The pandemic led to disruptions in traditional learning environments, causing financial constraints, uncertainties in enrolment numbers, and challenges in adapting to remote teaching and learning (Kara, 2021,9-26). Universities face faculty and staff adaptation issues, research disruptions, increased stress, and medical and mental health challenges among students, faculty, and staff (Idris et al., 2021,1-13). The survival of institutions became a central concern from all these impacts, with questions about long-term sustainability, mergers, program cuts and potential closures (Khalil et al., 2021,257-269). The pandemic also raised concerns about the long-term impact on international student mobility and highlighted the digital divide in education. Universities relied on government support and policies to navigate challenges, and uncertainties around funding and policy decisions added to concerns (Leal Filho et al., 2021,1-19). While Covid-19 has receded, the long-term impact on higher education and lessons learned remains a subject of ongoing study. The GSB and Leadership UKZN faced these challenges and aimed to achieve academic resilience within Regulations and guidelines set by the Department of Higher Learning. The study investigates the influence of strategic leaders at the GSB and Leadership UKZN in navigating these challenges and ensuring academic continuity and resilience.

1.4 Research objectives

This qualitative research had the following research objectives:

- (i) To explore how strategic leaders influenced the direction and activities of the GSB and Leadership UKZN in leading through disruptive times to ensure academic resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- (ii) To investigate the use of social capital by strategic leaders of the GSB and Leadership UKZN at the University to lead themselves and others during remote and hybrid work during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- (iii) To examine the practices of coping in times of uncertainty and instability used by strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN as they implemented new academic and work-related policies in disruptive times during Covid-19 pandemic.

1.5 Research questions

In addressing the study's objectives, the following were the research questions:

- (i) How did strategic leaders influence the direction and activities of GSB and Leadership UKZN in leading through disruptive time to ensure academic resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- (ii) How did strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN use social capital to lead themselves and other during remote and hybrid work during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- (iii) What practices of coping were used by strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN in times of uncertainty and instability as they implement new academic and work-related policies in disruptive times during the Covid-19 pandemic?

1.6 Motivation of the study

Strategic leadership is identified as a cornerstone in navigating these challenges. Leaders play a critical role in making decisions that impact the academic community, formulating strategies, and fostering a resilient organizational culture (Matarazzo and Pearlstein, 2016,162-178). Despite the recognition of the importance of strategic leadership during the pandemic, there is a notable gap in comprehensive studies that specifically explore the strategies employed by university leaders to ensure academic resilience and continuity (Shafi and Middleton, 2023). By examining successful instances of strategic leadership in universities during the pandemic, this study aims to identify best practices and lessons learned that can be applied to enhance academic resilience in future crises. The research study seeks to offer practical insights and recommendations for university leaders and policymakers dealing with the complexities of managing academic institutions in times of crisis. The research contributes to the academic literature by providing a nuanced understanding of strategic leadership for academic resilience, offering a foundation for future research in crisis management and higher education leadership.

1.7 Significance of the study

The significance of the study on strategic leadership for academic resilience at universities during the Covid-19 pandemic is multifaceted and holds implications for academic continuity, university administrators, policymakers, and broader society. The Covid-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges to the higher education sector. The study on strategic leadership during this crisis is significant as it sheds some light on how UKZN

leaders navigated the complex and rapidly evolving landscape, offering valuable insights for future crisis management. Understanding the strategies employed by university leaders helps identify the best practices that contribute to sustaining the quality of education and research, safeguarding the core mission of academic institutions. The significance of the study lies in its exploration of how strategic leadership decisions impacted the well-being and support mechanisms for faculty and staff. The insights into effective strategies can inform future initiatives to bolster the resilience of the academic community. The significance of the study lies in its examination of how strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN contributed to the development of an adaptive and resilient university culture. This understanding can guide GSB and Leadership leaders in fostering cultures that are better prepared to embrace change and uncertainty.

1.8 Research methodology

The research study used qualitative, in-depth interviews with the strategic leaders at the GSB and Leadership UKZN. The study specifically aimed to gain insight and understand how the strategic leaders influenced the direction and activities of the GSB and Leadership UKZN in leading through disruptive time to ensure academic resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic. The participants were upper-echelon members who were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The selection criteria for study participants included the following:

1. The senior leaders of the GSB and Leadership (Head of School, Operations Manager, Academic Manager, Academic Leaders for Research, and Academic leaders of Teaching and Learning). Only those working during the Covid-19 and where members of the upper echelon were selected.
2. The selection criteria included senior leaders with not less than three years of experience in the GSB and Leadership UKZN and who were willing to provide insight and reflection on their strategic leadership practices during this period.

1.9 Delimitations of the study

The study's delimitations focus on several aspects. The first aspect is that the study is qualitative and exploratory research. Consequently, the study employed purposive sampling to determine the perspective of a sample of strategic leaders at GSB and Leadership UKZN on how they practised leadership, which influenced the activities and direction to lead themselves and others, thereby ensuring academic continuity and resilience during Covid-

19. The second delimitation of the study was that the study did not focus on employees' views in the upper echelon. However, they may have opinions on how strategic leaders influenced the activities of the GSB and Leadership UKZN during the Covid-19 pandemic. Another delimitation is the level and experience of strategic leadership at GSB and Leadership UKZN. The study focuses on the strategic leadership of GSB and Leadership UKZN, which was at the upper echelon with at least three years of experience and was involved in decision-making during the Covid-19 era.

1.10 Thesis structure

The thesis is presented using a six-chapter approach. These chapters which are as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter presents a general introduction to the study. It briefly explains the study background, motivation, research problem, key objectives and questions and methodology used in conducting the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter lays the theoretical basis for the study by reviewing works done by other researchers and entities. The primary purpose of the chapter was to contextualise the thesis. The chapter has discussed the theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

This chapter presents a blueprint of the methods used to conduct the study. It outlines the logic behind selecting the research approach used for the study. The chapter has focused on the data analysis approach used in presenting and analysing the findings.

Chapter 4: Presentation of findings

This chapter presents and analyses the study findings collected from the participants.

Chapter 5: Discussion of findings

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the findings. It reflects on the connections between the literature, theory and the participants' viewpoints. Discussions of the findings of the study are also presented here.

Chapter 6: Recommendations and conclusions

This chapter summarises the study's main findings and makes recommendations based on these findings. It also makes suggestions for future research studies and, in so doing, brings the study to its conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the concept of a cyclical relationship between three concepts in a university during a turbulent event. These concepts are Strategic leadership, organisational resilience, and social capital. Effective strategic leadership can enhance organizational resilience, which relies on social capital and a robust social capital network for support in realising effective organisational resilience at a university during a disruptive event. Universities that recognize and nurture this interplay can position themselves better to navigate challenges, capitalize on opportunities, and contribute meaningfully to their communities' academic, social, and economic well-being. The relationship between strategic leadership, organizational resilience, and social capital in a university context is intricate and interdependent. Each concept significantly shapes the university's ability to adapt, thrive, and achieve its goals in a rapidly changing environment. If developed and applied effectively, each of these concepts can position the university to be ready to respond to any event that might negatively impact a university's practical learning and functioning. Strategic leadership involves the ability of university leaders to set a clear direction, make informed decisions, and allocate resources effectively to achieve the institution's long-term goals continuously. In the context of a university, strategic leaders may include top-level administrators, chancellors, deans, department heads, and other key decision-makers. Organizational resilience refers to an institution's ability to effectively respond to and recover from disruptive events or challenges while maintaining its core functions and achieving its mission. Social capital refers to the network of relationships, trust, and shared values within an organization. These concepts are explored individually and together to understand their historical development, nature, specifications, and ontology and how they can come together in an interplay, leading to a robust, agile, and effective university.

2.2 Evolution and nature and criticism of strategic leadership

Strategic leadership is the ability of an individual or a group to develop, influence and guide an organization or a team towards achieving its long-term goals and objectives. It involves making decisions that align with the organization's vision and mission, anticipating and responding to changes in the external environment, and effectively allocating resources to achieve competitive advantage (Boal and Schultz, 2007,411-428). The business environment is continuously evolving and requires capable leaders with advanced strategic leadership skills. According to Kanyangale (2017), there are a number of unique skills that lead to excellent performance, such as strategic thinking, remaining flexible and empower individuals to bring innovative ideas within the organization. Samimi et al. (2020), define strategic leadership as the ability to anticipate, predict, strategic planning and inspire others to formulate innovation that support the organizations sustainability. Therefore, strategic leaders have a critical role in setting the organizations long-term and ensuring its strategic vision is realized. A strategic leader ensures that strategy is in line with the organization's mission, vision, goals and objectives (Al Thani and Obeidat, 2020,307-326).

Asif et al. (2021), define strategic leadership as the process of clearly communicating the organization's common values and vision to lower-level employees so they make decisions with minimal supervision. As a result, strategic leadership places a strong emphasis on a leader's ability to maintain flexibility, and think strategically while inspiring employees to be innovative and bring new ideas that lead to organizational change and improve performance (Kanyangale, 2017,402-508). According to Samimi et al. (2020), strategic leadership requires specific competencies that a leader must possess in order to effectively assimilate new information and ideas through different learning processes and apply this knowledge to solve complex situations in the external business environment. These kinds of competencies, enable strategic leaders to be flexible and re-adjust organization in the face of uncertainty. Majority of researchers define strategic leadership as a set of practices that include defining the organizations long-term goals, making the most of its resources, managing human resources, social responsibility, creating and organizational culture that is sustainable and emphasizing ethical values to support the company's long-term success (Samimi et al., 2020). This definition is relevant for the study as it displays the skills and characteristics needed for strategic leadership during disruptive time.

2.3 Upper echelon theory

The upper-echelon theory originated from the influential work of (Hambrick and Mason, 1984,1346-1352). This theory suggests that organizational outcomes, including strategies and effectiveness, are shaped by influential individuals' values and cognitive orientations. Additionally, the concept of strategic leadership is emphasized, highlighting the symbolic role and the relational and social dynamics of top executives. The upper-echelon theory examines the interplay between managers, organizational processes and performance outcomes. This study will apply the Upper Echelons theory to analyse the extent to which the university's GSB and Leadership UKZN strategic leaders demonstrate leadership practices. According to the theory, the strategic decisions made by critical senior leaders at the university are influenced by their backgrounds, knowledge, expertise, experience, and personal traits (Hambrick and Mason, 1984,1366).

Further suggests that senior managers address emergent organisational issues based on their unique characteristics, knowledge, and experience, shaping the organization's behaviour. The Upper Echelons theory aims to understand the reasons behind the behaviours and actions of organizations (Hambrick and Mason, 1984,1388). As a result, the strategies and organizational performance will display the values and cognitive foundations of the top leadership within the organization. However, the upper-echelon theory has faced criticism in many ways. One key point of criticism is the use of demographic proxies (such as age, functional background, top team size, and characteristics) to deduce strategic leadership behaviours. Critics remain unconvinced that the upper-echelon theory adequately addresses strategic leadership in studying leadership. Additionally, the seminal work on the Upper Echelon theory is deemed a "theory of group composition," failing to focus on the behaviours of strategic leaders and their impact on organizational outcomes. Considering these critiques, the present study focuses on the influences of strategic leaders to ensure academic continuity and resilience within GSB and Leadership UKZN.

The ability and influence of senior leaders are shaped by team dynamics, incentives, the organizational environment, and collaboration with others (Samimi et al., 2020). Consequently, external factors are not the sole determinants of organizational actions and results; individual senior managers also have significant influence. This concept aids in understanding organizational outcomes by focusing on an institution's leadership. Additionally, competitors can anticipate the strategic direction of rival firms and the recruitment of capable leaders (Hambrick and Mason, 1984,1389).

Strategic decisions and choices are generally subjective and biased because they are made by humans whose ability to analyse the environment is limited to what they can see, believe, value, preferences, and experience. Consequently, the strategic decisions made by those particular leaders reflect their traits and the impact on the overall strategic success of the organisations (Hambrick and Mason, 1984,1389-1390). On the other hand, Hambrick (2007a) criticised the theory, arguing that it did not provide a definitive answer about the relationship between management traits and the organisational outcome. Further, it has not been proven that similar characteristics result in similar strategic actions. Despite these limitations, the theory clarifies how managerial traits and attitudes can influence the organisation's performance.

Hambrick (2007a) presented two moderators of the relationship between management traits and organisational outcomes: managerial discretion and executive job expectations. These were added to the Upper echelon model that was first proposed by (Hambrick and Mason, 1984). According to Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987), top managers' freedom of action while making strategic decisions is managerial discretion. If managerial discretion is high, managers' traits will predict organizational results more accurately than if managerial discretion is low (Hambrick, 2007b, 1346-1352).

2.4 The criticism of strategic leadership

Strategic leadership is commonly recognised for its role in navigating challenging situations. However, it has some criticisms. This research explores criticisms of strategic leadership from academic and empirical studies. Organizations have always used strategic leadership as a framework to navigate challenging environments. However, critics argue that there may be some limitations of strategic leadership which hinder its effectiveness.

One of the criticisms is the lack of a commonly accepted definition of strategic leadership. According to Denis (2019), there is a lack of clarity about the concept, leading to inconsistencies in its application and measurements. Dhir et al. (2020), highlight the challenges of aligning strategic leadership with organizational goals due to the vagueness of its definition. Another critique focuses on the potential overemphasis on individual leaders instead of considering how decisions are made. Aitken and Von Treuer (2021), argue that excessive focus on the leader's behaviours and actions may overlook the importance of organizational setting and collective intelligence. According to Cortes-Mejia et al. (2021), strategic decisions that are separated from external reality may fail in the organizational

setting. Some scholars argue that strategic leadership may lack innovation and adaptability due to rigid strategic vision (Lichtenstein et al., 2017,15-23). A study by Holmes Jr et al. (2021), highlights the challenges they encounter when fostering an innovative culture: strategic leaders adhere too strictly to predefined plans and do not allow enough flexibility.

There has been criticism of ethical consideration in strategic leadership. Thiers and Wehner (2022), argue that pursuing strategic goals may sometimes overshadow ethical considerations, resulting in decisions that focus on short-term over long-term ethical sustainability. Further, it was stated that considering global concerns over cultural norms and ethical issues, some ethical concerns lack localisation of consideration. The changing business environment challenges the traditional strategic models. According to Al Thani and Obeidat (2020), organizations operating in a rapidly changing environment may find the static nature of strategic planning irrelevant. On the other hand, Wehner (2022), stated that strategic leadership theories lack empirical evidence supporting the direct relationship between specific strategic leadership behaviour and organisational performance results.

To address these criticisms, future research could focus on refining the definition and measurement of strategic leadership, exploring innovative leadership models that incorporate contextual factors, and investigating the relationship between strategic leadership and organizational innovation and adaptability. While strategic leadership remains a foundation of organizational management, acknowledging and addressing its criticisms is critical for refining its application and ensuring its continued relevance in an ever-changing business environment.

2.5 Levels and scope of responsibility for strategic leadership

In strategic leadership, the level and scope of responsibility can differ depending on the position within an organization and specific context. Strategic leadership responsibilities embody high-level decision-making and aligning various elements to achieve organisational goals. According to Alalfy (2014), there are three organisational leadership categories. These are strategic leadership, tactical leadership, and operational leadership at the supervisory level. The following are the key levels and scope of responsibility in strategic leadership.

1. ***Top Level Strategic Leadership***: This level includes the Board, the Chief Executive Officer and the other C-suite executives who hold the highest level of strategic leadership responsibility, and they are responsible for setting the overall vision,

mission, and long-term strategic direction of the organization (Al Thani and Obeidat, 2020,307-326). They make critical decisions regarding the allocation of resources, mergers and acquisitions, partnerships, and other significant initiatives. The shareholders' representatives are mandated to lead and guide the organisation. They develop strategy and formulate the agenda for the organisation, sometimes in unchartered times. It is their responsibility to find answers and refine the strategy. Strategic leadership responsibility reaches its highest scope at the top management or executive level. The responsibilities include evaluating the performance and impact of strategic initiatives and fostering a culture of innovation, adaptability, and ethical conduct. This scope of strategic leadership involves decisions and actions that impact the entire corporation. Lastly, engaging with external stakeholders such as shareholders, investors, partners, and regulators is vital.

2. **Senior Management/Executives and Middle Management Level:** Mbanga (2018), states that this leadership level is more tactical. They have broader responsibility as they bridge the gap between top -level strategic decisions and operational implementation. Their responsibilities include translating the organization's strategic objectives into actionable plans for their respective areas and overseeing their frontline staff. Strategic leadership at the business unit level focuses on specific segments or divisions within the organization. Leaders at this level develop strategies to compete effectively in their markets, allocate resources, and manage the operations of their units. Moreover, they allocate resources efficiently to support strategic initiatives. They ensure that their teams' efforts align with the overall strategic direction and identify and address operational challenges that impact the execution of strategic goals. They develop tactics and approaches to implement the mission, vision, and long-term strategic direction.
3. **Frontline/Operational level:** This level includes frontline managers, supervisors and team leaders with minimum strategic leadership roles at the operational level. They implement the strategies set by senior management at the operational level, ensuring that daily activities are reflective and aligned with the organization's overall goals. According to the scope of responsibility, strategic leadership ranges from the highest level, where vision and long-term direction are set, to the operational level, where strategies are translated into action and daily operations with minimum strategy formulation. Thus, effective strategic leadership requires collaboration, communication, and navigating complex challenges to achieve sustainable success

at all levels. Leaders with a functional scope of strategic leadership (operations) are responsible for a specific area of expertise, such as marketing, finance, operations, or technology. They develop strategies and plans that support the overall business objectives while optimizing their functional area. Mbanga (2018), points out that even within teams or projects, individuals can exhibit strategic leadership by setting clear goals, making decisions that align with the project's objectives as informed by the strategic goals, and adapting to environmental changes.

In summary, the level and scope of strategic leadership can range from the top executives who shape the organisation's overall direction to frontline employees who contribute innovative ideas to improve processes. Regardless of the level or scope, effective strategic leadership involves a combination of vision, critical thinking, communication, and the ability to lead and inspire others toward common goals. Therefore, strategic leadership happens at all levels. However, it happens more at the higher levels (Board and TMT), less at the tactical levels and even much less at the operational level.

2.6 Ontology of leadership

In the context of strategic leadership, the ontology of leadership refers to a systematic and philosophical study of this leadership's nature, essence, and fundamental characteristics (Samimi et al., 2020,148-152). It seeks to understand the underlying principles of strategic leadership, concepts, and relationships that define strategic leadership as a concept and practice. Developing an ontology of strategic leadership involves delving deeply into strategy leadership's various dimensions and aspects. An ontology of strategic leadership definition refers to a structured and comprehensive framework for understanding strategic leadership's nature, principles, components, and implications within an organizational context (Gore and Kanyangale, 2022,375-385). It involves a philosophical exploration of strategic leadership's essence and fundamental characteristics, delving into its definition, attributes, roles, behaviours, and impact on organizational strategy and success. According to Gore and Kanyangale (2022), there are two types of ontology for leadership: Tripod and Direction, Alignment and Commitment. Tripod's ontology of leadership asserts that leadership has three elements: leaders, followers, and a common goal they want to achieve. The Direction Alignment and Commitment ontology relates to the tripod ontology (leadership, followers, and a common goal), in that leadership must set the direction in

Direction, Alignment and Commitment, and the followers should be aligned to the direction set by the leaders and commit to achieve the common goal.

Samimi et al. (2020), address strategic leadership and how it influences an organization's performance, competitiveness, and ability to achieve its strategic objectives. The influence of strategic leaders in finality affects areas such as market positioning, innovation outcomes, and financial success. Accomplishing this means envisioning the future, guiding the organization towards its goals, and making crucial decisions to achieve a competitive advantage. According to Samimi et al. (2020), where they outline the essential qualities and attributes that distinguish strategic leaders from other types of leaders. These attributes include strategic thinking, long-term vision, adaptability, innovative mindset, and a deep understanding of the organization's internal and external environment. A detailed list of strategic leaders' specific roles and responsibilities is defined. These involve setting strategic direction, aligning the organization's resources, fostering innovation, and ensuring sustainable growth. The ontology would delve into the decision-making processes of strategic leaders, including how they analyse complex situations, assess risks, and make informed choices that align with the organization's strategic goals (Gore and Kanyangale, 2022,375-385).

Strategic leadership behaviours include fostering a culture of strategic thinking, effectively communicating the organization's vision, collaborating with various stakeholders, and driving organizational change (Samimi et al., 2020). Strategic leadership is intrinsically intertwined with the formulation, execution, and adaptation of organizational strategies. Strategic leaders facilitate the translation of strategic plans into actionable steps. These are then delegated to the top management team to action through tactical strategies. The top management team further devolve tactical actions into operational activities for final implementation and monitoring. Strategic leadership offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay between leadership and strategy within organizations, which provides a deeper exploration of the critical role of strategic leaders in shaping an organization's direction, fostering innovation, and driving long-term success. The ontology of leadership within the context of strategic leadership refers to the fundamental nature, characteristics, and underlying principles that define leadership as it relates specifically to strategic leadership. Ontology in this context delves into the essence of leadership, its role in strategic decision-making and implementation, and the relationships and interactions that shape effective strategic leadership. The ontology of leadership continually evolves as

researchers explore different aspects of leadership and its impact on individuals, teams, and organizations. It highlights the complexity of leadership and underscores the need for a multi-dimensional approach to understand and practice effective leadership.

2.7 The roles and functions of strategic leadership

Strategic leadership plays several important roles in organisations to steer them towards success and sustainable growth (Al Thani and Obeidat, 2020). Based on conceptions from the literature, strategic leadership is defined as the functions performed by individuals at the top levels of an organization (CEOs, TMT members, Directors, and General Managers) that are intended to have strategic consequences in an organization. According to (Samimi et al., 2020) a primary classification of responsibilities was done, and the categorisation provided a clearer view of the complexity of strategic leaders' eight functions. The following are the descriptions of each of these functions and roles:

- 1. *Making strategic decisions*:** This function is the cornerstone of strategic leadership since it plays a fundamental role in shaping the direction of an organization. In carrying out this function, strategic leadership find themselves in a dynamic and complex situation of today's business environment, where they are expected to navigate uncertainties, capitalize on opportunities, and mitigate risks to ensure the long-term success of the organizations. Strategic decision-making involves identifying critical decisions that align with the organization's mission, vision, and long-term objectives. The decision transcends day-to-day operations, as they map the part for the organization's growth, sustainability, and competitive advantage. Strategic leaders are responsible for aligning decisions with the organisation's strategic goals, values, and vision, recognising that each choice contributes to the overall narrative of the organisation's journey. Leaders who excel in this function possess analytic insight, visionary thinking, and the ability to navigate uncertainty. The upper echelon's decision means significant provision of resources where the commitment has lasting effects for an organisation (Wang et al., 2023). Therefore, the influence of strategic leaders through decision-making is organisation-wide and unlike decisions made at lower levels of an organisation. These decisions include change, acquisitions, innovation, and diversification.
- 2. *Engaging with external stakeholders*:** Within the complex network of organizational dynamics, engagement with external stakeholders is a crucial

responsibility of strategic leadership. External stakeholders, comprising customers, investors, communities, and regulatory bodies, significantly influence the definition of an organization's operating environment. External stakeholders should be identified pro-actively through a well-informed formal assessment process to evaluate their suitability and potential contribution to the organisation's success. Recent researchers highlighted the significance of stakeholder engagement as a linchpin in effective strategic leadership. Kujala and Sachs (2019) highlight the evolution of stakeholder theory, stating that organizations no longer operate in isolation but are part of a complex network of diverse relationships. Further, strategic leaders must move beyond transactional interaction and adopt a relational approach, seeing stakeholders as vital partners in creating value for their organizations. Engaging with stakeholders requires a multifaceted approach beyond simple communication, encompassing collaboration, transparency, and responsiveness.

Wever et al. (2023) highlight the role of technology in improving stakeholder engagement. In an era where digital connectivity is pervasive, strategic leaders employ technology platforms to facilitate continuous stakeholder engagement. The transformative effect of stakeholder engagement is evident in the study of Carbone et al. (2022), who explored the relationship between corporate social responsibility initiatives and stakeholder engagement. The study found that organizations that engage with stakeholders in the formulation and execution of corporate social responsibility initiatives experience enhanced reputation, customer loyalty, and overall organizational resilience. According to Chua et al. (2021), strategic leaders must adopt a forward-looking and end-goal visionary approach to stakeholder engagement. The study highlights the importance of anticipating and proactively addressing emerging issues that may impact stakeholders and their organisations. Engaging with stakeholders requires a strategic mindset that recognizes interdependence and balances organizational success and stakeholder satisfaction. It involves not only effective communication but also the integration of stakeholder views into strategic decision-making. Leaders must proactively seek feedback, understand diverse stakeholder expectations, and align organizational actions with societal values.

3. ***Performing human resources management human activities***: Performing human resource management activities and tasks is a critical function of strategic leadership. Vaiman et al. (2021) highlighted fundamental aspects involving the paradigm shift from traditional human resources (HR) functions to a strategic HR approach,

contending that strategic leaders should view HR as a core driver of organizational performance. Guest (2021) conducted a study that delves into strategic HR management and its impact on organizational performance. According to his research, strategic leaders play a critical role in formulating and implementing HR strategies that contribute to achieving organizational goals. This highlights that strategic leaders must treat employees as valuable assets, investing in their development and well-being. The study further reveals a positive relationship between strategic HR practices, employee engagement, and organizational performance, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between effective HR management and overall strategic success. The impact of strategic leadership in HR management extends beyond internal processes to external considerations such as employer branding and employee well-being. Coolen et al. (2023) explore the connection between HR management and corporate social responsibility. The study identifies integrating corporate social responsibility initiatives into HR practices as promoting a positive employer brand that resonates with socially conscious employees and consumers, developing a unique brand profile, and leading to being an employer of choice. The study further highlights that strategic leaders must go beyond traditional HR practices by promoting a culture of continuous learning, talent development, and social responsibility, strategic leaders contribute to organizational resilience and success in an ever-changing business environment.

4. ***Motivating and influencing***: At the heart of strategic leadership lies the art of motivation and influence. Strategic leaders are not merely decision-makers but catalysts for change and inspiration. Strategic leaders are responsible for motivating and inspiring others in lower levels of management to achieve organizational goals and objectives (Kanyangale, 2017). This behaviour is very important for inspiring others and bringing people together to work towards a shared goal to embrace a strategic vision of the GSB and Leadership UKZN (Samimi et al., 2020). This type of leadership holds transformational characteristics that may impact organizational performance and create innovation (Kanyangale, 2017,482-508).
5. ***Managing information***: Information is a strategic asset in the digital era, and leaders are the custodians of this priceless resource. Managing information involves collecting and analysing data and ensuring that information is used to guide strategic decision-making. Any organization needs information management because it facilitates the clear and effective communication of the organisation's vision and

mission to internal and external stakeholders (Samimi et al., 2020). Subsequently, strategic leaders are responsible for collecting data and providing feedback to the business's internal and external environment. (Kanyangale, 2017,482-508). According to Samimi et al. (2020), leaders use this information or data in their strategic planning, execution, and decision-making process.

6. ***Overseeing operation and administration***: Effective strategic leadership demands a keen eye for overseeing operations and administration. While strategic decisions set the direction, it is the seamless execution of day-to-day operations that brings those decisions to life (Samimi et al., 2020). According to Kanyangale (2017), strategic leaders may implement policies and procedures to monitor other organisation members. This is critical in ensuring lower-level employees adhere to the policies and procedures and meet ethical and performance requirements. The implementation of strategies, organizational performance, and environmental changes can all be impacted by the capacity of these initiatives to affect reporting relationships, processes, and control (Choi et al., 2018,1868-1883). These oversight actions are critical to this strategic leadership role because they set the organizational framework and influence the execution of these activities.
7. ***Managing conflicting demands***: One of the characteristics of skilled strategic leadership is the ability to handle conflicting demands. The nature of conflicting demands in the contemporary business landscape is explored in a study by (Li et al., 2016,260-275). The author acknowledges that strategic leaders operate in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environments. Conflicting demands arise from diverse sources such as stakeholders, market dynamics, and internal organizational goals. The study highlights the need for leaders to cultivate adaptive capabilities, resilience, and a strategic mindset to manage the inherent tensions arising from conflicting demands effectively. Doz and Kosonen (2010), in their study, focus on strategic agility. According to the report, the study suggests that strategic leaders must cultivate agility to navigate conflicting demands successfully. Strategic agility involves the ability to sense environmental changes, seize opportunities, and reconfigure organizational resources promptly. Leaders who embrace strategic agility can respond adeptly to conflicting demands, adjusting organizational priorities and strategies in real-time.
8. ***Managing social and ethical issues***: According to Vasilyev et al. (2021), strategic leaders oversee tasks and direct ethical issues such as corporate social responsibility

and environmental sustainability. These creativities are important in attracting stakeholder funding, reputation, and organizational performance. According to Kabetu and Iravo (2018), a major ethical scandal is the accountability of the strategic leaders. Therefore, this function is imposed by the growing demands of stakeholders for higher ethical standards from the organizations.

2.8 Challenges and skills requirements of strategic leadership in universities

Over the years, leadership roles within universities have gained attention as a subject of study. As the university's core business becomes more complex, the list of challenges grows longer. Globally, the Covid-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges for universities, necessitating strategic leadership to address this global crisis's unique complexities. Many business organisations and institutions operating in South Africa, including GSB and Leadership UKZN, were also not immune as they were severely impacted directly, and some universities couldn't navigate adversity. University leaders faced several vital challenges during the pandemic, and these requirements for effective strategic leadership during this unprecedented period are identified below.

The spread of the pandemic demanded a rapid crisis response and the development of effective contingency plans to ensure academic continuity and resilience (Caviglia-Harris et al., 2021). The shift to remote and online learning necessitated rapid digital transformation, requiring university strategic leaders to navigate technological challenges and ensure the quality of virtual education (Al Lily et al., 2020,260-275). Ibeawuchi et al. (2021), stated that the economic impact of the pandemic affected university finances, requiring strategic leaders to steer budget constraints, secure funding, and make strategic resource allocation decisions. This pandemic has taken a severe toll on the mental health and well-being of everyone, including students and academic staff, demanding university leaders implement a support system for both students and faculty, addressing issues of isolation and burnout (Aslan et al., 2020,321-333). The ability of university leaders to make strategic decisions during the uncertainty became a critical challenge (Kezar, 2018). Thus, the skills Requirements for University Leadership during Covid-19 include the following:

- 1. Adaptive Leadership:** Heifetz et al. (2009) stated that the Covid-19 pandemic demanded effective university leadership with skills and the ability to adapt quickly to a changing environment and lead through uncertainty.

2. **Technology Literacy:** To successfully lead a digital transformation, leaders must be tech-savvy, and they must be able to use online learning platforms and collaborative tools (Ndukwe and Daniel, 2020,1-13).
3. **Crisis Communication:** According to Auer (2021), effective communication skills are essential for transparent and empathetic communication with stakeholders, addressing issues and managing expectations. Further, collaborative decision-making with diverse stakeholders, including faculty, students, and staff, is also critical when developing and implementing a strategic plan.
4. **Emotional intelligence:** Given the mental health challenges posed by the spread of Covid-19, strategic leaders with high emotional intelligence can navigate empathetically through disruptive times (Brown and Nwagbara, 2021).

Gore and Kanyangale (2022) proposed a framework for university strategic leadership during turbulent times. This framework brings together the challenges and includes (i) the external and internal context of the university, (ii) the sense-making of dynamic reality in a VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) and interfaces with key stakeholders to collectively shape and re-shape (iii) DAC (direction, alignment, commitment) in a context of the university and (iv) Leading self.

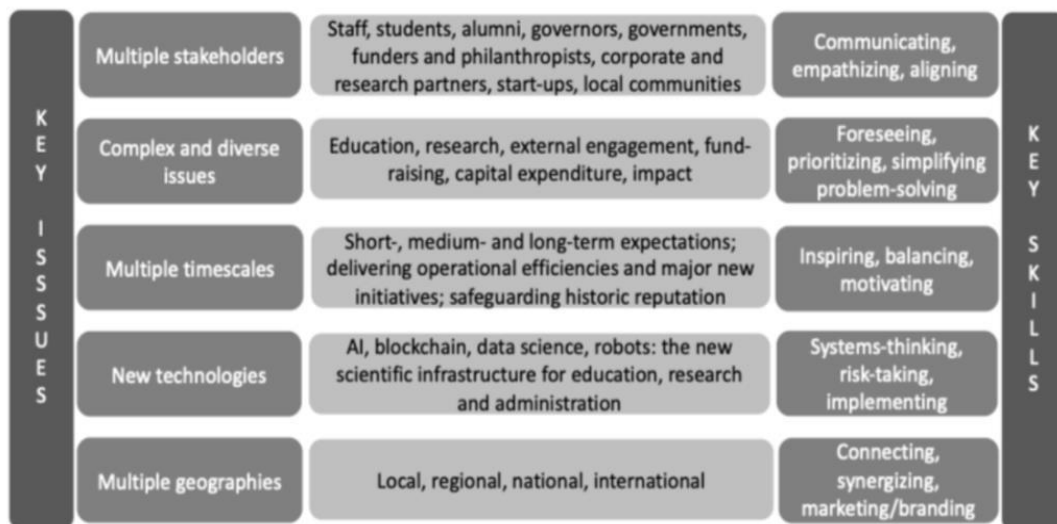


Figure 1: The Key Challenges and Skill requirements of the University Strategic Leaders

Source: Taken from Gore and Kanyangale (2022).

5. **External and Internal context of the University:** One of the challenges university strategic leaders face is interacting with international and national systems and

different subsystems within the university. Some are unique and prolonged environmental turbulence. Externally, these include currency instability and hyperinflation, depicting a hostile economy that affects the university (Gore and Kanyangale, 2022,482-508). They continue to define these distinctive elements as a high velocity of fluctuations and unclear patterns of evolutions, which often lead to quick deterioration due to complexity, dynamism, and unpredictability during environmental turbulence. Lack of readiness and unpreparedness of university strategic leaders lead to the failure of the university to offer a conducive environment towards learning. In some cases, some students, and sometimes many of them, deregister, rendering university services unfunded. Due to the complexity of the business environment they are operating under, university strategic leadership must compete with public, private, and international institutions and respond to macro-environmental changes caused by broad factors that affect many sectors, including industries and organizations. These include political dynamics (international or national politics) outside of the influence of the university. It is critical for university strategic leadership when they are responding to these, to be considerate of stakeholders' expectations and to strike a balance of global and local factors (Gore and Kanyangale, 2022,482-508).

6. ***Sense-making of dynamic reality and interfaces with key stakeholders***: Strategic leaders within universities are operating in an environment that is dominated by a lot of vulnerabilities, uncertainties, complexity, and ambiguities. VUCA needs to be pre-identified through a deliberate assessment process in all areas of the system. This is not an obvious skill that is always available at the universities. University strategic leaders should be the ones who identify the drivers of VUCA. They must possess agility system thinking to make sense of the environment and create and implement strategies to make sense to stakeholders while managing the environment (Gore and Kanyangale, 2022,482-508).
7. ***DAC: Long-term perspective, holistic and systemic balance of multiple stakeholders needs***: It is the role of university strategic leadership to demonstrate commitment to the mission and vision of the institution by providing a direction and ensuring that the level of understanding and the alignment of the strategy is realized by leaders and stakeholders (Gore and Kanyangale, 2022,482-508). Current operational complexities tend to focus the strategic leader's attention on the 'here - and- -now' issues. They find themselves focusing on solving operational problems.

The speed and complexity of change necessitate university strategic leadership to rely on collaborative sense-making and envisioning through a network of distributed leaders and various stakeholders to establish DAC during change within the university. The environmental turbulence makes it difficult for strategic leadership to anticipate the future or make confident decisions about the institution's future. As a result, clarifying the roles and functions of the organization's strategic leadership and its aims to survive turbulence is pivotal. Achieving operational and academic resilience during turbulent times requires interaction with a university's actors and stakeholders (Gore and Kanyangale, 2022,482-508).

8. ***Leading self-competence***: According to Gore and Kanyangale (2022), university strategic leadership needs to equip itself with critical leading self-competencies. These include strategic thinking competency, building personal social capital and networking, and demonstrating ethical competence. Personal social capital and networking include self-leadership amongst the entity's strategic leadership. Strategic leadership must be balanced in all spheres of the university. Inter-personal relationship issues sometimes cloud sound judgement and leadership effectiveness. Leadership at the university needs to apply a systems perspective when thinking because of interconnectedness, interdependencies, and patterns in the various business components of the university. They must be driven by strategic intent and vision thinking during turbulent times. Turbulence times create VUCA, which needs hypothesis-driven thinking. The strategic leaders need to pre-identify personal social capital and networking stakeholders during the VUCA assessment process before any turbulence event. University strategic leaders are not always aware of the need to identify stakeholders and the need to establish and maintain those relationships. This includes pre-determining roles and points of engagement, both formal and informal. Another area of leading self-competence is moral/legal/ethical competence. These areas might need pre-approved policy and procedural standards or guidelines. These might not be in place or pre-anticipated in many instances at the university, and where they exist, they might not be exhaustive enough to cover relevant VUCA.

2.9 Previous studies of strategic leadership at the university

Previous studies have highlighted several key aspects of strategic leadership in the university setting. Strategic leadership refers to the ability of the university leaders to effectively

navigate and guide their institutions towards achieving the long-term goals and objectives (Davies and Davies, 2006,138-144). One important finding from previous studies is that strategic leadership in university requires a deep understanding of the higher education landscape, including the challenges and opportunities specifically to the sector. University leaders needs to be knowledgeable about trends in education, research, funding, and policy to make informed decisions and develop effective strategies Grant (2021).

Additionally, studies have emphasized the importance of visionary leadership in universities. Alalfy (2014), argues that strategic leaders should have a clear vision for the future of their institution and be able to communicate this vision to stakeholders, including faculty, staff and students, and external partners. This vision should align with the university's mission and values and inspire others to work towards its goals. Furthermore, previous researchers have highlighted the meaning of collaboration and stakeholder engagement in strategic leadership. It is important for university leaders to promote a culture of collaboration and inclusivity, involving different stakeholders in strategic planning process. This includes faculty, staff, students, alumni, industry partners and community members. By involving diverse perspectives, strategic leaders can develop more comprehensive and effective strategies that address the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders (Irtaimeh, 2018,169-180). Lastly, the important aspect highlighted is the need for strategic leaders to be adaptable and responsive to change. The higher education landscape is constantly changing, with new technologies, societal demands, and global trends shaping the sector. This environment demands strategic leaders to be able to anticipate and effectively respond to these changes, adjusting their strategies and initiatives accordingly.

In summary, the study on the Mzuzu Library fire incident, articulated in depth about the effects of lack of effective strategic leadership in Gore and Kanyangale (2022), that are worth mentioning from a strategic leadership perspective. They identified that there was an interplay of various organisational, individual, and relational capabilities as central to the improvisation of library services, which contributed to the library fire, the lack of readiness to respond to the fire and its aftermaths. This point is further articulated by a number of examples referred to by Gore and Kanyangale (2022), which includes the following roles by the strategic leadership, that were absent even in the management of the Mzuzu University library fire. That includes four innovative strategies: exploration, knowledge management, entrepreneurship, and cooperation, which are core to the strategic leadership and the

existence of a university. This study takes us to the unintended results of lack of critical skills of strategic leadership in a university. The most unfortunate part is that due to strategic leadership's failure, the university's effectiveness is compromised, and when effective learning fails, the university fails for everyone.

2.10 Evolution of organisational resilience

Organizational resilience is a concept that has gained prominence in recent years, driven by the recognition that businesses and institutions need to adapt and thrive in the face of various challenges and disruptions. The evolution and meaning of organizational resilience involve understanding how organizations can effectively anticipate, respond to, recover from, and learn from unexpected events and disturbances (Burnard and Bhamra, 2011,443-445).

According to Gibson and Tarrant (2010), this evolution reflects the dynamic nature of strategic leadership in the business environment and the drive by organizations to innovate and evolve their resilience strategies continuously. The roots of organizational resilience can be traced back to disaster management and emergency response. The main goal was to prepare the organization for catastrophic events such as natural disasters. In the 1970s, Business Continuity Planning was developed, leading to a greater evolution of the resilience concept. Its focus was on ensuring the continuation of business operations in the event of disruption. Over the years, resilience incorporated a more comprehensive range of hazards, including financial, reputation, operational and strategic threats and disasters. This integration resulted in a more comprehensive approach to resilience. As organizations became more complex and interconnected due to globalization, the need for organizations and institutions to be resilient was a priority. An organisation's ability to navigate the complexities of global markets and supply chains became the most important component of organizational resilience. The significance of digital technologies and increasing reliance on information systems led to a new dimension of resilience. It became clear how important organizational culture and human capital are to resiliency. An organizational culture that is robust and adaptable is essential to respond to challenges effectively.

2.11 Meaning of organizational resilience

According to Acciarini et al. (2021), organizational resilience is considered a critical issue in strategic management. It involves accepting flexibility in operations and adjusting to changing environments. To overcome uncertainty requires modification in strategies, procedures, and organizational structures. According to Agasisti et al. (2018), resilient

organizations can respond quickly and efficiently to disturbances and minimise the impact on operations. Moreover, they also have well-defined recovery programs to return things to normal effectively. The ability to respond quickly and efficiently to unforeseen circumstances depends on the organisation's size. Acciarini et al. (2021), believe that large companies prioritize preparedness for disruptions, while others adopt organizational protocols to minimize complexity and uncertainty and align with the external environment. Dwiastuti et al. (2022a), on the other hand, believe that the way organizations use creative problem-solving processes greatly influences their resilience. According to Alias et al. (2019), resilience greatly depends on continuous learning. Resilient organizations learn from their failures and apply those lessons to enhance and fortify their systems, processes and overall resilience. Hapsari et al. (2020), argue that resilient organizations can bounce back from adversity and thrive in unpredictable conditions. In addition, a community's ability to cope with an unprecedented situation that has never happened before greatly depends on organizational resilience.

Organizational resilience can catalyse cultural adaptation, a competitive advantage, and a contribution to community recovery. Wills and Hofmeyr (2019), define organizational resilience as a multidimensional dynamic capacity built on interdependency and connection between organizational and community resilience. The involvement of stakeholders is part of resilience, which goes beyond internal procedures. A more resilient ecosystem results from collaborative relationships with suppliers, customers, and the community. The concept of resilience should be incorporated into a larger business plan rather than existing as a stand-alone (Sapeciay et al., 2019,138-144). This involves considering resilience while allocating resources and making strategic decisions. According to Fandiño et al. (2019), it is important to create resilient organizational leadership and followership interactions based on clear messages communicated from the top down to all levels of the organization. Organizations must have a clear vision, collaborate, and function well at all levels to create strategic resilience. According to Agasisti et al. (2018), organizational resilience includes strategic levels in production operations, management responses, and employee and group levels that contribute to resilience. The culture of an organization has a direct bearing on its organizational resilience. A resilient culture promotes creativity, open communication, and a proactive approach to challenges.

According to Ho et al. (2022), an integrated dynamic model of organizational resilience comprises three levels: organisational, group, and individual. These levels are contextual,

cognitive, and behavioural resilience. Acciarini et al. (2021), developed an action-focused resilience framework. The author integrated research data to build an organizational resilience framework that views resilience as a special combination of organizational routines and skills in addition to resilience processes. The framework consists of three sequential resilience action phrases: before-anticipation, during-coping, and after-adaptation. It highlights an organisation's knowledge base as the primary antecedent, with power and responsibility, resource availability, and social resources as the main drivers. The right resources must be available at every level to support behavioural and cognitive behaviours that lead to organizational resilience (Sapciay et al., 2019). There are two streams in the literature on organizational resilience. According to (Jia et al., 2020,23-28), the first method views resilience as a desired organizational quality reflected in a range of attributes such as strong leadership, engaged employees, and quick decision-making. As such, the focus is on building resilience. The second stream proposes that some organizations are resilient, and others are not, viewing resilience as an outcome and identifying its drivers experimentally. These studies lack empirical support and are theoretical. The primary goals of these studies are to quantify organizational resilience and pinpoint the behaviours that enhance it. The study uses proactive and reactive methods to create a common understanding of organizational resilience.

1. ***Proactive Organisational Resilience:*** Anticipating proactive resilience can help the organization adapt to change (Pitas and Ehmer, 2020,294-393). Organizations must engage in four important organizational activities: self-assessment of impact, prevention capability training, planning, and emergency preparation to become proactively resilient. Existing authorities, personal agencies, and internal and external structures are some of the variables that could help these proactive aspects.
2. ***Reactive Organisational Resilience:*** According to Wills and Hofmeyr (2019), reactive organizational resilience refers to an organization's ability to respond effectively and bounce back from unexpected events. In a reactive approach to organizational resilience, the focus is on responding to and managing the immediate impact of a disruption rather than proactively preventing it. This type of resilience is often necessary when facing sudden and unforeseen events such as natural disasters or public health emergencies such as the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Wills and Hofmeyr (2019), reactive organizational resilience comprises five key elements: Rapid response, Crisis management, Business continuity and Learning

and adaptation. Further, it was stated that organizations must have mechanisms to identify and evaluate the nature and severity of disruption quickly. This involves activating an emergency response plan, developing communication channels, and mobilizing resources to address the immediate needs. Effective crisis management is important in reactive resilience. It comprises establishing a crisis management team that makes timely decisions and communicates with internal and external stakeholders. This team should have clear roles and responsibilities, access to relevant information, and the ability to adapt and make decisions during disruptive times. Reactive resilience also involves implementing strategies to ensure the continuity of critical business functions during and after disruption. It is important to note that while reactive organizational resilience is important in managing unexpected events, it should not be the sole focus. Organizations should also strive to develop proactive resilience strategies to identify and address potential risks and vulnerabilities before they escalate into crises. A comprehensive resilience approach combines reactive and proactive elements to ensure organizations can withstand and effectively recover from disruptions.

Achieving organizational resilience is defined by Shaya et al. (2022), as predicting possible risks, managing unanticipated events, and learning and adapting to changes in the environment. The process consists of three sequential stages: anticipatory, coping, and adaptation. As a result of the spread of Covid-19 infections, government, organizations, and long-term operations had to undergo drastic changes to ensure continuity. This makes resilience a positive emotional concept emphasising an organization or individual's strength and virtue in the face of a disaster, particularly pertinent during the pandemic (Bartusevičienė et al., 2021,151-172). The ability to cope with difficulties and turbulence in the environment is considered an important component of academic resilience in strategic leadership (Cortes and Herrmann, 2021,1-28).

Organizations must be able and capable of addressing unexpected events and leveraging circumstances that could potentially jeopardize the organisation's long-term sustainability (Wills and Hofmeyr, 2019,192-205). This is achieved through collaborative decision-making, which enables the utilization of technical knowledge to develop business strategies re-configure and adapt to ever-changing conditions. For this study, organisational resilience refers to the capability to survive, adapt and grow in a dynamic, uncertain, and undefined environment. It is also the ability to return to a stable state after a crisis. This definition is

adopted in this study because it provides a holistic analysis of academic resilience, which is helpful for the organization in its survival, continuity, and coping mechanisms during a crisis. Accordingly, this study seeks to discover how strategic leaders influenced the direction and activities of the GSB and Leadership UKZN in leading through disruptive times to ensure academic resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic.

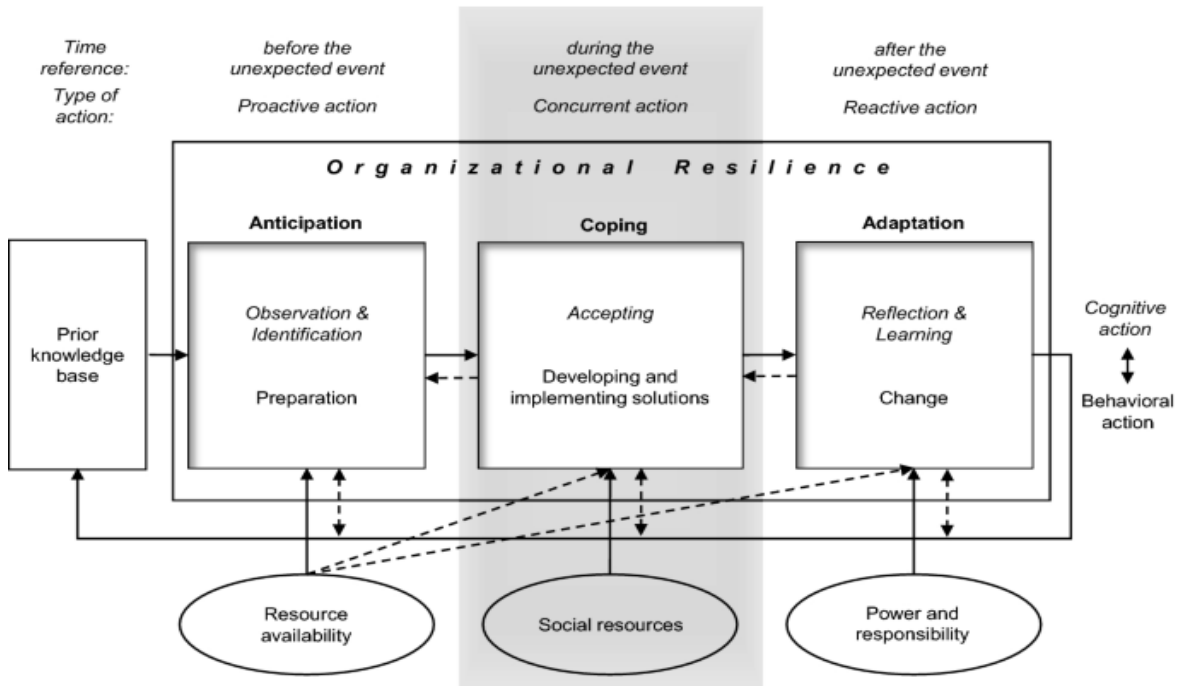


Figure 2: A Capability-based conceptualisation of Organisational Resilience

Source: Adopted from Duchek (2020).

2.12 Fundamental elements of organizational resilience

Organisational resilience is critical for contemporary businesses operating in a complex and unpredictable business landscape. This aims to explore the fundamental elements that form organizational resilience. Conducting a thorough review of existing literature and analysis of recent studies identifies and defines the components that contribute to an organization's ability to adjust, recover, and thrive in the face of disruption. In a time of technological advancement and global uncertainties, understanding the fundamentals of organisational resilience is critical for business success and sustainability.

1. **Adaptive Capacity:** refers to the ability to adapt and respond effectively to changes. A theoretical framework to understand the significance of adaptive capacity in organizational resilience in modern settings is provided by (Aldunce et al., 2014, 252-

270). Adaptive capacity was first proposed by Wildavsky (1991), as a critical component of organizational resilience. He highlighted how important it is for organizations to be able to adapt and respond to changes in their environment. He developed a framework for understanding the nature of resilience dynamics and highlighted how important it is to adapt in the face of uncertainty. Holling and Allen (2002), introduced the adaptive cycle model, which contributes to the theoretical framework of adaptive capacity. This model clarifies the cyclical nature of adaptability by outlining stages of growth, conservation, release, and reconfiguration in complex systems. It emphasized how critical it is to recognize the cyclical nature of opportunities and interruptions and learn how to adapt to them. Recent studies highlight that adaptive ability is reactive and proactive, building on the ideas of (Duit, 2016,364-380). Welsh (2014), argues that proactive organizations anticipate shocks and make strategic changes in response. These organizations are more resilient than others. Recent studies have also looked at how leadership develops adaptable ability, focusing on the necessity of a culture that values ongoing education and welcomes change (Coutu, 2002,46-56).

2. **Robustness:** According to Taleb and Plestan (2016), robustness focuses on enduring shocks without failure. This concept explores how robustness is changing and how it works with other components to improve organizational resilience. Shtessel et al. (2012), brought widespread attention to the concept of robustness in their exploration of antifragility. He asserted that robust systems endure shocks and benefit from them, becoming stronger. His perspectives redirected attention from mere survival to the idea that organizations can succeed through exposure to volatility. Okoh and Haugen (2015), contributed significantly to the concept of system accidents, asserting that certain intricate systems are inherently at risk of failure. He highlighted the importance of constructing systems that can withstand shocks without leading to catastrophic outcomes, thereby establishing the foundation for robustness. Recent research delves into the changing role of robustness within complex, interconnected global systems. Ben-Haim and Smithson (2018), propose a comprehensive approach to robustness, considering the technical elements and socio-economic and geopolitical factors. Woods (2015), highlights the significance of adaptive robustness, where systems endure shocks and adapt dynamically to evolving conditions, aligning with the changing nature of disruptions in today's business environment.

3. **Redundancy:** Building redundancy in organizational systems is emphasized as a crucial element for resilience. Drawing from the perspectives of McManus et al. (2007), the examination of the practical implementation of redundancy and its influence on organizational resilience is informed by the most recent developments. McManus et al. (2007), contributed to the understanding of redundancy by emphasizing its role in creating safety buffers within organisational systems. Their research highlighted that redundancy acts as a protective measure against the failure of critical functions during disturbances when strategically implemented. Weick and Sutcliffe (2015), expanded this idea, arguing that some redundancy can improve an organisation's ability to withstand shocks and continue performing essential functions. Their research highlighted the psychological aspect of redundancy, where several individuals or components can provide backup support and alternative solutions. Recent developments in organizational theory have acknowledged the necessity of adaptive redundancy. According to Hollnagel (2015), redundancy should be flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances rather than static. This dynamic approach to redundancy ensures that it aligns with the evolving nature of disruptions, offering a flexible, resilient solution. Righi and Samoili (2018), explore the integration of redundancy with other resilience components to provide a more thorough and nuanced understanding of its function in modern organizations.
4. **Learning and Innovation:** Innovation and continuous learning are essential to building organizational resilience. In light of the current study, viewpoints from Giniuniene and Jurksiene (2015), are considered to understand how innovation and adaptability contribute to an organization's total resilience. Teece (2010), highlighted the importance of learning and innovation as dynamic talents necessary for long-term competitive advantage. According to his research, organizations that innovate and adapt continuously are better equipped to deal with uncertainties. Jiménez-Jiménez and Sanz-Valle (2011), contributed significantly to the understanding of organizational learning by emphasizing that learning is an organizational and individual process. They argued that organisations capable of collective learning and knowledge creation possess a competitive advantage in turbulent environments. Rasmussen and Ulrich (2015), explore the concept of ambidextrous organisations, those adept at both exploration and exploitation. Such organisations balance innovation with preserving existing capabilities, encouraging resilience through a dual focus. Kedia and Mooty (2013), explore the importance of innovation

ecosystems, emphasizing the collaborative aspect of innovation in enhancing organisational resilience.

2.13 Ontology and task related to organizational resilience

Ontology in the context of organizational resilience plays an essential role in understanding the nature of resilience within the organization. It is an organisation's ability to anticipate, plan for, respond to and adapt to disruptive events and ensure the continuation of critical operations and functions. Developing an ontology for organizational resilience involves creating a structured framework for gathering and managing organizational resilience knowledge, which is necessary to develop a common understanding among stakeholders. Moreover, responsibilities associated with organizational resilience offer a range of activities and processes to ensure the organization's ability to adjust, bounce back and thrive in the event of disruptive times (Kanyangale and Njoloma, 2020,14-26).

Ho et al. (2022), proposed four categorical factors of organizational resilience, namely (i) perceptual stance (unified commitment, positive perceptions and sense of wisdom and reality), (ii) contextual integrity (supportive environment, compatible interaction, and employee involvement) (iii) strategic capacity including employee capability, focused strategy, and resource availability, (iv) and strategic acting including proactiveness, flexibility and creativity. Effective resilience requires integrating and applying the dimensions across all four categories. The framework includes important contributing factors to organizational resilience. According to the above definition, there are four basic tasks (overall) of organisational resilience, which will be discussed immediately below for further conceptual clarity. There are also tasks in critical areas that will be listed thereafter:

- 1. *Task-related to Organisational Resilience:*** Organisational resilience tasks are proactive and reactive activities intended to advance the organizational capacity to endure, adjust, and bounce back from disruptive events. These activities are critical in creating a strong organizational structure and ensuring long-term viability. Strategic leaders must ensure that organisational employees understand the complete business operational systems and processes. This includes their operational roles and areas. This prepares them to recognise and appreciate any negative event and impact. They must be able to understand how each process influences the achievement of the organisation's strategic vision, goals, and the quality of their product. This enables

them to understand the impact of their roles both from up and downstream, even in the event of an incident.

2. ***Task of Building Situational Awareness:*** A complete understanding of a company's environment is critical for situation awareness (Ho et al., 2022). An organisation must anticipate crises, triggers, and consequences in the present and the future. Situational awareness entails understanding the organization's internal and external resources (Levey and Levey, 2019,739-745). In many crises, it is critical to understand stakeholder expectations, constraints, obligations, and minimum operating needs to develop a coherent and clear response and to define recovery priorities. According to Kanyangale and Njoloma (2020), there are five indicators of situational awareness. These include clarity of roles and responsibilities (definitions, expectations, knowledge, scope); understanding hazards, their consequences, and impacts; knowing how to manage hazards; knowing about insurance and other support mechanisms; and being aware of connectivity.
3. ***Task of Managing Keystone Vulnerabilities:*** The third task of managing keystone vulnerabilities entails identifying, prioritizing, and targeting those components of an organization system that may cause a huge negative impact either catastrophically or insidiously (Kanyangale and Njoloma, 2020,14-26). Management of keystone vulnerabilities also includes eliminating exposure to risk, enhancing the capacity to respond, and reducing the consequences of failure. Keystone vulnerabilities can be managed through planning strategies (ongoing risk identification and emergency and recovery plans) and employee participation in emergency drills. Other indicators such as capability and capacity of internal resources (physical components, HR, process resources) and external resources (expected availability of external assistance, services, supply network) play a critical role in how keystone vulnerabilities are managed to unlock potential organisational resilience (Kanyangale and Njoloma, 2020,14-26). Moreover, understanding the links between components and what vulnerabilities arise from these as interconnected parts of a larger system and not isolated components is crucial to assessing the degree of organisational connectivity.
4. ***Task of Building Organisational Understanding:*** A final aspect of the generic/overall organizational resilience is adaptive capacity, or the ability to make decisions in an organization's culture in a timely and appropriate manner during a crisis and to identify and maximize opportunities (Kanyangale and Njoloma,

2020,14-26). Achieving resilience requires adaptation, which includes learning and organizational change. According to Lalramchuan (2021), adaptive capacity indicates the system's ability to adapt to changing external environments and recover from damage to internal structures that affect the system's ability to perform its tasks.

According to Kanyangale and Njoloma (2020), there are five indicators of adaptive capacity. The first indicator is the extent to which an organization experiences the negative effects of a silo mentality and the implementation of the related mitigation strategy. A second indicator is the effectiveness of communication avenues and relationships with stakeholders daily and in crises. The third indicator relates to vision and outcome expectancy. During times of crisis, vision is important as a tool for identifying and directing adaptive activities of an organization. Indicator four focuses on how information and knowledge are acquired, retained, and transferred within and between linked organizations. Fourth, the indicator measures the information and knowledge acquired within the organization and transferred between linked organizations. Last, leadership visibility, availability, and transparency in decision-making are important factors in achieving change to resources, activities, and actors (Kanyangale and Njoloma, 2020,14-26). It's important to note that the specific ontology of organizational resilience may vary depending on the organisation's industry, size, and nature. Understanding these dimensions and how they interact is crucial for building and maintaining organizational resilience.

2.14 Criticism and weakness of the concept of organizational resilience

Organisational resilience, celebrated as a critical capability for navigating uncertainties, is not without its critics and challenges. By synthesizing insights from scholarly perspectives, the aim is to shed light on the nuanced aspects that have been critiqued and the challenges organisations face in fostering resilience. As organisations strive to enhance their resilience in the face of uncertainty, it is imperative to assess the concept critically. This seeks to provide a comprehensive knowledge of organizational resilience challenges, focusing on academic views to identify and analyse the challenges and criticisms of organizational resilience. Three major criticisms surrounding the lack of a universally accepted definition, the temporal dimensions of resilience, and challenges associated with the measurement of organizational resilience are discussed below. Scholars such as Burnard and Bhamra (2019), have contributed to these critiques, shedding light on the weaknesses that hinder the progress of the organizational resilience discourse.

One major criticism revolves around the absence of a universally accepted definition of organisational resilience. Patriarca et al. (2018), argued that the ambiguity in defining organizational resilience poses a substantial obstacle to effective measurement and implementation. The absence of a precise and agreed-upon definition can lead to confusion among researchers, practitioners, and organizational leaders, hindering the development of a cohesive and comprehensive understanding of the concept. This criticism suggests that the diverse interpretations of organizational resilience may result in inconsistent applications across different contexts. Without a clear and universally accepted definition, developing standardized methodologies and tools for evaluating and improving resilience becomes challenging. Organizations may struggle to identify and adopt best practices due to the lack of a common framework, hindering the progress of resilience research and implementation efforts. He further argues that a lack of a precise definition hampers effective measurement and implementation.

Some critics argue that focusing on short-term adaptability overlooks the importance of long-term sustainability and strategic foresight (Baykal, 2018,34-48). He highlights the temporal dimensions of resilience as lacking long-term impact to sustain and drive towards future outcomes. Critics argue that resilience should not be confined to immediate responses to disruptions but should encompass the ability to withstand and thrive over the long term. This criticism points out the temporal dimensions of resilience, asserting that organizational resilience should extend beyond mere adaptability to address long-term impacts and outcomes. The failure to consider strategic foresight and sustainable practices may result in organizations being well-prepared for immediate disruptions but ill-equipped to navigate and thrive in the evolving business landscape. To address this criticism, researchers and practitioners must broaden their focus to include a comprehensive understanding of resilience that incorporates both short-term adaptability and long-term sustainability.

Another criticism is that determining organizational resilience remains a significant challenge, as highlighted by (Burnard and Bhamra, 2019, 5581-5599). The absence of standardized metrics and assessment tools creates difficulties in evaluating the effectiveness of resilience strategies. Without clear and widely accepted measurement criteria, organizations may struggle to assess their resilience capabilities accurately. This criticism underscores the need to develop reliable and standardized metrics to capture the multifaceted nature of organizational resilience. The absence of a standardized measurement framework

hampers the comparability of resilience assessments across organizations and industries. Researchers and practitioners must collaborate to establish common metrics and assessment tools that facilitate a more accurate and meaningful evaluation of organizational resilience. The criticisms surrounding the lack of a universally accepted definition, the temporal dimensions of resilience, and measurement challenges shed light on the complexities associated with organizational resilience research. Addressing these criticisms is essential for advancing the field, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of resilience, and providing organizations with effective tools to enhance their resilience capabilities. There is a need to focus on developing a consensus on the definition, incorporating long-term sustainability into resilience frameworks, and establishing standardized metrics to overcome the current challenges in measuring organizational resilience. Organisations operate within interconnected environments, where intricate interdependencies exist among various components. Hollnagel (2015), highlights the importance of effectively identifying and addressing these interdependencies to enhance resilience. The challenge lies in comprehending the intricate web of relationships between internal and external factors and the dependencies between different components within the organization.

Navigating these complex interdependencies requires a holistic understanding of the organizational ecosystem. Traditional risk management approaches may fall short of capturing the dynamic nature of these relationships. Future research and organizational practices must focus on developing tools and frameworks that facilitate the identification, analysis, and management of interconnectedness, enabling organizations to bolster their resilience in the face of systemic disruptions. Another challenge regards the human dimension, which introduces unique challenges to building organizational resilience. Scholars such as Somers (2009), highlight the impact of cultural and behavioural factors on resilience. Resistance to change, often rooted in organizational culture, poses a significant barrier to adopting resilient practices. Understanding how cultural and behavioural factors influence resilience is crucial for developing strategies that foster a more adaptable and change-ready workforce.

Organizational culture is pivotal in shaping employees' attitudes towards change and resilience. Cultivating a resilient organizational culture involves addressing communication gaps, promoting a proactive mindset, and fostering a learning-oriented environment. Future research should delve deeper into the dynamics of organizational culture and employee

behaviour to develop tailored interventions that mitigate resistance to change and enhance overall resilience. Research identifies another challenge of building and maintaining resilience as requiring resources, and organisations often face time, finances, and personnel constraints. Vugrin et al. (2010), emphasize the trade-offs organizations must navigate when allocating resources for resilience efforts amidst other operational priorities. Limited resources may hinder the implementation of comprehensive resilience strategies, leaving organizations vulnerable to unforeseen disruptions.

More research in this area is needed to identify optimal resource allocation strategies that balance the need for resilience with other critical operational requirements. Understanding the cost-benefit analysis of resilience investments and developing efficient resource management frameworks will be essential for organizations to navigate the challenges posed by resource constraints. Organisational resilience is a multifaceted concept that demands attention to complex interdependencies, human dimensions, and resource constraints. By addressing these challenges, organisations can develop more robust and effective resilience strategies, ensuring their ability to navigate disruptions and thrive in dynamic organisational environments. The above highlights the implications for practitioners and suggests future research directions to address the identified challenges and criticisms in advancing the field of organisational resilience.

2.15 Models of organizational resilience

Organizational resilience refers to the organization's ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to and recover from crises. Many models and frameworks have been recommended to help organizations to understand and improve their resilience. The resilience model developed by Bruneau et al. (2003), outlines four essential organisational resilience elements.

- 1. *Anticipation:*** Anticipation involves proactively identifying and evaluating possible risks and disruptions. Resilient organizations can foresee possible threats and opportunities, enabling them to create strategies to mitigate or leverage these factors effectively.
- 2. *Preparation:*** Preparation focuses on creating and applying plans, policies, and procedures to boost the organization's capacity to respond to disruptions. This comprises training personnel, creating contingency plans, and establishing communication protocols to ensure a coordinated and effective response.

3. **Response:** The organisation's ability to control and mitigate the immediate impacts of the disruption. This contains activating emergency response plans, mobilizing resources, and making quick decisions to minimize the negative consequences of the event.
4. **Recovery:** Recovery comprises the restoration of normal operations and the organisation's adaptation to the change's due disruption. It includes efforts to rebuild infrastructure, restore critical functions, and learn from the experience to improve future resilience. This Resilience Diamond model highlights these four components' interconnectedness and underscores that a holistic approach is necessary for effective organizational resilience. Other models and frameworks may expand on these components or give a different view. For example, the Business Continuity Institute's good practice guidelines propose the "Business Confidence Index Resilience Cycle," which consists of understanding, design, implementation, and validation activities.

Moreover, with these specific models, it's important to acknowledge that organizational resilience is influenced by many factors, including leadership, culture, communication, adaptability, and the ability to learn from experiences. Some organizations may adopt standards and frameworks such as ISO 22301 (Business Continuity Management) or COSO ERM (Enterprise Risk Management) to manage their resilience efforts. Organizational resilience is not a one-size-fits-all concept, and models may need to be modified to fit the unique characteristics and challenges of different industries and organizations. Regardless of the specific model used, promoting a culture of resilience adaptability and integrating resilience into the organization's overall strategic planning are essential for building and sustaining resilience over the long term.

2.16 Meaning of academic resilience in disruptive time

Resilience is defined as the ability of a system to bounce back after the disturbances and, through learning those situations, to bounce forward and increase the system's adaptive capability to handle emergencies, thus incorporating reactive and proactive responses to uncertainty (Herrman et al., 2011,258-265). Resilience and academic resilience are closely interconnected. Ramadhana et al. (2021), define academic resilience as a process and ability to thrive in challenging situations. Moreover, it refers to the patterns of positive adaptation to these challenges. Dwiastuti et al. (2022a), refer to resilience as a personal element in

assessing obstacles and evaluating the results of specific events that arise and support provided in a multidimensional manner. According to Ramadhana et al. (2021), academic resilience is a form of individual resilience specific to the context of education. It is referred to as the capability to overcome difficulties seen as challenges to student educational development. Academic resilience focuses on the challenges, risks, and pressure of experiencing poor academic and learning performance (Dwiastuti et al., 2022b,157-164). The resilience process highlights individual efforts to rise from adversity, restore the situation to a new normal, incorporate cognitive effective aspects, and adaptive and non-adaptive behaviour (Agasisti et al., 2018). Eva et al. (2020), pointed out three main dimensions in explaining students' academic resilience, which represent the context for persistence, adaptive reflection, seeking assistance, negative influence, and emotional response.

The first dimension is perseverance, associated with the student's character and reactions, including top performance, determination to succeed, following plans, directing goals, using feedback, solving innovative problems, and seeing difficulties as opportunities. The second dimension is reflection and adaptive help-seeking. They are referred to as the strengths and weaknesses of individuals, the willingness to use different learning methods, seeking help when difficult, getting support and encouragement, self-assessment and focusing on reward and punishment. Lastly, the third dimension is negative effects and emotional responses that yield character and reactions such as anxiety, stress, and individual efforts to avoid negative reactions (Eva et al., 2020,202-214). An academic resilience approach identifies students' academic profiles based on perseverance, reflection, adaptive help-seeking, negative effects, and emotional responses. Earlier studies proposed that these specific dimensions identify measures of general attitudes of resistance that characterised identical mood attributes (Ramadhana et al., 2021,334-355). The academic resilience scale recognises cognitive-affective and behavioural responses to difficult situations in the learning and academic process in achieving effective approaches to learning (Eva et al., 2020,202-214).

Moreover, it recognises non-adaptive reactions to academic challenges and to help structure interventions to strengthen student academic resilience. Dwivedi et al. (2020), defined academic resilience as the ability of students to cope with acute or chronic problems that are the major disturbance in the educational process. This definition is followed by Beale (2020), which emphasizes the individual ability to face academic challenges. Academic

resilience in disruptive times refers to the ability of individuals, educational institutions, and systems to adapt, persevere, and thrive in the face of significant challenges, disruptions, or crises that impact the field of education. These disruptions can include a wide range of events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, natural disasters, social and political upheavals, technological changes, and economic uncertainties. Academic resilience encompasses various dimensions that contribute to the ability of students, educators, institutions, and educational systems to navigate disruptions while maintaining the pursuit of learning, teaching, and educational objectives. Ensuring that all students have access to quality education, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances, and is fundamental to academic resilience during any disruptive event (Serhan and Welcome, 2023,428-433). Academic resilience should provide for flexible and adaptable learning environments that can seamlessly transition between in-person, remote, or hybrid modes of instruction.

1. ***Mental Health and Well-being:*** According to Hernández-Torrano et al. (2020), academic resilience involves prioritizing the mental health and well-being of students, educators, and staff, recognizing the emotional challenges brought about by disruptions.
2. ***Innovation and Technology Integration:*** Providing educators with training and resources to navigate new teaching methods and technologies for effective academic resilience. Educators need to be consulted on developing alternative teaching methods and be trained to innovate their teaching methods and strategies to engage students effectively in changing circumstances. Embracing and effectively utilizing technology for online learning, virtual collaboration, and digital assessment becomes essential for maintaining educational continuity (Hixon and Buckenmeyer, 2009,130-146).
3. ***Resource Allocation, Research and Innovation and Flexible Curriculum and Assessment and Evaluation:*** Encouraging research and innovation in education can lead to the development of strategies, tools, and practices that enhance resilience. Efficient allocation of resources, such as technology, learning materials, and support services, helps institutions and individuals overcome disruptions (Brennan et al., 2014,144-154). Institutions may need to adapt their curricula to respond to changing demands and incorporate relevant skills for navigating disruptive environments. This needs a rethinking of assessment methods and evaluation processes to accommodate diverse learning contexts. According to Rubin and Dierdorff (2009), establishing

collaborations between educational institutions, industry partners, and government agencies can enhance resources and support during disruptive times.

- 4. *Policy Adaptation and Student Support Services:*** Governments and educational bodies may need to adapt policies and regulations to facilitate educational resilience and ensure equitable access to education (Guerra et al., 2020,1-13). Offering robust support services, such as counselling, academic advising, and career guidance, helps students navigate challenges and disruptions effectively. Taneja et al. (2010), state that effective communication strategies help institutions keep stakeholders informed and manage expectations during disruptive periods. Academic resilience involves thinking beyond immediate disruptions and considering educational systems' long-term sustainability and adaptability.

In summary, academic resilience in disruptive times requires a proactive, adaptable, and student-centred approach that enables educational institutions and individuals to withstand challenges, maintain educational quality, and continue pursuing their learning and teaching goals despite uncertainties and disruptions.

2.17 Previous studies of organisational resilience in the university

Previous studies covered different viewpoints, such as a new business model for the sharing economy, the resilience process and phases of organizational response and the categorization of management responses (Dwiastuti et al., 2022a, 25-41). Organizational resilience is critical in strategic leadership (Acciarini et al., 2021,). It can deal with threats and unprecedented events. If an organizational structure and control mechanisms are rigid, it negatively affects resilience. To improve resilience, the organisation must explore the importance of organizational ambidexterity and strategic consistency. Duchek (2020), found that how companies execute creative problem-solving routines significantly influences their resilience. Other ways to increase resilience include defining employees' strengths and abilities, such as confidence and hope.

Resilience refers to the ability to respond to severe impacts or turbulent conditions (Herrman et al., 2011,258-265). Previous studies suggested that resilient organizations can adapt to changes and gain a competitive advantage during turbulent times by coping with changes. Typically, resilient organizations recover from adversity and thrive in uncertain environments (Hapsari et al., 2020,393-398). As a result of pandemics, natural disasters, economic recessions, terrorist attacks, equipment failure, and human error, it is paramount

that an organization has strong, resilient organizational systems. Dwiastuti et al. (2022a), argue that organizational resilience goes beyond managing and surviving during adversities. Organizational resilience refers to an organisation's ability to recover after destructions, in which strong resilient organizations can adapt to new environmental conditions and abilities to change as necessary. Organizational resilience is key to a community's ability to deal with an unprecedented situation. Organizational resilience can also contribute to community recovery and be a competitive advantage and a driver of cultural adaptation (Ho et al., 2022,1-45). According to Wills and Hofmeyr (2019), organizational resilience is a multilevel dynamic ability based on interdependency and interconnection between community and organizational resilience. Ho et al. (2022), suggested that an integrated dynamic model of organizational resilience consists of three aspects: contextual, cognitive, and behavioural resilience. These levels include organizational, group and individual levels. In addition, they emphasized the importance of developing a resilient organizational leadership and followership interplay based on clear messages cascaded from top management to all levels. To develop strategic resilience, organizations need to have a clear vision and must be able to coordinate and operate effectively at all levels. Researchers suggested various frameworks for organizational resilience for specific divisions or functions of an organizations (Ye et al., 2021,169-202).

Additionally, it should cover strategic levels in production operations, management responses, individual employees and group levels, job factors and contributing factors to resilience. The author integrated findings from previous studies to conceptualize an organizational resilience framework that combines resilience process with resilience as a unique mix of organizational capabilities and routines. The framework includes three successive resilience action phrases including before-anticipation, during-coping, and after-adaptation, highlighting an organizations knowledge base as the main antecedent and power and responsibility, resource availability and social resources as the key drivers. Each stage requires the right resources to be in place to support cognitive and behavioural actions that would result in organizational resilience.

According to Jia et al. (2020), organizational resilience literature consists of two streams: The first stream viewed resilience as a desired organizational characteristic and is reflected in a variety of attributes, including strong leadership, engaged employees and quick decision-making, so that building resilience is the focus of the process. The second stream viewed resilience as an outcome, and its determinants are empirically identified, thus suggesting that some organizations are resilient, and others are not.

2.18 The concept and criticism of social capital

In the late 1980s, social capital became a research topic and gained momentum. The concept of social capital has been regarded as a solution to many social problems, including poverty, economic problems, disasters, and pandemics. Despite the fact that social capital is relatively new, there is a growing body of literature on it. The concept of social capital has been extensively studied, but no universal definition exists. In recent years, numerous studies have refined the concept and measured approach. Recently, social capital seems to have gained some consensus as a conceptualisation and major component. According to Claridge (2018a), the social capital theory is based on trust, norms, and informal networks.

Further, it is believed that social relations are valuable resources. Social capital can be viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses a stock of social norms, beliefs, trust, obligations, relationships, networks, friends, memberships, civil engagement, information flows, and institutions that promote cooperation and collective action for mutual benefit and contribute to economic and social development. The concept of social capital is complex and it's not easy to define in one way. As a result, different authors define social capital differently depending on their interests. There is a commonality among most definitions in that they emphasize the role of social relations in generating productive outcomes. In these definitions, social capital is either treated as a personal resource or as a social resource.

According to Martikke (2017), social capital is defined as economic, cultural and social. The author defines social capital as the sum of actual or potential resources with a persistent network of institutionalized mutual acquaintance and recognition relationships. This definition emphasizes the importance of social networks, offers examples, and discusses the benefits of belonging to a group. According to Claridge (2018c), social capital is a collectively owned asset that provides members with credit and individual benefits. The author focuses on the instrumental value of social capital in deriving economic and social benefits from group membership and the impetus to invest in such memberships. The benefits of being a member of a group are what make them possible. The social capital is maintained and reinforced as long as members continue to invest in the relationship. Martikke (2017), on the other hand, defines social capital as an asset in the competition between individuals to improve their position relative to others. According to Claridge (2018c), social capital comprises three elements: the social relationship that allows actors to access resources that their associates possess (social connections contain resources), the

amount of those resources produced by all the relationships between actors, apart from a common quality, and the quality of those resources. Engbers et al. (2017), define social capital based on its function. They believe it is not one entity but a combination of multiple entities sharing two characteristics: it is part of the social structure. It enables the actions of individuals within it. The entities bring obligations, expectations, trust, and information. Using it facilitates production and enables certain goals that would otherwise not be possible. Additionally, it allows the actions of individual actors and forms the basis of social capital. Efforts to take membership in a group can be seen as rational investments in social capital.

Engbers et al. (2017), identified three types of social capital: reciprocity (including trust), information channels, and norms. Individuals and organizations can use these resources to achieve their goals. In contrast to other forms of capital, it is not completely tangible across individuals or activities. Most forms of social capital are developed by group members working together. According to Bhandari and Yasunobu (2009), social capital is a public good since it exists in individual relationships. Chakrabarti and Santoro (2004), define social networks as methods for sustaining and enhancing collective capital.

Aldrich and Meyer (2015), believe that social capital refers to the qualities of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that facilitate coordinated action within society. Meanwhile, Bhandari and Yasunobu (2009), define social capital as the relationships between individuals, social networks, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from those relationships. Moreover, social networks are valuable and social contacts affect an individual's and group's productivity. Societies with a high number of civic associations and high levels of participation have a high level of social capital. Thus, social capital contributes to civic engagement, participation in voluntary organizations, and social connections, which foster trust and reciprocity (Claridge, 2018c, 1-26).

The formation of networks for civic engagement facilitates societal cooperation, coordination, and communication. It also strengthens reputations, enabling the resolution of challenges faced by collective actions. The concept of social capital refers to the qualities of public benefit that affect the productivity of actors (individuals and groups). In view of its collective nature, it cannot be transformed into a private good (Bhandari and Yasunobu, 2009). According to Johnson (2016), social capital is the ability of people to work together and to achieve the common goal between groups and organizations. Jia et al. (2020), define

social capital as identifying certain informal norms and values shared among group members that facilitate cooperation. Further, interpersonal trust is key to establishing social relationships. A feeling of mutual trust improves cooperation between people, reduces transaction costs, and boosts business transactions. Moreover, he emphasized that social capital results from the qualities found in social relationships and provided a single, straightforward measure of social capital: how many people believe that most people can be trusted. Due to the multidimensional nature of social capital, it should not be the only indicator.

Wu (2021), defines social capital as an investment with a projected return on investment in a social relationship. Operationally, social capital is any resource based on social networks that actors can access and use to further their actions. The notion consists of two main elements:(i)it represents societal resources instead of personal resources, and (ii)actors are responsible for gaining access to and using them. According to the first element, social capital can be viewed as an investment in human connections that have potential financial value. Actors connect and interact with one another to accomplish their goals. According to Tonkaboni et al. (2013), social capital is the ability of an individual to show empathy, advantage, and preferential treatment for another individual or group that goes beyond what is expected in exchange interactions. Claridge (2018c), argues that this idea clarifies the nature of capital and its potential advantages, emphasizing the transformation power of capital embodied in interpersonal interconnection. Johnson (2016), proposed that for strategic leaders to manage their organizations effectively, they must reunite social capital within units and organizations with external social capital. Effective strategic leadership develop social capital, resulting in favorable organizational outcomes. Therefore, the business's success is impacted by strategic leaders' capability to continuously create and effectively integrate the external social capital into internal social capital.

2.19 Criticism of social capital

Social capital has been perceived as a solution that provides answers beyond economics. Its smooth and wide application has made it the most popular concept in the social sciences. The concept and theory of social capital are so complex that entire books have been written on it. According to Claridge (2018a), social capital has been criticised mostly for its ambiguity and variability. The author believes that discussing the criticisms of the concept is very important since it allows us to focus on the potential weaknesses and our application

of it. This offers an opportunity to improve our practice and the validity or effectiveness of our projects involving social capital. Many of the criticisms are valid, and failing to account for them could result in social capital projects being open to scrutiny.

The criticisms of social capital theory are that it is not social capital or a theory (Claridge, 2018a,1-8). This lack of substance has led some authors to describe the concept as fundamentally flawed. According to Haynes (2009), it is impossible to measure that the complexity of the model makes it a repetition and that a positive and negative outcome can occur in different contexts. Some aspects are objective, but others are subjective. Some are cognitive, but others are pre-cognitive. Social capital can be rational, pre-rational, or even non-rational. As a result, social capital may be seen as more of an umbrella concept than a working theory. Social capital in practice can be challenging to measure and quantify accurately, leading to debates about its conceptualization and operationalization. Different researchers and scholars may define and measure social capital in various ways, making comparisons and generalizations difficult (Klein, 2013,891-911).

According to Van Tubergen and Volker (2015), the distribution of social capital is not uniform across societies. Social capital networks can sometimes perpetuate existing inequalities, favouring those already well-connected or part of privileged social groups. This can reinforce social hierarchies and exclude marginalized or disadvantaged individuals and communities. It can perpetuate exclusion and social closure. Social capital can contribute to creating exclusive social networks that limit access to opportunities and resources for individuals not part of those networks. This can lead to social closure and inhibit social mobility.

Critics also argue that viewing social relationships primarily through an economic lens, as a form of capital, can diminish the intrinsic value of human interactions and relationships. It may reduce genuine social interactions to calculative and exploitive exchanges. Burt (2009), on the other hand, argues that the value and meaning of social capital can vary significantly across cultures and contexts. What constitutes a valuable social connection in one culture may differ in another, making the universal applicability of the concept questionable. While social capital is often discussed in terms of its potential collective benefits, Poortinga (2006), argue that individuals might strategically use social connections for personal gain without contributing to collective well-being.

Ivana (2017), is of the view that social capital theory tends to focus more on the positive aspects of social networks and relationships, overlooking the potential negative consequences and conflicts that can arise within these networks. Issues like symbiotic benefits expectations are just but one negative aspect that leads to broken relationships because of unfulfilled expectations. Some researchers, like Hughes et al. (2011), raised concerns about the methodological limitations of studying social capital, including causality, selection bias, and the difficulty of establishing a clear cause-and-effect relationship between social capital and desired outcomes. It is evident from the argument above that social capital lacks a unified and widely accepted theoretical framework (Toyon, 2022,1-15).

Different scholars have proposed various definitions and theoretical approaches, which can lead to confusion and challenges in building a cohesive body of research and a formalised concept to be taught as a curriculum subject that can be used to build social cohesion and a united nation. Klein (2013), on the other hand, argues that social capital can sometimes be overly simplistic in its explanation of complex social phenomena, potentially overlooking other important factors that influence social interactions and outcomes. While social capital has gained significant attention and recognition for its potential to explain social interactions, networks, and their impact on various aspects of society, it is not without criticism. Despite these criticisms, social capital remains a valuable concept that offers insights into the dynamics of social networks and relationships. The concept continues to be used and applied. Researchers continue to engage with these critiques to refine the concept and its application in understanding and addressing social issues. In fact, much of the social capital literature uses the concept mostly in a vague and often careless manner. The concept of social capital seems almost resistant to criticism (Haynes, 2009,56-78). Depending on the theoretical perspective, most critiques are valid or invalid. For example, consider the criticism that social capital is not social; while it may be true from some authors' conceptions, many other authors don't see it that way.

2.20 Types of social capital

The study has divided social capital into various groups according to its characteristics and purposes. The study's most prevalent types of social capital include bonding, bridging, linking and structural and cognitive social capital (Claridge, 2018b,1-26).

1. ***Bonding Social Capital:*** According to Claridge (2018b), bonding social capital defines the connection within a group or community characterised by high levels of

similarity in demographic characteristics, attitudes and available information and resources. It occurs between people like us who are in it together and usually have strong, close relationships. Examples include family members and close friends. Whereas Johnson (2016), defines bonding social capital as the strong relationships that grow between people of similar backgrounds and interests, it usually includes family and friends, provides material and emotional support and is more inward-looking and protective. Martikke (2017), argues that bonding social capital also refers to the networks with a high density of relationships between members, where most, if not all, individuals belonging to the network are interconnected because they know each other and interact frequently with each other.

2. ***Bridging Social Capital:*** Johnson (2016), defines bridging social capital as a type of social capital that defines connections that connect people across a cleavage that divides society, such as race, class or religion. It is associations that bridge between communities, groups, or organizations. Further, it is stated that bridging social capital differs from bonding social capital, which is within social groups and is characterised by a dense network with people feeling a sense of shared identity and belonging. The bonding and bridging distinction can be made in relation to a range of relationship and network characteristics. Bridging describes social exchange relationships, often of associations between people with shared interests or goals but contrasting social identities. The difference between bonding and bridging social capital refers to the nature of the relationships, which are associations in the social group or community. Bonding social capital is within a group or community, whereas bridging social capital is between social groups, social class, race, religion or other important sociodemographic or socioeconomic characteristics. The bonding and bridging differences can be made in relation to a range of relationship and network characteristics.

The table below summarises the main features of each.

Bonding Social Capital	Bridging Social Capital
Within	Between
Intra	Inter
Exclusive	Inclusive
Closed	Open
Inward looking	Outward looking
Getting by	Getting ahead
Horizontal	Vertical
Integration	Linkage
Strong ties	Weak ties
People who are alike	People who are different
Thick trust	Thin trust
Network closure	Structural holes
Public-good model	Private-good model

Table 2. 2: Distinctions between bonding and bridging social capital

Source: Taken from Claridge (2018c)

3. **Linking Social Capital:** According to Jia et al. (2020), linking social capital is a type of social capital based on norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradient in society. These relationships are defined as vertical, and the key component is differences in social position or power, i.e., could be relationships between a community-based organization and government or other funders. According to Claridge (2018a), linking social capital is the third type of social capital that extends the common bonding and bridging distinction that is popular in the network theory approach to social capital. Further, it stated that linking social capital may be an extension of bridging social capital involving networks and ties with individuals, groups, or corporate actors re-presenting public agencies, schools, and businesses. Moreover, linking social capital refers to the relations between individuals and groups in different social strata in a hierarchy where different groups access power, social status and wealth. It is the extent to which individuals build

relationships with institutions and those with relative power over them (providing access to services). Linking relationships also include reciprocity. For example, funders expect effective quality service for their grants and mentors hope that the people they work with will reflect well on them by doing well in their lives or providing the same assistance to others. It has been suggested by Jia et al. (2020) that strategic leaders need to reunite social capital within units and organizations with social capital in the external environment and social capital in the external environment. For this study, social capital means the connection and interaction between diverse groups at different levels presented as interconnected, bridging, and linking. This study seeks to investigate these three types of social capital used by GSB and Leadership UKZN leaders during disruptive times to achieve academic resilience. This definition is relevant and useful because it helps the study to analyse the effective strategies of collective action, in mobilizing, bridging, and linking social capital during the pandemic Covid-19 and to promote bonding social capital for the continuity of business at GSB and Leadership UKZN.

2.21 Dimensions of social capital

Previous studies have acknowledged the role of social capital in enhancing resilience following disasters. However, there is a shortage of research on social capital and organizational resilience. According to Jia et al. (2020), organizations can benefit from established relationships to recover in the face of unprecedented crisis. Social capital resides in relationships created through exchange, providing access to resources. Therefore, social capital provides a theoretical framework for examining the competitive advantage gained by organizations by leveraging their social networks.

According to Bhandari and Yasunobu (2009), social capital is defined in terms of bonding, bridging and linking. Another approach defines social capital as structural, relational, and cognitive capital. Although bonding, bridging, and linking social capital are related, they represent different elements of the social environment. It must be acknowledged that not all organizations can utilize social capital in disaster response and recovery. The distinction between structural, cognitive, and relational social capital is the most widely used and accepted framework for understanding social capital. These dimensions are conceptual distinctions that are useful for analytic convenience, but in practice, social capital involves complex interrelations between the three dimensions that will be discussed below:

1. ***Structural Social Capital:*** Structural social capital refers to the configuration of linkages between people across organizations: who you reach and how you reach them. It is related to the impersonal configuration of linkages within a social structure and can be assessed from the perspective of social ties (Claridge, 2018b1-26). These social ties can potentially provide access to valuable information. Studies suggested that structural capital among partnering companies creates a structure with dense interactions, including a high frequency of interactions among partners and multiple connections that facilitate the exchange of more readily accessible and can, therefore, be available early as part of the warning system. Multiple connections can help partner organizations design a structure with different contact points within and across different levels of the organizations.
2. ***Cognitive Social Capital:*** Cognitive social capital is defined as the resources that provide shared representations, interpretations, and systems of meaning among parties (Costa et al., 2014). It represents similar ambitions, visions, goals, and cultural values between organizational actors within a social system. Similar business goals are the degree to which parties share a common understanding and approach to the achievement of common tasks and outcomes. It can guide the nature, direction, and magnitude of the efforts of the parties (Claridge, 2018b,1-33). Committed parties have a deeper understanding of why a relationship exists and how they can contribute to the attainment of compatible goals. Overall, cognitive capital facilitates the development of common understanding and collective ideologies, outlining appropriate ways supply chain partners coordinate their exchange and share each other's thinking process.
3. ***Relational Social Capital:*** Cognitive, social capital entails the strength of the relationship, in which trust, friendship, respect and reciprocity are embedded and developed through organizations' repeated transactions with their partners (Claridge, 2018b,1-33). When trust is built through repeated transactions, decision-makers tend to be less concerned about the opportunistic behaviour of others. They are more willing to communicate openly and show greater behavioural transparency. Similarly, reciprocity norms also transform decision-makers from self-centred partners into members of a friendship with shared interests and a sense of a common goal.

Structural	Cognitive	Relational
Social structure	Shared understanding	Nature and quality of relationships
Network and configuration Roles, rules, precedents, and procedures	Shared language, codes, and narratives Shared values, attitudes, and beliefs	Trust and trustworthiness Norms and sanctions Obligations and expectations Identity and identifications

Table 2. 3: Distinctions between structural, cognitive, and relational social capital

Source: Taken from Claridge (2018b)

4. ***Relational of Organisational Resilience and Social Capital:*** Organizational resilience refers to an organization's ability to cope well following disruptions (Acciarini et al., 2021). Organizations need internal and external resources to overcome the negative consequences of a disruptive event (Jia, 2018,101614). Resilient organizations should be able to keep their critical operating functions active following disruptive events by using internal resources (e.g., personnel, facilities, raw materials, information and data) and external resources (Alias et al., 2019,23-44). The effective and efficient use of resources is necessary for maintaining business continuity and implementing recovery plans successfully. This study focuses on external resources that play a crucial role in building organizational resilience. Maintaining the relationship with business partners as external resources plays the most influential role in overcoming the negative consequences of any disruption. In this regard, social capital is regarded as a valuable external resource that can support an organization to build its resilience capacity. Agasisti et al. (2018), stated that social capital tightly relates to organizational resilience, which enables organisations to have quick access to numerous valuable resources during adverse situations; they also state that social capital can be a solution and provide the ability to an organization to respond and cope with uncertain external disruptions.
5. ***Structural Capital and Organisational Resilience:*** According to Aldrich and Meyer (2015), structural capital in social interactions provides certain benefits to organizations, such as information and resources. According to Jia et al. (2020),

during disruptive events, the flow of information and resources is usually disrupted and has a negative impact on an organization's operations. During such a disruption, access to valuable information and resources is critical for mitigating the negative consequence. Organizations with strong structural capital are more likely to obtain such valuable information and resources.

According to Aldrich and Meyer (2015), social interactions mature and develop. Frequent communication and interaction strengthen organisations' relationships and provide access to reliable resources and information. Thus, organizations with solid structural capital are flexible enough to move to alternative networks that have not been affected by disruptive events (Aldrich and Meyer, 2015). Alias et al. (2019), stated that this assists organisations in recognizing possible opportunities and threats during crises and further helps them to set exact strategies for crisis prevention and response. Engbers et al. (2017), asserted in their study that structural capital provides good-quality information and resources that enable continuity in organizational operations and improve organizational resilience. A network of connections and dense interactions within and across organizations allow easy access to reliable information and diverse resources (Fandiño et al., 2019,137-152). In addition, strong and dense structural capital influences the quick transfer of information. Acciarini et al. (2021), argue that this impacts the effectiveness and effective planning, responding, and recovering activities essential for improving the organization's resilience capabilities. As Jia (2018), pointed out, strong structural capital is associated with frequent interactions within an organization and with its supply chain partners, increasing the availability of information and resources.

Moreover, it facilitates early awareness of potential disruptions and strategic implementation to cope with disruptions. In contrast, structural capital created for one purpose may be used for another. It may enhance reactive organizational resilience by allowing quick and flexible access to alternative information and resources during disruptive events (Dwiastuti et al., 2022a,233-245). Based on these theoretical arguments, organizational structural capital positively impacts its proactive organizational resilience capability, and structural capital positively impacts reactive organizational resilience capability.

6. *Relational Capital and Organisational Resilience:* The ability to access useful information and resources is facilitated by relational capital, which is essential for proactive and reactive organizational resilience (Matos et al., 2022,276-280). Particularly, relational capital, in the form of mutual trust and beneficial relations

developed over time, facilitates information and resource exchange between organizations and suppliers, especially during crises, making firms and suppliers more cooperative (Matos et al., 2022,276-280). Thus, in this way, organizations can strengthen both their proactive and reactive resilience capabilities.

Matos et al. (2022), suggested that building open, reliable, and flexible social networks enhances proactive and reactive organizational resilience. For example, relational capital in the form of mutual trust ensures organizations and their suppliers have the confidence, willingness, and flexibility to share information and resources, enabling firms to obtain valuable information and resources for implementing and improving coping strategies. Moreover, trust facilitates rapid access to valuable information and resources, particularly critical for enhancing firms' reactive resilience capabilities. Through mutual respect, relationship capital enhances proactive and reactive organizational resilience through sharing tactic resources and information between partners, especially during adverse times (Matos et al., 2022,276-280). Kanyangale and Njoloma (2020), stated that relational capital, such as trust, respect, friendship, and reciprocity, facilitates the exchange of information and resources between an organization and its partners, positively impacting both proactive and reactive organizational resilience. Therefore, organizational resilience is positively influenced by a firm's relational capital and Relational capital has a positive impact on reactive resilience within an organization.

7. ***Cognitive Capital and Organisational Resilience***: The concept of cognitive capital plays a positive role in both reactive and proactive organizational resilience since it enhances the capability of managing potential failures in a variety of situations (Costa et al., 2014,123-130). Through shared common vision, value, purpose and goals, cognitive capital enhances the willingness of network members to participate in proactive and reactive organizational resilience activities (Aldrich and Meyer, 2015,343-350). Having compatible goals and values between partners brings and keeps people together. By having shared goals and values, organizations are more emotionally and cognitively connected (Lalramchuan, 2021,349-356). It has been shown that strong identification among network members fosters a positive cognitive orientation and a sense of direction during external crises (Aldrich and Meyer, 2015,343-350). Reactive organisation resilience is strengthened by encouraging network members to move forward in the face of unfavourable circumstances. According to Claridge (2018b), cognitive capital can filter information to understand

a phenomenon, influencing a manager's perspective and directing an organization's reactions. Organizational resilience can be strengthened and built by enhancing proactive and reactive (Acciarini et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Acciarini et al. (2021), emphasized the importance of strong core values, which promote organizational resilience by enhancing the organization's ability to solve problems and its proactive and reactive resilience. On the other hand, cognitive capital constructs meaning about real and potential disruptions, and helps organizations to respond accurately to current and potential disruptions, improving both proactive and reactive organizational (Claridge, 2018b,1-26). Furthermore, cognitive capital makes it possible for an organization to constantly consider and improve its expectations and perspective on current functioning, enabling it to be more proactive in dealing with disruptions. Cognitive capital also promotes proactive organizational resilience by creating a high level of awareness and attentiveness to potential disruptions, so that an organization can be prepared to deal with potential disruptions. Therefore, based on these theoretical arguments, it is noted that organizational cognitive capital is positively influenced by proactive organizational resilience capability, and cognitive capital positively impacts its reactive organizational resilience capability.

2.22 Previous studies of social capital in the university

In recent years, research has suggested that social capital can be important in various fields, such as social science, political science, economics, and management (Tonkaboni et al., 2013,40-50). Social capital has become one of the most important aspects of any development. Hence, social capital is regarded as one of the most important characteristics of social growth and development. Social capital refers to inclusive concepts such as trust, cooperation, and collaboration among community members that form a targeted system (Nelson, 2021). As a result, they pursue worthy goals with the support of social capital. Tonkaboni et al. (2013), noted the relevance of social capital to some concepts such as urgency, collective interest, values, and social trust, which all include glimpses of concept dimension.

Labra et al. (2021), research and others led to the official formation and use of social capital. In addition to its functionality and benefits, social capital can be beneficial to individuals and communities. Therefore, community social capital increases and expands the community's economy, culture, and political participation. According to Tonkaboni et al.

(2013), social capital consists of three components: social trust (resulting from justice, equality, and social security), social integration (when people's emotions are expressed through their cultural symbols, adjusted actions, and harmony through cultural norms), and social participation (benefit from collaboration and group participation. Among the constituent social capital institutions are the family, educational institutions, religious institutions, market institutions, government agencies, and civil society organizations. The universities and higher education systems are, however, the most important institutions for developing, managing, and growing social capital. Most researchers, including Chakrabarti and Santoro (2004), argue that social capital is a function of educational institutions and communities. These institutions were made and grew by the same social capital. On a social level, education today is synonymous with socialization. According to Robertson et al. (2019), higher educational organizations, especially universities, can significantly improve community relations by fostering social solidarity and modernistic enthusiasm. Further, most societies have relationships with diverse cultures, genders, and racial groups, and training so that young people and minorities can learn about the culture of their communities. In this way, a relatively homogeneous population will be formed with values that are similar to each other.

Dika and Singh (2002), claim that social networks based on learning environments influence attitudes toward job opportunities, access to information, and student interactions. Tonkaboni et al. (2013), believe that social capital promotes academic achievement and innovation in the university. Through group and service learning, a variety of teaching methods can promote social capital. According to Dika and Singh (2002), the transfer of value, norms, and culture occurs in an academic setting with its subculture. It facilitates the development of new social networks and links within the university system that lead to the strengthening of the social capital of the scholars. By combining knowledge and motivation, social trust influences knowledge creation.

In education, they are effective when establishing formal networks, such as university systems and informal networks, such as social networks, values, and norms shared by people as a group. Martin (2009), conducted research at universities on the relationship between educational systems and social capital to explain why educated people are transitioning from tradition to modernity. Students at universities and higher education institutions have low academic socialization. As far as academic socialization is concerned, only the educational aspect has been addressed. Social capital and educated graduates are being lost because the

community's sense of richness and needlessness is paralleling the development of science and technology (Martin, 2009,185-210). Therefore, to enhance social participation and trust among individuals, especially among the educated, it is necessary to prepare education and higher education systems objectives and curricula based on the components of social capital and the requirements of the day (Robertson et al., 2019,461-472). Higher education systems need to define their position on the development of social capital and design their curricula accordingly.

2.23 Summary

This chapter has explored the concepts of strategic leadership, organisational resilience, and social capital, which are key to this qualitative study. It critically discusses the origin of strategic leadership traced to the upper echelon theory and the functions of leadership at the top level of an organisation. Further, the chapter has discussed the concept of organizational resilience, its different components, and the notion of social capital. The types of social capital discussed in this chapter include bonding, bridging and linking social capital networks for support in realising effective organisational resilience at a university during a disruptive event. The next chapter discussed the research methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Research methodology refers to the process and tools in conducting research studies (Patel and Patel, 2019,48-55). Its main point of emphasis is the stages involved in carrying out a research project. Thus, the methods and processes employed to carry out the current study are discussed in this chapter. It starts by describing the type of data that was gathered. After that, the chapter discusses the research paradigm, the study's overall design, sampling methods, and data analysis methods.

3.2 Research paradigm

Khalidi and Research (2017), define a research paradigm as a tool defining how researchers conduct their research. The research paradigm provides the researcher with a roadmap for the methods used to conduct their study (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019,8-255). Ultimately, the research paradigm is a comprehensive research approach that reflects a researcher's understanding of the different areas they are studying and how best to acquire knowledge about their research (Hart, 2010).

Kaushik and Walsh (2019), state that after deciding on a topic, a researcher must carefully analyse the research approach they will use to further their topic. Depending on the researcher's viewpoint and how they plan to explore the issue, their approach will determine whether the findings are trustworthy to the researcher and other members of their discipline (Hart, 2010). Researchers' opinions regarding knowledge and truth also influence their thinking, beliefs, and assumptions about society (Laher, 2007,120-122). Accordingly, researchers determine how they assess or interpret the world (Haseman, 2006,98-106). It has been suggested that a paradigm is an attempt to frame the world through the researcher's lens (Haseman, 2006,98-106). A paradigm, therefore, guides researchers into asking specific questions and using appropriate methods to conduct their research methodology (Kamal, 2019,1386-1394). As a result, the choice of research paradigm influences the design of a study.

According to Brown and Dueñas (2020), a research paradigm is a connected system of behaviours and ideas that define the nature of enquiry on three levels: ontology, epistemology and methodology. The primary focus of the ontological and epistemological components of the research is an individual's worldview, which is believed to play a significant role in how people interpret the significance of various aspects of reality (Panhwar et al., 2017,253-259). Objectivism and constructivism are the two basic worldviews. Objectivism holds that items exist and have significance regardless of our awareness, whereas constructivism holds that reality is a social or psychological construct. Depending on the aim and kind of the study, one of these worldviews could be too simplistic or excessively complicated in some situations.

Guba and Lincoln (1994), identified three existing worldviews: positivism, post-positivism, and postmodernism. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), positivism is based on realism, which holds that reality does exist. The term positivism is thought to have first been coined by Auguste Comte, as cited (Pickering, 2003,13-40). According to Pickering (2003), in conceptualising the term, Comte intended for the term conceptualization to represent the rigorous empirical method of study, which requires that any assertions about knowledge be based only on experience. According to the theory, the best foundation for studying the social sciences was provided by the methodologies and procedures from natural science (Chilisa and Kawulich, 2012,51-61). The positivist perspective expressed by Panhwar et al. (2017), holds that research findings may never be completely certain or objective, regardless of how closely a scientist adheres to the scientific method. For this reason, Rehman and Alharthi (2016), changed the positivist concept of certainty to probability. Conversely, post-positivism contends that positivism's narrow view of reality makes it susceptible to flawed and probabilistic understanding (Guba and Lincoln, 1994,2-105).

According to Panhwar et al. (2017), post-positivism offers an essential framework of an ideal state that is vital to pursuing knowledge, even though it holds that complete objectivity is impossible to achieve. Both post-positivism and positivism are objectivistic, so they can be viewed as similar concepts. Guba and Lincoln (1994), claim that because post-modernism embraces a transactional and subjectivist epistemology, it is a component of critical theory. Critical theory tends to be subjective as the researcher and the "object" being investigated are presumed to be interactively connected. Through this theory, investigators critique contemporary societal norms, constraints, and injustices by questioning and evaluating society and the effectiveness of the structures that maintain it (Rehman and Alharthi,

2016,51-59). In distinguishing between objectivism and critical theory, Panhwar et al. (2017), state that the purpose of positivism and post-positivism enquiry is to explain, predict and control, while critical theory aims to critique and emancipate. Related to subjectivism is the interpretivism paradigm, described by Panhwar et al. (2017), as placing more emphasis on understanding the world as it is from the subjective experiences of individuals. This approach employs meaning-oriented methodologies based on subjective relationships between the researcher and research participants and typically involve data collection techniques such as interviews or observing participants. As stated by Patel and Patel (2019), interpretivism attempts to understand phenomena through the meanings that individuals give to them. Therefore, this approach contextualises analyses (Panhwar et al., 2017,253-259).

A comparison summary between the two positivists and interpretative paradigms are tabulated.

Point of comparison	Positivist / Post-positivist Paradigm	Interpretative / Constructivist Paradigm
Reason for doing the research	To discover laws that are generalizable and govern the universe	To understand and describe human nature
Philosophical underpinnings	Informed mainly by realism, idealism and critical realism	Informed by hermeneutics and phenomenology
Ontological assumptions	One reality, knowable within probability	Multiple socially constructed realities
Place value in the research process	Science is value free, and values have no place except when choosing a topic	Values are an integral part of social life; no group's values are wrong, only different
Nature of knowledge	Objective	Subjective; idiographic
What counts as truth	Based on precise observation and measurement that is verifiable	Truth is context dependent
Methodology	Quantitative; correlational; quasi-experimental; experimental; causal comparative; survey	Qualitative; phenomenology; ethnographic; symbolic interaction; naturalistic
Techniques of gathering data	Mainly questionnaires, observations, tests and experiments	Mainly interviews, participant observation, pictures, photographs, diaries and documents

Table 3. 1: Comparison of positivist, post-positivist, and interpretative paradigms

Source: Adapted from Chilisa (2011).

The present study is a descriptive study using qualitative technique. It is therefore using an interpretative subjective approach with its main purpose to subjectively report on the truth.

3.3 Research philosophy

Foster et al. (2015), define research philosophy as the system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge they are undertaking. Research philosophy contains important assumptions about the way in which the researcher views the world. These assumptions turn to shape all aspects of your research projects. Research philosophy is also influenced by assumptions and worldviews held by the researcher. These philosophies, in turn, affect research strategy, methods, and interpretation within the field of business. The main research philosophies are:

1. *Positivism* - produces generalizations based on scientific evidence, such as experiments and statistics.
2. *Critical realism* - Uses both positivism and postmodernism elements to search for connections to better understand social events and provide recommendations for addressing them.
3. *Interpretivism* - advocates that people are distinctive from the phenomena as they create significance for events.
4. *Postmodernism* - This term emphasizes the role of language and power relations in challenging conventional thinking patterns and expressing alternative marginalized viewpoints.
5. *Pragmatism* - focuses on actions and consequences rather than cause and effect. The approach is dynamic, and the researcher is free to make changes as necessary as this approach supports the idea that concepts are relevant where they support action.

For this study, an interpretivist philosophy is followed because the researcher sought to gain in-depth insight into the phenomena of strategic leadership and influence to promote resilience within GSB and Leadership UKZN.

3.4 Research method and design

A roadmap for data collection, measurement, and analysis is what research design is (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Three main approaches are typically employed when gathering research data: mixed methods, quantitative methods, and qualitative methods. In short, a researcher conducting qualitative research collects data, analyses it inductively and

concentrates on the interpretations provided by the participants (Hart and Achterman, 2017). When employing this research method, data gathering is typically conducted through interviews and is very rich and in-depth (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). However, the data collected using this technique is non-generalizable due to the small size.

Moreover, qualitative research is very subjective (Laher, 2007,120-122). Quantitative research, on the other hand, is a formal, objective, systematic process that is able to test relationships among different variables (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014). Quantitative methods tend to be more objective than qualitative techniques for collecting, analysing, and interpreting data. Data collection using the quantitative method normally involves structured questionnaires, with response options numerically coded for ease of data analysis and manipulative flexibility. Statistical inferences can often be made with quantitative data, and depending on sample size relative to the population of interest, findings can be generalised (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016).

Furthermore, qualitative research is very subjective (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, Sekaran and Bougie, 2014,344-455). Quantitative research, on the other hand, is a formal, objective, systematic process that is able to test relationships among different variables (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014). Quantitative methods tend to be more objective than qualitative techniques for collecting, analysing, and interpreting data. Data collection using the quantitative method normally involves structured questionnaires, with response options numerically coded for ease of data analysis and manipulative flexibility. Statistical inferences can often be made with quantitative data and depending on sample size relative to the population of interest, findings can be generalised (Babbie, 2010, Sekaran and Bougie, 2014). The final data collection method, the mixed method approach, is basically a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques.

We utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to expand the adopted theoretical model. Strategic leadership as a phenomenon was explored and exploited with a group of individuals who once assumed a senior leading role in managing the current pandemic crisis. The present study is exploratory in nature. Consequently, the qualitative phenomenological research approach was considered the most suitable choice. The qualitative method approach also allowed the researcher flexibility to analyse and manipulate data in a manner that the quantitative approach would not allow. This data

collection method was also preferred because of the potential it is believed to provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena over the entire GSB and Leadership UKZN.

3.5 Research Approach

In theory development, there are three main approaches: deductive, inductive, and abductive. It is important to pay attention to the main differences between the two approaches when deciding whether to use an inductive or deductive approach. According to Anderson (2017), deductive analysis involves developing a theory and hypothesis that will be tested. This approach is undertaken by developing a hypothesis. The term 'deductive' refers to reasoning from the general to the specific. According to Anderson (2017), the inductive approach is where data are collected, and a theory is developed as a result of the data analysis. It is generally associated with qualitative research. The researcher begins with a completely open mind- that is, with no preconceived ideas- and collects and analyses data that results in creating a series of propositions or hypotheses.

In this study, no theoretical framework or prior assumptions are being tested. For this study, an inductive approach was adopted as the study focused on gaining insight into the specific behaviours and activities of Strategic Leadership working within the GSB and Leadership UKZN during Covid-19, as evident in the data.

3.6 Research strategies

According to de Villiers et al. (2022), research strategies are a step-by-step plan of action that provides direction to your thoughts and efforts, enabling a researcher to conduct research systematically and schedule to produce quality results and detailed reporting. Strategies employed by researchers are experiments, surveys, archival research, case studies, ethnography, action research, grounded theory, and narrative enquiry. According to Creswel (2009), qualitative researchers select from narrative inquiry, phenomenology, ethnography, case study and grounded research approaches. In addition to the research strategy, the researcher's goals, namely the exploration, description, or explanation of the research topic, are closely related to the research design.

1. Interviews

The research interview is a conversation to gather information. It is an important data collection technique involving verbal communication between the researcher and the

subject. A research interview involves an interviewer, who coordinates the process of the conversation and asks questions, and an interviewee, who responds to those questions. Interviews can be conducted face-to-face or over the phone. The rise of electronic networks and the internet has led to the development of computer-mediated tools for conducting research interviews, such as Zoom and Teams. Researchers commonly use interviews in exploratory and descriptive studies and survey designs. According to de Villiers et al. (2022), face-to-face interviews are helpful because they provide additional information through social cues such as body language and voice intonation, while interviews conducted via electronic communication methods allow researchers to speak with people around the world.

2. Structured interviews

According to DeJonckheere et al. (2019), a structured interview is where the researcher asks a set of standard questions, predetermined questions about the topics, in a specific order. The respondents need to select their answers from a list of options. The researcher may provide clarification on some questions. Structured interviews are typically used in surveys.

3. Semi-structured interviews

According to de Villiers et al. (2022), the researcher uses predetermined questions, and the respondents answer in their own words. Some researchers use a topic guide as a checklist to ensure that all respondents provide information on the same topics. The researcher can probe areas based on the respondent's answers or ask supplementary questions for clarification. Semi-structured interviews are useful when there is a need to collect in-depth information in a systematic manner from several number of respondents.

4. Unstructured interviews

According to DeJonckheere et al. (2019), the researcher has no specific guidelines, restrictions, predetermined questions, or list of options. The researcher asks a few broad questions to engage the respondent in an open, informal, and spontaneous discussion. The researcher also probes further questions and explores inconsistencies to gather more in-depth information. Unstructured interviews are particularly used to get the stories behind respondents' experiences or when little information about the topic exists.

An unstructured interview aims to expose the researcher to unanticipated themes and to help them gain a better understanding of the interviewee's social reality from the interviewee's perspective. This interview method requires detailed knowledge and intense preparation on

the researcher's part to understand the interview can give useful data information; however, the volume of data collected can be time-consuming to transcribe and analyse.

3.7 Target population

According to Saunders and Townsend (2018), the target population is the complete set of cases or group members from which the sample will be drawn. The targeted study was the strategic leaders at the GSB and Leadership UKZN. The study specifically aimed to gain insight and understanding of how strategic leaders influence the direction and activities of the GSB and Leadership UKZN in leading through disruptive times to ensure academic resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.8 Sample population and sampling

The GSB and Leadership UKZN has approximately 7 key leaders who are involved in making strategic decisions about academic activities and operations.

The senior leaders of the GSB and Leadership UKZN (Head of School, Operations Manager, Academic Manager, Academic Leaders for Research and Academic Leaders of Teaching and Learning), only those working during Covid-19, were selected and the upper echelon members. The selection criteria were senior leaders with not less than three years of experience in a GSB, members of a strategic leadership team, and willing to provide insight and reflection on their strategic leadership practices.

The present study is explorative. As the results are intended to understand and describe human nature over the entire GSB and Leadership UKZN population, purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling as a technique means the researcher selects specific individuals for inclusion in a sample based on the purpose of the study. This method is commonly used when the researcher wants to include individuals with particular experiences relevant to the research question (Palinkas et al., 2015). Unlike random sampling, where every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected, purposive sampling involves a deliberate and thoughtful selection process. According to Palinkas et al. (2015), the advantage of purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who possess the characteristics or experiences that are most relevant to the research objectives. This ensures the sample is directly aligned with the study's goals, leading to more focused and targeted findings. The second advantage of purposive sampling is that in-depth exploration is useful when exploring specific cases in-depth. By intentionally selecting participants with

unique characteristics or experiences, so that the research can gain deeper understanding of a particular behaviour or phenomenon (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). In cases where the target population is small or difficult to access, purposive sampling provides a particular approach (Patton, 2014). The researchers can identify and recruit the most relevant participants without the need for extensive sampling efforts (Palinkas et al., 2015). This method is considered as one of the best data collection techniques because it highly reflects the population of interest (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014). According to Sekaran and Bougie (2014), each individual within a population of interest has a known and or an equally likely chance of being selected as part of the sample using purposive sampling (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014).

3.9 Data collection method

The research data were collected using interviews that strive to understand patterns of leadership activities and behaviours that calling for a qualitative research design (Cleary et al., 2014). Considering the nature of the pandemic, with potential threats to academic continuity and the existence of organizations, participant selection capitalized on utilizing the expert knowledge of executives affiliated with universities showing high organizational resilience. Accordingly, purposive sampling took place. Data were collected through Zoom and semi-structured interviews lasting around 45 to 60 minutes each. Prior to enrolment, an invitation by email to take part in the study was sent to potential subjects. Information pertinent to the aims and objectives of the current research study and consent form encapsulating the subject's voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw at any time was shared.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, facilitating an inductive research style and allowing the researcher to focus at the micro level to address the problem (DeJonckheere et al., 2019). Semi-structured interviews are considered an important data collection tool as they provide relaxed and spontaneous opportunities for participants to share their experiences and allow data analysis, validity checks and triangulation. These interviews usually provide the participants a platform where they can describe complex situations easily and elaborate or clarify questions. Interview recordings were professionally transcribed, and the data were analysed via theoretical thematic analysis Braun and Clarke (2019), in which the data were organized around major findings. The researchers drive theoretical thematic analysis theoretical and analytic interest in a specific area and is thus predominantly

analytically driven. Theoretical thematic analysis was deemed more appropriate for the study as more specific questions need to answer concerns the resilience of GSB and Leadership UKZN towards the Covid-19 pandemic. Hence the thematic area and second order themes in this study were driven by the literature of anticipating, coping and adaptation, with the first-order themes subsequently emerging from the data.

3.10 Data pre-testing of the interview guide

The researcher initially pre-tested the interview guide (see Appendix 5) with an individual who had the same characteristics as the study population. The first pre-test of the interview guide enabled the researcher to identify problems with the questions and take corrective action. Shortcomings in the interview guide were attended to. Some questions were rephrased to ensure that they were clearly understood. Other questions were deleted or added as necessary so that the questions were more focused and enabled the researcher to gather data on strategic leaders' influence on direction and activities during the disruptive times to ensure academic resilience. The researcher divided the questions into three categories and added an introductory statement to each category to make the purpose clear to the participants.

The second pre-test of the interview guide was with an individual who satisfied all the requirements of the sample population. The researcher went through all the questions with the individual and realised that the order of specific questions needed to be adjusted to facilitate the flow of the interview and the participants' thought processes. This assisted with easier follow-up questions while on a particular topic and avoided unnecessary interference with the participant's train of thought. Changes were made to the questionnaire immediately after the session.

3.11 Data analysis

The researcher utilised thematic analysis to analyse the interview data collected in this study. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data, Braun and Clarke (2006). The authors advocate that thematic analysis is both an adaptable and valuable method in qualitative research and provides a recipe for people to undertake thematic analysis in a way that is theoretically and methodologically sound.

Table 3. 2: Fifteen-point checklist of criteria for proper thematic analysis

Process	No.	Criteria
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for accuracy.
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead, the coding process has been thorough, inclusive, and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
Analysis	7	Data have been analysed – interpreted, made sense of - rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8	Analysis and data match each other – the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic.
	10	A right balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
Overall	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
Written report	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis is explicated.
	13	There is a good fit between what the researcher claims to do, and what the researcher shows to be done – i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15	The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just emerge.

Source: Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006)

3.12 Research quality

According to Anderson (2017), qualitative research quality can be achieved through the implementation of the following eight criteria. A summary of these criteria can be found in Table 3-3 below, along with practices, methods, and means to achieve them.

Table 3. 3: Eight big-tent criteria for excellent qualitative research

Criteria for quality (end goal)	Various means, practices, and methods through which to achieve
Worthy topic	The topic of research is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant; Timely; Significant and Interesting
Rich rigour	The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical constructs • Data and time in the field • Sample(s) • Context(s) • Data collection and analysis processes
Sincerity	The study is characterised by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher • Transparency about the methods and challenges
Credibility	The research is marked by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thick description, concrete details, explication of tacit (non-textual) knowledge and showing rather than telling • Triangulation or crystallization • Multivocality • Member reflections
Resonance	The research influences affect or move particular readers or a variety of audiences through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic, evocative representation • Naturalistic generalisations • Transferable findings
Significant contribution	The research provides a significant contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptually / theoretically • Practically • Morally • Methodologically and Heuristically
Ethical	The research considers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedural ethics (such as human subjects) • Situational and culturally specific ethics • Relational ethics • Exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing research)
Meaningful coherence	<u>The study:</u> Achieves what it purports to be about; Uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals; Meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other

Source: Adapted from Anderson (2017).

3.13 Ethical consideration

The study complied with the UKZN ethical procedures. In research, ethics processes adhere to the principles of doing no harm (Kuper et al., 2008). This means that participants protection is given high priority. The following protocols were followed to ensure adherence to ethical standards:

1. Gatekeeper's letter

The gatekeeper's letter was sought from the UKZN ethics department and was granted as a protective measure for participants and the university.

2. Voluntary participation

Volunteers always have the right to participate in research at their discretion. The specifics of the study were thoroughly explained to the participants. Senior leaders at GSB and Leadership UKZN who participated in this study were made aware that it was voluntary and could withdraw at any time without any consequences. The participant information sheet was given before the interview (see Appendix 5 for the participant information sheet).

3. Informed consent

The participants in this study, senior leaders at GSB and Leadership UKZN, were assured of their rights to consent or withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Therefore, an information sheet letter and a consent form were given before the interview. The researcher ensured that the participants signed the informed consent form before the interviews commenced to fully understand the study (see Appendix 4 for informed consent).

4. Confidentiality and anonymity

In this study, confidentiality and anonymity were given top priority. Anonymity and confidentiality were critical to this study. Participants at the GSB and Leadership UKZN were informed that only the researcher and the research supervisor could access the recordings and transcripts. Anonymity was ensured as no identifiers were recorded with responses. The researcher used code names instead of real names to report the study findings. Participants were informed that the research report would not mention their names, departments, or job titles.

5. Ethical clearance

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the UKZN before the commencement of the study. Therefore, the researcher upheld all

necessary ethical issues by adhering to UKZN standards and obtaining an ethical clearance letter (See Appendix 1).

3.14 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology used in this study. A brief discussion of the research paradigm culminated in why the researcher selected a qualitative approach for this study. Furthermore, the construction and testing of the research data collection tool were also detailed. In addition, a description of the data collection and analysis tools used in the study was also stated. The data collected using the methods outlined in this chapter will be presented and discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER FOUR

Presentation of Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the exploratory research findings on the strategic leadership influence of the GSB and Leadership UKZN. The presentation of the findings of this study is structured according to the three research objectives. First, the chapter presents the key themes of activities employed during the disruptive time. Secondly, the chapter focuses on the use of social capital to lead self and others during remote and hybrid work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Lastly, the chapter presents themes on practices of coping, which were used by strategic leaders during the period of turbulence and instability as they implemented new academic teaching and learning methods and work-related policies in disruptive times during the Covid-19 pandemic before the chapter summary.

4.2 Presentation of Findings

The study's findings reveal various themes and sub-themes which reveal strategic leadership influence. It also presents the consequences faced in influencing the activities and the commitment to strategic vision by strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN.

4.3 Themes on strategic leadership influence on direction and activities of GSB and Leadership UKZN in leading through the Covid-19 disruptive time, to ensure academic resilience

The study reveals a variety of five themes relating to strategic leadership influence at GSB which include (1) Strategic thinking (2) Redesigning of teaching and learning from face to face to online (3) Resource allocation (4) Communication (5) strategic commitment as shown in table 4.1 below.

Table 4. 1: Themes on strategic leadership influence on direction and activities during disruptive time to ensure academic resilience

Strategic leadership influence on activities and direction	Frequency
1. Strategic thinking	5
2. Redesigning of teaching and learning from face to face to online	6
3. Resource allocation	6
4. Strategic communication	5
5. Strategic commitment	5

Source: Authors composition

4.4 Strategic thinking

The findings revealed that strategic leadership at that time were demanded to respond to disruptive events and ensure academic resilience. They were able to assess the situation, identify challenges and opportunities, and make informed decisions, plan for the future that aligns with the university's goals of continuous online academic learning and teaching. Academic leaders and staff had a very condensed timeframe (approximately a week) to plan, create, prepare, and launch a flexible online school program. Their strategic thinking resulted in the identification of strategic interventions with the guidance of the Dean.

A total of six participants were interviewed, and all indicated that there was a collective approach and team spirit in addressing the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic impact on effective administration, academic teaching and learning at the GSB and Leadership UKZN. One of the interviewees indicated the following:

And we know that academics were not yet experienced in online delivery. We knew that there would have to be a shift to an online mode of delivery of the academic programs and we needed to make sure that staff were resourced to cope with an online mode of delivery. The Dean of the school at that time, gave guidance on how to compile and how to go about online teaching. She gave valuable information about asynchronous and synchronous modes of delivery on the online. (Participant 2)

One of the interviewees reiterated on the urgency of providing professional development opportunities for GSB and Leadership UKZN to enhance online teaching skills and foster a culture of continuous learning and innovation illustrated as follows:

We needed to then ensure that academics were able to make a swift transition to online delivery. And we know that academics were not yet experienced in online delivery. We needed the change of culture. And that the urgency of Strategic Leaders to respond to change was so important during that time. So that was the important role the top leaders played. They rolled the blade in terms of ensuring that we still achieve the university strategy even whenever the environment has changed. (Participant 5).

4.5 Redesigning of teaching and learning

The findings revealed that strategic leadership at that time were demanded to respond to the urgency and redesign teaching and learning from face-to-face to online learning. They used a comprehensive approach to improve and enhance the educational experience. Strategic leaders of GSB were able to identify specific needs for the students and explore, implement new teaching methodologies and pedagogical approaches. One of participant illustrated in the quote below:

Firstly, GSB has been in a traditional and learning institution whereby classes are done face to face. So then during the time we had to go to online teaching and learning of which it was something that we've never done before. And then looking at our competitors within the industry of business schools, most of them were already doing certain activities online which GSB or the University were lagging behind on. So, it actually assisted us to catch up with the other institutions in terms of teaching and learning online and offering online courses. So, it actually assisted us in order to catch up, because we were just that traditional institution for long. We were comfortable doing it like that and as much as we knew that the market is going towards online momentum. We were not catching up. But then the pandemic, actually pushed us to achieve online teaching and learning very fast. Right now, the pandemic has actually helped us because now in terms of the competitors, we are there as well online. The direction is different because as I said before, we were just a traditional face to face. So now we are face to face and online. So, the direction is no longer similar to how we used to do it. So now we have we are actually into blended learning. So, we use technology we also can use face to face. (Participant 2).

Another participant revealed that strategic leaders provided opportunities to upskill academic staff and student by providing training to adapt to remote teaching methods. This

included training on online pedagogy, technology tools and strategies for engaging students in a virtual environment to ensure academic continuity and resilience as illustrated below:

So, the academics were given a lot of assistance by the School Leadership to persevere with this new mode of delivery. So together with those colleagues, we could quickly, uh, got a program going on how to upskill very quickly or how-to skill our staff with the information on how to deliver online mode of delivery, both in the online doing synchronous and asynchronous engagement with students. We had that before we left. The other was I had to quickly stipulate to staff the arrangements for how we would engage during that time. (Participant 5).

Other participants responded and reflected on the support that was provided by GSB strategic leaders to ensure resilience, this is what he had to say:

It was of course to capacitate everyone in terms of working with technology. It was training and retraining of colleagues and everybody in terms of the use of technology. There are some colleagues that are finding it difficult to utilize that. So, I think that is what we did. So, training of colleagues in terms of the use of technology was, another key thing. (Participant 6).

Another participant reiterated on above point relating to support illustrated as follows:

Yes, there was a lot of motivation, and other things that were happening. Those, unofficial sessions where people just talk and so that we can maintain the relationship that we had. The next thing in terms of the activity was, well, which I found to be very critical in my road was that we had to migrate things from paperwork to what do you call it to “online base”. Yeah, that was the most difficult thing that we had to do. Online phase. It sounds so easy when you say it, but when you are a paper-based university and you have to move to online platforms it becomes so very, very, very difficult. It helps us a lot in terms of being resilient in terms of, Covid-19. (Participant 1).

Positive and negative consequences of redesigning teaching and learning online

Redesigning teaching and learning at GSB and Leadership UKZN led to both positive and negative consequences. The findings revealed that redesigning teaching and learning to online made learning more interactive, engaging and captured students’ interest and

motivation. Academic staff and student became more resilient during the disruptive time of Covid-19 pandemic. One participant illustrated below as follows:

Positive consequences

At the GSB, I wouldn't say there was any negative consequence, because we were doing almost the same thing. And we are a very small school if you know I'm talking about 17 staff members. So, most of the things that I say I am doing. Most likely half of the staff members are doing it. So, they positive and negatives will be the same. And yeah, because we have basically just what we called shared leadership at the GSB. (Participant 1).

One participant elaborated on the positive consequences for the redesigning of teaching and learning at GSB and Leadership UKZN as follows:

It changed GSB for the better because you know, we had always talked at strategic meetings about GSB trying to offer online courses and online teaching as an addition to the current mode. But I think that you know, with every challenge comes opportunity. So, we saw that, we had an opportunity now to kind of move to on to online teaching and learning. So, that was very important for us, and I think, it assisted a lot because even now, we are doing online. If that moment had not come, we would not even have decided that GSB has now move to online. So, in that sense, we had introduced a different mode of delivery and therefore that is a completely different direction. Our previous modes were face to face and block release or evening classes. We had one core goal as an institution or Business School, that is to deliver on our academic programs. So, the overarching direction remain the same, right? And that overarching direction is to deliver quality academic programs to our students. What was different in our direction was the mode of delivery. (Participant 6).

Another one participant added on how redesigning teaching and learning influenced the direction of GSB and Leadership UKZN. This is what he had to say:

On a positive note, virtual classes allowed students and lecturers flexibility and efficiency in terms of time and travelling costs, flexibility in that students were able to attend classes anywhere, in the comfort of their homes, office etc. Students were also able to access lecture videos anytime on the google platform. Positive:

migrating activities to online platform meant there was none or minimal personal contact, which was good to avoid or reduce the chances of people contracting the virus. (Participant 4).

Another participant reiterated this point on staff and lecturers as follows:

It has a positive outcome, you know, seeing that colleagues could work even anywhere, because we've become so accustomed to working together and doing everything in the office and all that, but a positive outcome of all of that was that anybody could work from anywhere and still, do whatever they're supposed to do. So, there was a positive thing for me, and just organizationally to think that everybody could be driving the same strategy, the same everything. So, you know it's not a forced thing that they are together in the same building or so, which is a plus for us. (Participant 6).

One participant reflected on how the redesigning teaching and learning influenced the direction of GSB and Leadership UKZN and this is what he had to say:

I think it was online (influence) and we just had to go fully online and even now we are still online and the ways of assessing students, we had to change to online and continuous assessments. Also, the issue of competency skills. I'm a staff member in terms of online teaching and learning and I think those are the things we see, and the direction now going forward is that we'll see when everything settles down, we will be able to continue with other classes online and other classes face to face so that we can have that blended learning approach within the school. So those are the direction for the school now. (Participant 2).

Another participant considers the redesigning of teaching and learning as a positive benefit to the entire school and how it has built resilience. See response below:

Well, the most important influence was that it made things feel like not a complete change. I don't know how to explain this properly in English. But it made you feel that you still have a place at the GSB. And you can still do your day-to-day work like you used to do before March 2020. So that's the most important thing that happened, because of those activities that were put in place by the strategic leaders. Yeah, so and then I think that was also the target that they wanted everyone to still feel like an academic that still wake up and go into research and teach. It also

exposed that the academia needed to change. It also exposed that we were in a space where we have resisted the change for a very long time. So those are the things that came out of my head. And now, like we got to the point where the academia is accelerated towards online teaching and learning, and the technology is becoming our daily tool that we must use in everything we do. What could have changed in terms of direction is that we are now starting to realise that this has the potential to make more revenue by offering online courses. That's the direction that we started taking. That could be the reason why now there's consideration for a lot of short courses which we didn't have before. Consideration for online MBA which is something that we didn't have. That's the change of direction that came with the Covid-19. Our concern was not to become something different. But it was that because Covid-19 came, can we maintain the high level of learning? (Participant 1).

Another participant reflected on positive consequences that they had a spill over effect on staff in the delivery of the academic programs:

On a positive note, I think it galvanized the staff, right. We found that staff were able to form stronger and more engaging relationships. Uh, because of the lack of face to face, I think there was a big compensation for us to be online to make the calls either on zoom or teams. So, in that sense, there was a big positive it galvanized the academic staff as well as the professional services staff. So, we found that staff were more cohesive. So that positive would have a spill over effect on staff in the delivery of the academic programs. Because if you are more cohesive and you are more galvanized, then there's a better team spirit. So that came out very, very much where we found people were rallying around each other, assisting each other, being very supportive of each other so that the academic programs could continue at a level that we expect the Graduate School to deliver at. So that was the positive right that galvanizing, and cohesiveness spread into the academic program. So much so that we found that the MBA, that's when Covid-19 was approaching its end, or we were approaching the fact that we're going to return to work. Students were quite satisfied. They asked in 2022 that we continue with an online delivery of the MBA program because such was the value it brought to them. (Participant 5).

Another interviewee reflected on positive consequence and that assessments were moved to online and become quicker to assess students. This is what he had to say:

The positive is in terms of staff members. The work was reduced significantly. You prepare for one class, that study material could teach the entire 1,000 students using the effort that you were supposed to be using in just one group of 70 to 80 students. So, we could cover more classes where classes were supposed to be grouped into 5 groups. They have been taught all together in just one session. Assessments were moved to online, and then they become quicker to assess. (Participant 1).

One participant reiterated on the positive consequence of redesigning of teaching and learning to online platform and illustrated below:

Yes, the positive consequences were that, looking at the context of the UKZN, where we often have a master's leg right now. There were strikes like the previous two weeks. There were strikes and of which it's something that our students have been complaining about, that they are not a priority because most of the strikes that happened within the campus were simply because of NESFAS issues. So, then we have students that are paying, especially like your MBA that are paying like R120,000. So those students, they pay from their pockets, or maybe their employers are paying for them. So then when the strike erupts, they get affected because they say when the university takes a decision of saying 'we are closing all our classes', it means everyone is affected. The MBA students are not excluded at the school. So then when we went online, we were able to work without being bothered by the strikes and the tension that comes with strikes and all of that. So, both of us, the students, as well as the lecturers, we were safe. So, then there was like the positive thing about it because we were not going to be affected by strikes anymore. When it is time for exams, we had to make sure what we come up with strategies to do online assessments of which we started doing. When we were doing continuous assessments, we had to come up with strategies on how to do them and make sure we don't compromise on quality of assessments as well. (Participant 2).

Negative consequences

The findings revealed that even though there were positive consequences, there were also negative consequences due to the redesigning of teaching and learning to online platform. This is what the participant had to say:

Although communication was regular, what was negative was that sometimes it was not clear on procedures that needed to be followed. One of the reasons for the lack

of clarity was that this was a sudden and novel virus that was unexpected, therefore there were no policies in place guiding staff and students on how to accomplish some of their activities working remotely. (Participant 4).

Lack of clarity on some processes to be followed due to lack of official policies on Covid-19 / crisis management in place. Also, network connectivity challenges can be a negative for online teaching and learning. Negative effects on the social aspect since people found themselves working alone/isolated in their home offices with no personal/ social interaction with colleagues. (Participant 4).

Another participant revealed another negative consequence regarding some members of the staff who were resisting to move to the new teaching platform:

The challenge in a way that not everyone was keen to online teaching and learning, and not everyone was used to using tools of online teaching and learning. So, it was one of the challenges that we had. Hence, we had to do workshops and trainings on how to facilitate a class online and learning on what works and what doesn't work. And we were learning in there, you know, so whatever we were learning we will do mistakes, but this was a discovery for us. And then we had to improve on that and, certain things like sharing YouTube videos and then the copyright and all of that because, we must adhere to all those rules. Also, on how we upload those YouTube videos online and when we do that, at what extent can we do that because there's certain copyright issues that were involved in. Then and the issue of recording. (Participant 2).

And in my online classes one of the challenges was with the other students, who would say we want recordings, while other lecturers would say I don't want to record the class, and the issue of attendance. Attendance and participation during the online classes because students would just log in and then they are not there. When you ask a question, nobody responds and all of that. So those were the challenges. Then how do we then try to mitigate those challenges as lecturers during that time? So those are the challenges and I think those were the ones that were critical to an extent to also even within the systems that we adopted as the university (Participant 2).

There were certain issues on certain videos not uploading, so it had to be changed and all those certain things within the systems. Sometimes I would say to my system

developers “I need 12345”. But then when I start using it, it doesn't work like that. So that constant back and forth interaction with everyone, it was a real challenge because we were supposed to implement and do it right the first time. Adopt, implement, and use it (Participant 2).

So, there was also load shedding in the mix of all this Covid-19 chaos. I was going to have a class at 6 to 8 for instance, and then suddenly you are on load shedding. I remember at some point I had to do the entire class in the dark, because of load shedding. Sometimes load shedding will affect some and not others and totally affecting your lecture. Sometimes it affected my location and not the students' location, or some of the students. So, it affected all of us. You will say I'm going to have a presentation maybe on Friday, and you assign students to do a group work. Then on the day of presentation, it's either you or some of them don't have electricity and then at that moment in time when you have prepared to say within those presentation I'm going to be allocating marks for those presentations so if they cannot present, it means now you have to reschedule, and say since we couldn't make it, this group couldn't make it on Friday maybe let's do it on Saturday. Then it means now your schedule changes. Your plan is changed. I remember some lecturers and even myself I had to have certain classes on Saturdays of which normally we don't have. Classes are on Mondays to Friday, but then when 'push comes to shove', we must improvise and have them on Saturday. (Participant 2).

There was also an issue with timetables. They will tell you what you are teaching for this coming 2 weeks, and then these things happen. So that's when you would need to negotiate with the students. Others would negotiate to an extent that we either do it on weekends or during the day. But during the day there is a challenge again for some of the students because they are working during the day. (Participant 2).

One strategic leader reflected on the lack of interaction with the lectures as another negative consequences of the redesigning of teaching and learning as follows:

Students didn't have effective interactions with their lecturers. They couldn't spend a lot of time with lecturers, and some were not participating. And they were no longer learning from each other because the Zoom session had to be kept as short as possible so that they can have access to internet. It exposed a lot of challenges that students have at home. And, that students at home, don't have a conducive

environment to study. They were not tested properly. And so, there were a lot of disadvantages in terms of students (Participant 1).

Staff had to start using online learning tools. Well, they were difficult to use, I would say. So, it means that you must change the pedagogy of teaching. You must change your entire teaching methods. You must teach people that you don't know, and you don't see. Basically, you just see the names. Sometimes we cannot even connect the names to the faces. You are unable to see if a person is concentrating. You are unable to assist a person who seemed to be left behind. Because there's just no time for all that. It takes away more time for demonstration. So those are the negative things that came out of that (Participant 1).

One participant reiterated on the point above as follows:

And in terms of the negative, obviously I think you know everything that had to do with Covid-19 was a problem. I think that we are still trying to battle in terms of working online, because working online has its own downside as well. You know, because that human element, it will always lack. You know, there are easier for me as one of the leaders at the GSB. You know just going down to the office of an administrator and asking a question is now different. I must write an email I have to call them. Which is something that is not ideal in an organization where you know we want things to be done quick. You know something needs to be signed. You are sending an email that can be answered an hour later. So, it becomes very hard because you are not in the same building. So those are the negative consequences, which I think I don't know how they can be ironed out, but something that is tricky. (Participant 6).

4.6 Resource allocation

The findings that emerged from the participants reflected that strategic leadership of GSB and Leadership UKZN were able to allocate resources that were required by academic staff, and students effectively to ensure successful online teaching and learning to ensure academic continuity. One participant illustrated below:

We had to ensure connectivity of our staff, so I was very quick in procuring laptops for the professional services staff. Uh, because the laptops and the data were

provisioned, the laptops as I said was provisioned before our departure and a week into our departure, not even a week (Participant 2).

4.7 Strategic communication

The findings revealed that GSB and Leadership UKZN strategic leadership were required to be transparent and be communicative to any changes and new development. This was critical for the leadership to apply their expertise related to leadership during a disruptive event. The interviewees indicated on skills displayed by strategic leaders of UKZN which is communication and transparency. It was critical for strategic leaders during the pandemic to be transparent and communicate any changes especially to internal stakeholders which includes academic staff and students. This included expectations and contingency plans. This is what the participant responded has to say:

One of the main activities used was communication, and it was fundamental because we had to communicate more often and to ensure we are on the same page, because we take the lead from the university as a school, we take the lead from the university. So, then the university informs the college, then the college informs our schools within the college. So, it was a very important duty, whatever they call, I mean the university decides, it gets communicated to us and then we'll have meetings or sessions on how to deal with the new developments. Then we'll see what we could do better in schools. It was important because looking at the calibre of our students, majority of them are employed, so we needed to come up with plans also that are aligned with the strategy. I mean decisions were taken by the country, and everything that the university was doing in response to the pandemic, was from the National Department of Higher Education. And from that we developed strategies that we deployed. So, we had to quickly go back and update the students on that, through established platforms. So, students were to utilize those online platforms as quickly as possible. And they did. (Participant 2).

Participant also reflected on activities employed that provided support to all staff and students to technological access and swift shift to online teaching and learning platform.

It was also sharing of information within the schools. We did a lot of workshops and integration into technology on how we can best utilize the technology. Mm, I think there was also liaison with the students. It was important because we also had to make sure we inform the students with whatever we come up with and getting that

buy-in from the students. It was important that we communicate with them on whatever decisions we had taken as a school. Update them that this is the decision that we have taken, and this is how we're going to proceed during this time. (Participant 2).

Another participant reiterated on the above and this is what he had to say:

So, we had what we call a weekly forum with the Professional services staff to meet with them because it was a very difficult time as well and we needed to keep spirits and emotions in check and get people to transition to the workplace, to the online workspace as swiftly as possible. (Participant 3).

4.8 Strategic commitment

The findings revealed that strategic leaders played a crucial role in shaping the direction of academic resilience in response to the pandemic. Their commitment is aimed at ensuring organizational resilience, adaptability and long-term success in the face of significant change. Their commitment to the strategy significantly impacted how the university leaders responded to the challenges and adapted to the changing circumstances during the Covid-19 pandemic. The strategic leadership of GSB and Leadership UKZN provided a roadmap for building resilience within the school by displaying commitment to the strategy. This was a collective effort, and all leaders at different levels were working towards one goal to achieve stability during the new normal. One of the participants articulated how academic leaders at GSB and Leadership UKZN were committed to the strategy by ensuring academics are provided with a lot of assistance by the school leadership to persevere with this new mode of delivery.

I think we were excessively accessible. If I may put it this way, there was too much accessibility of especially the professional services side and I speak for myself and I speak for the academic leaders, it was not uncommon for us to work a normal day which went into like 6:00 o'clock in the evening, where we would be accessible either by cell phone or through the Skype or through zoom. But I think we were overextending ourselves to the responsibilities that we were faced with. So, people were working, I think beyond the call of duty. The funny thing is that people felt "well you are working from the comfort of your home and you're working online". I think working online and working from home made us very much more accessible than we would be in an office setting and because of that accessibility, we were constantly,

working. We were constantly engaged in activities and tasks to support the academic enterprise. We made that sacrifice during these times to work outside of normal hours. (Participant 4).

Another participant reflected on power of readiness, as an important personal factor perceived as effective in dealing with any disruptive event:

Yes, I think because of our readiness to learn, our readiness to respond to change, our readiness to have a plan in place to deliver the academic program. Also, the willingness of staff to have a lot of meetings in the early part of this disruption and staff was always available to do that. That was already, programmed into staff, they responded literally and were prepared to do what was expected during that time. So, if you want to know why we were able to achieve academic resilience, and I'm taking your definition of achieving academic resilience is in line with the delivery for academic programs, right. We were able to continue with this and achieve this because staff were willing to learn quickly, they were willing to respond to change, and they were willing to also make personal sacrifices. (Participant 5).

One participant reiterated on the point above and this is what he had to say:

Responding quick and being decisive by migrating teaching and learning to online platforms is one of the key decisions/ reasons the school was able to ensure continuity, adaptability, and resilience during the disruptive emergence of Covid-19 virus. Finally, once again, to be in management, there was no time to sleep. Provide training to those that don't have the necessary skills that are needed for online and attend workshops and change speed. (Participant 4).

Another strategic leader reflected his experience on adaptability (an adaptable mindset) was also important factor perceived as effective in dealing with various administrative, teaching and communication situations as follows:

I'm blowing my own horn because I was steering that we like nobody else's business. I was in it like 'in it for real', cause I was like, we cannot fail. We cannot afford to fail because that is the entire concept of being in a Business School because we need to operate like businesses. So, we operate like business and in a business every moment counts. So, you cannot afford to lose your customers, even in a leadership position. That time you see, we'll see in this disruption and what not. Do you need to

be proactive and say we need it regardless of what happens if it means working on weekends? Let's do that if it means working at night, let's do that because I remember at some point, I had a class that finished at 9:00 o'clock at night. So yes, yeah, we had to make it and we did. (Participant 2).

The findings that emerged from the participant's responses revealed the strategic leaders' personal attributes, unity through decentralization and opportunities to reinvent the university. It also reflected important attributes from GSB and Leadership UKZN leadership such as responsibility, flexibility, readiness, power of experience and adaptability to changes. One of the participants reflected that they were excessively available to respond to queries. It also displayed commitment from the strategic leaders. This is how he had to say:

So, we now had more focused, specific, or specialized area to give attention to. Uh, and you know, once again, I'm going to talk about the fact that there was little experience on online delivery. So, this was strengthened greatly during that period where people, the academic leadership of the school, was able to get the academics to move in that particular focus and direction of excellence during online delivery because it had never been done before. We wanted to make sure that the value of our lectures was not going to be lost because we changed our mode. So, the academics were given a lot of assistance by the school leadership to persevere with this new mode of delivery. It now equipped the school with a new set of skills which we can use even beyond Covid-19, and which we are currently using. So, in that sense, it opened a new direction for us, and the direction was excellence in online teaching and learning. (Participant 3).

4.9 Theme on the use of Social Capital to lead self and others during remote and hybrid work during Covid-19 pandemic

The second objective of this study was to investigate the use of social capital by strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN, to lead self and others during remote and hybrid work, during Covid-19. In this respect, this section reveals one theme, namely (1) stakeholder engagement. The identified themes are reported in the table 4-2 below.

Table 4. 2: Themes on the use of Social Capital to lead self and others during remote and hybrid work during Covid-19 pandemic

Focus on Themes	Frequency
1. Stakeholder engagement	5

4.10 Stakeholder engagement

The findings revealed that strategic leaders at GSB and Leadership UKZN were engaging with stakeholders effectively during the hybrid work and Covid-19 pandemic by fostering strong relationships and connections through the use of social capital, social linking and social bridging. Findings also revealed that they have recognized the importance of maintaining open lines of communication, both virtually and in-person, to ensure everyone feels supported and engaged. Moreover, social bonding created a sense of belonging and trust. Amongst the academic staff and students, they have been able to navigate the challenges of remote work and the uncertainties brought about by the pandemic, as illustrated below:

OK, so ... it galvanized staff. And there was more cohesiveness amongst the teams. So, in terms of the leaders of the Graduate School, that was very important that we had those, forums again, you know, so that the social bonding, so that individuals and myself, we're equipped and be able to respond to our customers, to our students. During the time for the forum, it would be the academic leaders and myself and we'd meet with the professional services staff to get the academic staff to be able to deliver both remotely and hybrid. The academic leader of teaching and learning, the academic leader of research and the Dean had met with the academic staff to bridge that change. And we had also met with the college leadership. That means the DVC of the college. And they wanted to know how the school was going prepare itself. And they almost at that point, which was a little bit later, maybe at about three or four weeks into Covid-19 pandemic started mapping out how the school should, uh, equip their academics to be able to cope with delivery. Oh, yes so these were bonds that we already had. Remember, even without Covid-19 pandemic, we had the support of the Dean, the support of the academic leaders, research and teaching and learning. (Participant 5).

So that was further strengthened. Uh and solidified during the Covid-19 pandemic experience. We were better able to connect even, in terms of being accessible on cell phone as I told you by Skype, zoom etcetera. There was this high level of accessibility to the school leadership to these social connections. But the support staff and the professional services staff play a very important role in supporting their academics and the lecturers. So, by us, as professional services staff, having that close knit, close link with each other during the Covid-19 pandemic experience and having those forums, we were able to build ourselves up so that we could provide support in turn to the academics who would be delivering on the academic programs. But when you are talking about bonding, I'm talking about cohesiveness. I'm talking about a more cohesive team and relationships, social bonding. These were able to bridge or bring us closer. (Participant 5).

Four participants were interviewed, and this is how they shared their experience on social bridging and how it developed and improved their knowledge. One participant illustrated below:

Social bridging helped because, there are certain things we think we know but we don't know, and for people from industries, they had to change certain ways. So, we'll find that a certain company has been operating this way, but then they had to change. So now with the new information they will bring, we can tap into the new information that they're dealing with and have the ability to change even within the content that you deliver. Now as a lecturer and as a leader, you know this works for other organizations. Then maybe we can adopt certain things within the school and change because it has worked, and where there are things that we are not sure about, we would discuss it. So, we'll take information from outside and then put it inside and share it with our students and that helps because when you look, as I was saying that our students are people from the industry, it's gain. (Participant 2).

One of participant reflected on how social bridging was utilised to ensure academic continuity and resilience as illustrated below:

It would start from college meetings and then from the college meetings we have different leaders from different schools. So, everyone would share what they know and where we don't know, the university will get us an expert to assist us there, and then whatever I've learned today, I would bring it down back to the school and then

within the school. If I don't have the capacity to lead their topic or to assist my colleagues, I would request that we get somebody to assist us with the knowledge, so that at least we are on the same board, we are on the same understanding and explain even if it means to explain in simple terms. This is what we mean by this and make sure we the people own it as well because we are in it together. It shouldn't be just brought by leadership straight to all the other colleagues whether it makes sense or it doesn't make sense. So, I think that, sharing of information should be in an open-minded way. Sometimes you would be in a meeting as a leader, and you think you understood everything, and then when you come back to your colleagues and try to share it and then they ask you questions and then you are unable to answer. (Participant 2).

Some participants reflected on how social bridging assisted in refining the strategy and one participant responded:

In public life like ours, you need to see what's happening around and then you can ask people. You can be able to communicate with them, what it is that they're doing in their own space. It is important to know other people that are not necessarily in your space, but who can offer advice. So, I would say that it was very important that we do that. It helped to say that, you know, whatever we are thinking, whatever ideas we have, you know they are acceptable. We can do this because you know when you talk to people and then something is not being accepted or received, you have to review the way that you are thinking of it, then you can change. But social bridging helped in refining our strategies. (Participant 6).

Another participant shared their experience on social linking and how it advanced their knowledge as follows:

That is a tough one becausemy colleagues would just send through that I'm planning to have a webinar and I'm inviting this person who's an expert in this field, so that we can share information and then we are always open to that as a school. We will have these webinars because we can't have these face-to-face sessions anymore. So, on webinars is where we, actually talk to people because as an academic, you always have to be informed of what is happening in the environment around us in different topics. You know, so my colleagues would reach out to people that they know they have the correct information on a certain topic and then they'll

bring that back to us, and then we'll host those workshops, even had workshops online so that we don't lose touch with other people outside the school. It's something that we were doing very well, but that in most cases we were doing it face to face, but then we were having webinars, we were having workshops online so that we keep that link between us and people outside the university and people from the industry most importantly. And then when we bring those people, we also invite the students so that they can benefit from those presentations from those people. Yes, it helped because when you call upon an expert in a field and since the IT disruption was like worldwide, you would know what certain industries are affected and these are their coping mechanisms. These people are actually doing it very well, so it really helped to actually advance our knowledge in different types of businesses. (Participant 2).

In a different vein, one participant reflected social linking in this manner:

Umm, that didn't really happen, that we linked up with powerful people. But if it could happen like that, it would have been lovely. But it wasn't necessary. Maybe that's because I'm not at that top level of the leadership of the school, but it wasn't necessary on my part to have those part of linking. (Participant 6)

Negative and positive consequence of stakeholder engagement

The interviewees shared the experience that, as much as social connection helps to advance knowledge and promote resilience and continuity of the school, however there were positive and negative consequences:

You know, positive consequence would be the fact that there was this increased engagement again you know with staff that can only be positive because it's strengthening and solidifies relationships. It was almost like a psychological feeling that you needed to be accessible, right regardless of time of day. So as part of middle management, I was constantly accessible to the Dean. We wanted to remain accessible so that things ran smoothly. This resulted in strengthening of relationships. We now had healthier, stronger relationships with each other, right. We remained accessible to each other, you know, so and then we provided training. (Participant 5).

4.11 Theme on practices of coping which were used by strategic leaders as they implemented new academic and work-related policies in disruptive times during Covid-19 pandemic

This section reveals one theme depicting practices of coping employed by strategic leaders as they implemented new academic and work-related policies in disruptive times. This theme includes policy(ies) that were implemented necessitated coping strategies. Themes is depicted in Table 4-3 below.

Table 4. 3: Theme on the coping practices by strategic leadership

Theme focus on the use of coping practices by strategic leadership	Frequency
1. Policy adaptation and student support services	5

4.12 Policy adaptation and student support services

The findings that emerged from the participants revealed that strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN have prioritized the well-being of their teams and students, understanding the importance of work-life balance and mental health. Strategic leaders implemented mental health resources, counselling services and flexibility in work arrangements. Policies were adjusted to accommodate personal challenges arising from the pandemic. Steps were taken to address the unique challenges faced by individuals during the disruptive event. They realized that a healthy and motivated workforce is important for the successful and effective continuous operation of the business school and for coping during disruptive events. Five participants were interviewed, and their opinions on how strategic leadership at GSB and Leadership UKZN prioritized employee well-being were reflected. This is what he had to say:

I would go back to the fact that this event was new to all of us. So, whatever you thought of as a coping strategy, mechanism, you thought it could work for you, you tried it. You know, it wasn't something that we were not averse to any strategy that was being proposed. So, everybody was welcoming anything because nobody knew how long the state would last. Now that, the world has healed, I think we, understand how much big this thing was. We didn't know how long it was going to last, so can you imagine just thinking of strategies that will last only for a week? So, everything that we had to think about was something that could last, for 5-10 years, so there had to be those strong coping activities. Umm, no, there wasn't specific. But you

know, the university provided us with a lot of infrastructure and a lot of things to try and cope. Things like, having access to the mental health facilities. (Participant 6).

Another participant reiterated on point mentioned above as follows:

We were afforded facilities for Mental Health Wellness. Those are the things we did, have the support and we will be in a meeting and then they will call upon maybe the department that deals with the Wellness issues and say this is how we doing it this is how and then we need to have check temperature and all of that, and then if you're not feeling well you're allowed to take leave, so they were actually emphasizing on those things to take care of yourself first, before you can actually do your work properly. (Participant 2).

One participant further reiterated on the point mentioned above as follows:

Providing access to health advice and information as well as access to vaccination was also key to help staff and students adapt in living and working when the pandemic was at peak levels. (Participant 4).

The findings emerged from the participants revealed that academic leaders implemented various Covid-19 related policies to ensure the safety and well-being of their students, faculty, and staff. These policies included special assessment, blended learning and access to the university, mandatory mask-wearing and limiting campus activities. One strategic leader illustrated as follows:

There was a lot. And one of them is about continuous assessments and what we had to implement. During that time, we would say, lets afford student an opportunity to write exam, because a lot of people were booked off due to Covid-19. Others would have like in months in hospitals. So that's the policy I'm referring to called special assessments. It wasn't a policy per se, it was an implementation plan which spoke to a special exams or special assessments. So, where we are affording students with an opportunity to rewrite their assessments of which we had certain criteria that were attached to that, where a student maybe was ill during Covid-19, then we afford that student another opportunity. The other one was about blended learning which was speaking about strategies for us moving towards online teaching and learning. And yeah, I think that was those two of which I believe were critical. Guidelines that we had were largely stemming from what the government had prescribed in terms of,

Covid-19. So, the first was about access to the campus. They were strict guidelines, and you know when we could access campus, we had to have a special access permit granted to us to come onto campus. So, these were some of the policies that the university implemented or guidelines that the university implemented, which we had to obviously comply with, right. You know, policies related to Covid-19, they were definite guidelines. So, we had to comply obviously with government policies and of the university. (Participant 2).

One strategic leader reflected on the focus of strategic leadership at GSB and Leadership UKZN in ensuring that academic community is afforded knowledge and skills on the new mode of delivery and be able to cope and adapt to the new mode of teaching and learning. This is what he had to say:

I think it was mainly workshopping, trainings and all of that. And then, because the university had quite a lot of workshops, so it was just back-to-back workshops because everything was changing and making sure students know what to do. So, if we say now, we need to upload certain documents online, and we make sure that we use facilities that are provided from Moodle system. So, there were those activities that we did. Training and workshops. (Participant 2).

Also, the practice of coping was based on constant communication because you would have a meeting today and then you think everything is fine since we had a session within the school. So, now, and then, it was back and forth ways of communication, and I think constant communication was also a coping mechanism because things were changing rapidly so we needed to constantly communicate that change. (Participant 2).

One participant reiterated on the point above and illustrated as follows:

There was a lot to comply with and obviously it has an impact on schools. You know, I think it's more of as just being able to do it rather than adopting any coping strategy. Umm, one of the most valuable things I found during the whole experience was just regularly online meetings with staff for short periods of time. That opened a lot of communication channels during early part of Covid-19. I'm not talking about official communication. I'm talking about just having an exchange, right engagement. So

that was the coping strategies and, it increased our levels of engagement online. (Participant 5).

Another participant reflected on coping mechanism as follows:

I think what we did also as a coping mechanism, was a survey that teaching, and learning did in our school to find out what experience people had on online teaching. Based on the results of that quick survey, we were able to see the different experience that people had, what tools they used or what tools they never use or didn't have experience with. And based on that, we were able then to provide relevant workshops. So that was done by teaching and learning right. From the professional services staff, it was more in a case of getting them equipped to know how to use simple things like zoom, which many of them have never used before. Online etiquette, so all these things and we were basically very quickly to learn, including myself. And we were able to communicate that during our forums, our weekly forums with the professional services staff, and the academic staff. (Participant 3).

The findings emerged from the participants revealed that there was positive and negative outcome out of these coping practices and policies that were employed by strategic leaders at GSB and Leadership UKZN during pandemic Covid-19. One participant illustrated as follows:

Positive consequences

So, the positives were the flexibility. I think it's nice when you have a team that you are on the same page with because I think we worked very well. We will discuss something and then we need to come up with solutions. We can't be talking about problems and then not coming with solutions. Secondly, the positive thing there was academic continuity. The school did very well, but in the personal capacity, as an individual no. (Participant 2).

Another participant reflected on the positive consequences emerged from these coping practices. This is what he had to say:

The fact that there was this increased engagement again you know with staff that can only be positive because it strengthens and solidifies relationships. We now had healthier, stronger relationships with each other. Secondly, we wanted to remain

accessible so that things ran smoothly, and provided training, but there is a negative side to that in that you overextend yourself and in so doing you can push yourself to fatigue. (Participant 5)

Negative Consequences

One respondent reflected on the negative consequences as follows:

The negative consequence was me not giving myself time. I was not sleeping at all. You were thinking about the others? Ohh... I could not even take leave. Always ask myself "How can I take leave in an ever-changing environment?" How do you do that?" Because you know that every day there's something new. It happened to an extent that, I think it was one of college meeting where I voiced out that "I'm not going to be working on weekends." That was the coping mechanism I had to use, because I needed to take care of myself. (Participant 2).

We will receive an email maybe at 7:00 o'clock, that's how bad it was, we will receive an email at 7:00 o'clock saying that there is a new change. We need your input on this document. It has to be discussed in university meeting on Monday at 8:00 o'clock. So, it means then you don't have a weekend, you need to work throughout the weekend so that the document is ready to be presented on Monday morning. So, at some point I was like I can't do this anymore. I'm only human, I need to take some time out. As much as I want this thing to work, but I also need to take care of myself, so, negative consequences were that there was no time to rest. So those were the challenges that we had and the negative consequences, but we were able to work with those. (Participant 2).

I think for me the only thing that I'm now talking about, that comes back, and I would say angry was that all the efforts and sacrifices we did was not recognised when it comes to the university KPA. These are the KPI's that were given to us. So, when I could not publish it, it means when it comes to my KPI for publishing our scores will be the one or the two. So regardless of these beautiful efforts, when it comes to your performance management, it's a downfall it's more like you didn't perform at all. So, when you start to say uh on my teaching KPI, actually I even had to stand in for another lecturer, they will tell you that was not there, that was not counted. It was part of your job. So, if I were to say everything like the downfall of it as much as I

was able to do everything very well, but in my personal capacity as an academic, I did not achieve anything in terms of my performance management. So, when it came to performance management, I was under performing and its simple means I'm not going to get a bonus. But this part of the leadership, Leaders focus on people. (Participant 2).

4.13 Chapter summary

The findings presented in this chapter reveal a variety of experiences, observations and activities employed by strategic leaders at GSB and Leadership UKZN. These activities employed by strategic leaders influenced the direction of resilient academic learning and new online blended learning. They also reflected on the positive and negative consequences of activities and direction employed by the strategic leaders. Although there were also negative consequences, these were not necessarily totally destructive towards achieving the academic resilience goal and mission of the GSB and Leadership UKZN.

The study also reported on the use of social capital by strategic leaders to lead themselves and others during remote and hybrid work to ensure academic resilience and continuity. Those social capital interventions included social bonding, bridging, and linking. The study has also reported on the coping practices used by strategic leaders in times of uncertainty and instability as they implement new academic and work-related policies. Lastly, this study found that strategic flexibility, participative and collective commitment of strategic leaders of the GSB and Leadership UKZN to the identified strategy enabled the GSB and Leadership UKZN to achieve the desired academic resilience and more. The next chapter discusses the detailed findings of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the key findings of this study in relation to existing literature and relevant previous studies. Notably, this study's results provide insights into the influence of strategic leadership in building academic resilience and continuity at GSB and Leadership UKZN. It also highlights the challenges faced by strategic leaders and students while in the process of influencing the direction of online platforms. First, the chapter discusses the key findings on themes including strategic thinking, redesigning teaching and learning online, resource allocation, strategic commitment and communication. Second, the chapter discusses the findings on how strategic leaders engaged with stakeholders to ensure resource allocation and resilience at the school. Last, the chapter discusses the policies implemented or adapted to ensure students support services and build resilience with the university.

5.2 Findings

Notably, strategic leadership's influence at GSB and Leadership UKZN includes *strategic thinking, redesigning teaching and learning online, resource allocation, strategic commitment and communication*. However, they faced positive and negative consequences in redesigning teaching and learning, including implementing coping strategies. It is important to highlight that redesigning teaching and learning to online platforms improved GSB and Leadership UKZN schools as they are now using hybrid teaching and learning methods. To achieve academic resilience leadership of the GSB and Leadership UKZN, leadership must possess a key competency which includes the ability to adapt to conditions for nurturing academic resilience and be able to respond by applying a strategic thinking mindset, communicating strategy, engaging with stakeholders to solicit their commitment to the strategy. The results are discussed in detail below.

5.3 Strategic thinking, redesigning teaching and learning to online, resource allocation, commitment and communication

First and foremost, it is essential to highlight that one key finding revealed by this study was that the strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN indeed emerged and gave strategic leadership by identifying academic continuity as a strategic goal. The successful influence

of strategic leaders on the direction and activities to ensure academic continuity and resilience was a determining factor. Strategic leaders identified the online mode of teaching and learning as a strategic option and, jointly with academic staff, developed and implemented a comprehensive crisis response plan to achieve academic resilience and continuity. The performance of strategic leaders at the GSB and Leadership UKZN was essential and crucial during the challenging crisis period caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The success of the GSB and Leadership UKZN relied on them carrying out their strategic functions effectively. This suggests that the strategic leadership was determined and set a strategic goal for the university, whose aim was to ensure academic resilience and continuity during the pandemic and beyond. It further reflected that academic continuity was their priority. Hence, there is a shift from traditional face-to-face teaching and learning to online and remote learning. The plan effectively addressed immediate challenges while aligning with the university's long-term goals.

Strategic leaders' decisions reflected strategic foresight, positioning the institution for surviving the crisis and future success. There was equitable and effective financial, technological, and HR management. Contingency plans were responsive, and resource allocation aligned with the immediate strategic goals identified to respond to the urgent crisis. The efficient resource management contributed to the university's resilience. Strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN believed that communication was important during the crisis. They prioritized communication with students and ensured their buy-in during developing and implementing the crisis response plan. They developed communication strategies that were inclusive and transparent across all levels of the university. Stakeholders, including students, faculty, academic staff, and the wider community, were well-informed of the new changes. Reverse communication meant that strategic leaders were receiving feedback and reports from all three levels, namely students, staff, and the strategic leaders themselves.

Decisions were canvassed and influenced by consultation at all levels of staff and students at the University. This ensured trust and reliability between all stakeholders within the GSB and Leadership UKZN. Trust was maintained through open and honest communication, which included feedback. Every one of the leaders and academic staff worked beyond normal means, and this suggests that there was a commitment from strategic leaders to ensure that academic continuity and resilience are realised. These findings resonate with the notion by Al Thani and Obeidat (2020), stating that strategic leadership plays a crucial role

within organizations to steer it towards success and sustainable growth even during turbulence and crisis. These roles include guiding the organization through strategic assessment and planning processes, aligning resources, fostering innovation, and making crucial decisions to achieve immediate and long-term objectives. Kabetu and Iravo (2018) believe that strong and effective strategic leadership helps organizations to be increasingly competitive and to reconcile employees and resources to achieve organizational goals. Hagen et al. (1998) support Kabetu et al.'s (2018) view that strategic leaders are an important factor and a powerful source of influence for employees and the organization. They further stated that a lack of good leadership often leads employees to lack motivation to perform their duties in an innovative and effective manner, limiting their ability to cope with a disruptive event.

Al Thani and Obeidat (2020), argue that an organization's competitiveness and adaptability depend on the ability to make informed decisions based on a clear vision and the effective allocation of resources to meet strategic goals and maintain organizational resilience. Their understanding of complex dynamics, stakeholders' needs and perspectives, and product niches within an organization enables them to map and communicate a clear picture. This reveals that strategic leadership involves creating a vision and mission for the organization. Jooste and Fourie (2009) support vision as the desired end state of a future organization. Lear (2012) asserted that strategic leaders of an organization must articulate a compelling vision for the future and align it with a clearly defined mission to achieve their goals. It is further explained that having the right vision motivates and energises people. People can only find meaning and purpose in their lives through the right vision. Several studies support this view Samimi et al. (2020), stated that it is the right vision that establishes a standard for excellence and prepares the present for the future. This suggests that strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN influence their direction towards long-term goals. Strategic leaders need to understand and know how to prepare their organizations for change. Marquis and Huston (2009), recommended that their strategic flexibility enables them to handle complex situations swiftly and pro-actively to attain current performance and acquire future opportunities. Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between strategic leaders' ability to initiate and manage change, with evidence that this relationship exists across a wide range of organizations (Lorensius et al., 2021). They lead and manage organisational change as part of their responsibilities, and understanding adaptability is important. Samimi et al. (2020), asserted in their study that successful strategic leaders can

think strategically continuously and make correct strategic choices. Kanyangale (2017), in his study in Malawi, revealed that strategic leaders employ strategic thinking to ensure that an organization remains competitive by constantly analysing its internal and external environment, identifying opportunities and threats, and formulating strategies to achieve its objectives. In this way, an integrative perspective and creative thinking are combined to provide innovative solutions to the organization. Kabetu and Iravo (2018), stated that strategic leaders are responsible for making important decisions which enable business operations to be effective towards strategic goals. In a changing business environment, strategic leadership combines linear and non-linear thinking to make effective strategic choices. Through this, an organization is able to achieve its strategic goals, cope with turbulence, and remain resilient (Kanyangale, 2017).

A study by Elali (2021), on leadership agility identified that strategic leaders who demonstrated agility in decision-making during the Covid-19 pandemic were more effective in navigating uncertainties and fostering organizational resilience. This study reflects a different outcome with the results that before the pandemic, the leadership of GSB and Leadership UKZN was not necessarily effective in managing crisis events like the repeated strikes by students at the University, but differently managed the Covid-19 successfully. During strikes, the university's activities were disrupted without any creative management of the crisis as it happens, and even after the strikes no pre-emptive strategies got employed, as the strikes repeated.

Another study by García and Weiss (2020), on adaptive strategies in university crisis reveals that strategic leaders employing adaptive leadership strategies, emphasizing flexibility and innovation, contributed significantly to successful crisis response in universities. This explains the importance of finding and utilising different thinking capabilities of internal and external HR and using collective resources to pull together in thinking and finding solutions during a crisis, an approach that the GSB and Leadership UKZN effectively used this time. Therefore, the study by García and Weiss (2020), agrees that thinking should involve finding adaptive, agile and flexible strategies, and employment leads to inclusive solutions.

The study emphasises the need for adaptive and agile leadership during crises. It also underscores the importance of strategic foresight and scenario planning, balancing innovation with stability in decision-making. The study confirms the GSB and Leadership

UKZN study that Leaders should cultivate agility and adaptability in their decision-making processes. The GSB and Leadership UKZN study agrees with the study above that strategic leadership should incorporate strategic foresight in organizational planning and encourage a culture of innovation to enhance resilience.

In a study conducted by Fernández-Batanero et al. (2022), online learning transition, a comparative analysis of universities, revealed that universities that implemented a phased approach towards redesigning teaching and learning online like the GSB and Leadership UKZN did, they provided faculty training and prioritized student engagement so that they are introduced into the new teaching and learning method through training in a phased approach. The study reported a smoother transition to online learning during the pandemic in their implementation, as they first trained them in using laptops, then Word and software thereafter on virtual learning. Further to that, they were taught both asynchronous and synchronous learning. This finding confirms what the study on the GSB and Leadership UKZN found: through the leadership of the Dean, the training by the staff and other professionals invited by the university, learning happened in phases, and it led to the success of the virtual teaching and learning that led to better academic results by the students.

A study conducted by Chen et al. (2020), on resource allocation Strategies for organizational resilience in South Korea suggested that organizations adopting a flexible resource allocation approach, aligning with evolving needs, were more resilient during crises compared to those with rigid allocation models. The study revealed that those rigid organisations, not according to their internal stakeholders' options to use their judgement and innovation in resolving tactical and operational issues, tend to restrict creativity, delaying imminent solutions. Those organisations tend to lose agile staff and leaders from their organisations. This also affects the effective response during a crisis, as resources are delayed from being released to respond to a variety of situations as dynamics evolve during a crisis. This study agrees with the study on the GSB and Leadership UKZN during the Covid-19 crisis in that both the academic and administrative staff were not confined to applying their innovative ways of distributing resources as and when needs arose to enable the management of the Covid-19 crisis and the implementation of the hybrid teaching and learning and ensuring academic resilience is achieved. The strategic leaders availed resources in a way that allowed flexibility, relevant to evolving needs, allowing agility of the whole organisation's response to the crisis, thereby achieving the GSB and Leadership UKZN strategic long-term goals. According to a study by Anderson, K., & Taylor, R. in

2021 Canada, on "Fostering Commitment in Higher Education: A Longitudinal Study", transparent communication, involvement in decision-making, and recognition of individual contributions enhance commitment among staff and students during strategic implementations. The study confirms the results of the GSB and Leadership UKZN study that when strategic leadership engages openly and transparently and involves both staff and students in decision-making, this is a positive spinoff on organisational performance during a crisis.

The above study proved that staff and students tend to take responsibility and become committed when they are engaged in finding solutions. Results are shared openly, whereby their views are canvassed and considered in resolving any issues facing the university. They view their involvement as a positive indication that they are valued. This encourages them to be more committed, just like it happened at the GSB and Leadership UKZN in accordance with the study on strategic leadership at the university. This is again confirmed in the study by Kaplin et al. (2019), on the impact of inclusive decision-making on university commitment, highlighting that involving staff and students in decision-making processes positively correlates with higher commitment levels. It also emphasised the role of transparent communication in fostering commitment. It reinforced that involving staff and students in decision-making enhances commitment. It also confirms that recognizing individual contributions positively impacts commitment. Though GSB and Leadership UKZN did not recognise the commitment displayed by staff and students after the pandemic, the results of successful implementation of the virtual and hybrid were evident for all students, staff and external stakeholders to see, as reflected in the Covid-19 study. It is important and very crucial that the university correct the reflection made during the performance assessments of not awarding excellent performance and recognise the staff accordingly. This will also bring back the element of trust and strengthen readiness for any eventual crisis. This culture of prioritizing transparent communication during strategic implementations, involving staff and students in decision-making processes, and recognizing and celebrating individual contributions to enhance commitment must be continued as a whole and not in part.

The Impact of Effective Communication on staff and students during the pandemic is highlighted in a study by (Reddy and Gupta, 2020,3793). The study highlighted the importance of clear and empathetic communication, indicating that institutions that prioritize strategic communication build trust and resilience during times of turmoil. It

indicated that when everyone understands the calamity faced at the university, trust is built, and concern is shared. When ideas and solutions are solicited from all stakeholders, everyone is willing to find solutions for the success of all. Communication was at all levels at GSB and Leadership UKZN, and many avenues were used to communicate. These included social media, messages, virtual systems, etc. Fear was controlled, confidence was boosted as everyone knew what was implemented was working, and there was no need to panic. All celebrated successes, which boosted the morale of staff and students.

The role of leadership communication in crisis mitigation is highlighted in the study of Demiroz and Kapucu (2012), and it suggests that effective leadership communication plays a crucial role in mitigating uncertainties and building trust during crises. The critical role of clear and empathetic communication by the leadership communicating to all key role-players is defined in this study as a trust-building mechanism. The study revealed that strategic leadership utilizes communication to mitigate uncertainties. It further prepares staff and students for any eventualities during the crisis. The GSB and Leadership UKZN showed that it is definitely true that when strategic leaders take staff and students to their confidence and communicate effectively during a crisis, a team spirit is built. Readiness to respond is assured without surprise because of the unknown. The studies agree with the findings at the GSB and Leadership UKZN on strategic leadership during a crisis, as it happened during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

5.4 Stakeholder engagement

This objective sought to determine how strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN used social capital to lead themselves and others during remote and hybrid work during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study revealed that in terms of social bonding, the strategic leaders used their network of relationships and acquaintances for the benefit of the university to lead themselves and others, access resources, share information, provide psychological support, and cope. In addition, they used social bonding to build trust, collaborate, support each other's well-being, and assist one another in adapting to change. These bonding sessions created a sense of belonging and trust among the academic staff and students, and they were able to navigate the challenges of remote work and the uncertainties brought about by the pandemic. They were able to navigate the challenges of loneliness, remote work and the uncertainties brought about by the pandemic through these bonding sessions. These collaborative efforts contributed to the university's overall success in responding to the crisis

as it happened and led to permanent solutions for its continued development and growth. The experience of the study participants was that the strategic leaders used social bonding during the hybrid work to foster a learning culture and sharing lessons learned and best practices. They recognized the importance of maintaining open lines of communication, both virtually and in-person, to ensure that everyone feels supported and engaged. Through these sessions, they solidified knowledge and improved coping capabilities at the individual and collective levels. They also used social bridging to build and strengthen social connections, foster a sense of community, and provide support to the university community towards university operations, including remote and hybrid teaching and learning. This included using IT specialists, individuals and organisations to navigate the new online technologies. In addition, it was also used for mental health support on how to deal with issues of loneliness during the isolation period.

Regarding the use of social linking by the strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN during the pandemic, only one participant responded by saying it either did not happen or happened at another level outside of his level or of being aware. Overall, other participants indicated that strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN participated strongly in local, provincial, and national discourse regarding the management and control of the pandemic. These relationships benefited the university in accessing resources and influencing strategies and policies. These collaborative efforts contributed to the university's overall success in responding to the crisis as it happened and led to permanent solutions for its continued development and growth. In the study of Velingara conducted by Udeh (2022), Senegal defined social capital as the average of the available actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less common and accepted parts of a system or culture, beliefs and practices relationships of mutual general use or recognition or in words, to membership in a particular group which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital or resources. This credential entitles them to benefit in various senses available. Therefore, by defining the concept of capital in social capital as an established and known economic term, Bourdieu (2018), defines social capital as an individual property rather than a collective. Claridge (2018c), defines the volume of social capital by the size of the network of connections one can effectively mobilize and by the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed by each of those to whom they are connected. According to Bourdieu (2018), the concept of social capital has been criticized for being under-socialised (Claridge, 2020). The study of Velingara revealed

some measurements of social capital, such as information and communication, trust and solidarity, collective action and cooperation, social cohesion, and inclusion, which is in line with the outcome of this study on GSB and Leadership UKZN. The success of the GSB and Leadership UKZN social capital interventions on Covid-19 reflects similar measurements achieved through socialised social capital, as defined by the study of Velingara.

Samimi et al. (2020,) elaborated that university strategic leaders use social capital to build relationships with others, bridge networks, and gain access to resources by connecting with influential people. Human capital development is influenced by social capital, or the level of seriousness of an individual's social perception and the structure of their social interactions (Nelson, 2021). Mahdi and Nassar (2021), view social capital as the active relationships between individuals, where trust, shared understanding, shared values, and behaviours connect members of human networks, allowing cooperative action. On the other hand, Pitas and Ehmer (2020), described social capital as the internal and external bonds that help businesses complete tasks and produce value for consumers and shareholders; thus, an organisation's social capital is an important asset. Jia (2018) suggested that strategic leaders must reunite social capital within their units and organizations and social capital in the external environment.

Moreover, effective strategic leadership develops social capital, resulting in favourable organisational outcomes. Thus, the strategic leader's ability to continually create and effectively integrate the organization's external social within internal social capital has an impact on the organization's performance. The universities and higher education systems are, however, the most important institutions for developing, managing, and growing social capital. It has been argued by most researchers Chakrabarti and Santoro (2004), that social capital is a function of educational institutions and communities. For these institutions to grow and prosper, they depended on social capital. Robertson et al. (2019), asserted that higher education can significantly improve community relations by fostering social solidarity, modernism and enthusiasm. Tonkaboni et al. (2013), believe that social capital promotes academic achievement and innovation in the university. Through group and service learning, a variety of teaching methods can promote social capital.

5.5 Policy adaptation and student support services

This objective seeks to identify coping practices used by strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN in times of uncertainty and instability as they implemented new academic

and work-related policies in disruptive times during the Covid-19 pandemic. The strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN adjusted existing educational policies to accommodate better the evolving requirements of the university, student, and overall education system. The higher education and training department guidelines influenced the policies implemented as part of the crisis response plan. These policies included access to the university, special assessments for students, flexible work arrangements to respond to the crisis amongst many and their well-being and mental health. The policy adaptation involved changes in assessment methods, including the new online mode of teaching and learning to adjust to the current needs or modifications to support students (Peimani and Kamalipour, 2021,11-72). Strategic leaders of the GSB and Leadership UKZN believed in the well-being of the university community. Comprehensive measures were taken to support the well-being of students and employees. Measures included the provision of mental health support through virtual counselling sessions and the provision of personal protective equipment. Effective mechanisms were implemented to ensure coping, including informative pamphlets, flexible work arrangements, mental health support and a call centre service for staff and students alike. Academic staff and students were able to make suggestions to influence leadership decisions towards improving the plan. Regular transparent updates on progress and any successes or failures in the response plan to the crisis were communicated. This strategy alleviated the anxiety, boosted confidence, and fostered a sense of community and coping by and amongst the staff and students, individually and collectively. The investment made by the university in technology and upskilling of all administrative and academic staff at all levels and students gave them the much-needed know-how and confidence in the ensuing changes. Even the most critical and labour-intensive activity of migrating course material from paperwork to online base, though cumbersome, did not dampen their commitment as they determined to work beyond their call of duty, even putting in extra work hours to accomplish it with success. The faculty and staff were supported by external experts, alumni, and students alike, all of whom were integrated into upskilling and bringing industry experience, interventions, and support. All these interventions by the strategic leadership ensured coping at the university during the transition beyond the Covid-19 pandemic. These interventions facilitated a seamless transition to remote teaching and learning and ensured effective administrative functions. The smooth transition to remote learning ushered the university into blended learning, a new product that brought about online delivery programs. The promptness in dealing with challenges escalated to strategic leadership eased psychological pressure, and boosted their

confidence. This finding suggests that they were confident in the university's leadership and direction. These collaborative efforts contributed to the university's overall success in responding to the crisis as it happened and led to permanent solutions for its continued development and growth. Upon realizing the progressive successes in implementing the crisis response plan, academic resilience, learning and teaching continuity, job security and the potential of new revenue streams, their moral was boosted, and their coping abilities strengthened. The collaborative leadership style reinforced their sense of belonging, control, and a spirit of collective celebration over all achievements during the pandemic. They felt they had a place and future within the GSB. Academic staff at GSB and Leadership UKZN viewed their inclusion in decision-making as psychologically therapeutic. According to Guerra et al. (2020), governments and educational bodies may need to adapt policies and regulations to facilitate educational resilience and ensure equitable access to education. Offering robust support services, such as counselling, academic advising, and career guidance, helps students navigate challenges and disruptions effectively. Hernández-Torrano et al. (2020) believe that academic resilience involves prioritizing the mental health and the well-being of students, educators, and staff, recognizing the emotional challenges brought about by disruptions. Taneja et al. (2010), asserted that effective communication strategies help institutions keep stakeholders informed and manage expectations during disruptive periods. Academic resilience involves thinking beyond immediate disruptions and considering educational systems' long-term sustainability and adaptability. This is in agreement with the study by Mahdi and Nassar (2021), who asserted that the responsibility of strategic leadership is to develop, focus, and empower an organization's structural human and social capital and capabilities to meet real-time opportunities and threats. It further makes sense of the crisis, gives meaning to environmental instabilities and uncertainty and provides a clear vision and road map that allows an organization to evolve and innovate. Jaleha and Machuki (2018), believe that strategic leadership must undergo four stages to survive unpredicted crises: gathering, protecting, challenging, and integrating. Ho et al. (2022), identified eight purposes of strategic leadership, namely (i) to create a vision, (ii) strategic decision-making, (iii) stakeholder engagement, (iv) resource management, (v) information management, (vi) empowerment (vii) motivation and influencing (viii) social and ethical issue management. Knowledge is a strategic asset that gives businesses a competitive edge as global competition, environmental unrest, and the knowledge economy grow. During the Covid-19 pandemic, knowledge management can be very crucial. Therefore, implementing knowledge management well can help businesses survive the

pandemic and boost performance (Lestari et al., 2020). Changing managerial concepts into strategic resources, such as organizational knowledge, is part of the knowledge economy. According to Farida and Setiawan (2022), knowledge has been considered a strategic resource to enhance organizations' competitive performance. As a result, business organizations that utilise their knowledge assets tend to be more successful and meet a competitive edge. In today's business world, knowledge management is growing as a long-term source of competitive advantage. Knowledge management aims to facilitate information sharing between individuals and groups. In ensuring these flows are effectively supported and amount of knowledge is transferred, the assistance of organizational knowledge strategic leadership is critical (Shannak et al., 2012). When knowledge management is supported by strategic leadership, it can offer tactical tools for creating a long-lasting competitive advantage. The study by Ho et al. (2022), stated that resilient organizations can adapt to changes and gain a competitive advantage during turbulent times by coping with changes. Resilient organizations thrive in uncertain environments and recover from adversity (Hapsari et al., 2020). In addition, organizations must have strong, resilient organizational processes in place to survive the effects of pandemics, natural disasters, economic downturns, terrorist attacks, equipment malfunctions, and human error. According to Dwiastuti et al. (2022a), organizational resilience is more than just coping with adversities. The ability of an organization to bounce back from setbacks is known as organizational resilience. Strong, resilient organizations can adjust to changing circumstances and acquire new skills when needed. It can also contribute to community recovery and be a competitive advantage and a driver of cultural adaptation (Ho et al., 2022). Having the ability to cope with difficulties and turbulence in the environment is considered as an important attribute of academic resilience in the field of strategic leadership, (Cortes and Herrmann, 2021, 224-243). This is achieved through shared decision-making which empowers technical expertise to build business strategies, re-configure and adapt to ever changing condition. For this study, organisational resilience is referring to the organizations ability to survive, adapt and grow in a dynamic, uncertain, and undefined environment. It is also the ability of returning to a stable state after facing a crisis. This definition is adopted in this study because it provides a holistic analysis of academic resilience, which is helpful for the organization in their survival, continuity, and coping mechanisms during a crisis.

The study by Hodges et al. (2020), highlights the need for policy flexibility during times of crisis. It examines the challenges when combining emergency remote teaching and online

learning. The authors emphasize the importance of understanding that an online learning experience that has been meticulously planned and implemented is not the same as a hasty switch to remote teaching during a crisis. To create reasonable expectations, it is imperative to acknowledge the emergency context. According to Hodges et al. (2020), institutions may need to implement flexible assessment policies during emergency remote. This entails re-evaluating traditional grading methods and adjusting expectations to accommodate the challenges students and academic staff face in emergency situation. The authors highlight the importance of leaders being flexible in identifying and supporting diverse learners who may encounter varying challenges in the remote learning environment. Institutions are urged to consider the individual needs of students and provide necessary support as needed. Hodges et al. (2020), emphasized the importance of clear communication and policy transparency. Strategic leaders should communicate any changes to policies, expectations, and procedures clearly to students, faculty, and staff so everyone can be on the same page. The study also discusses equity concerns related to access to technology, internet connectivity, and other resources. Flexible policies should aim to minimize the gap in students access to educational opportunities. The study concurs with GSB and Leadership UKZN strategic leaders who established flexible policies including online grading and assessment technique to offer students support services.

Another study on the effect of Covid-19 on college student mental health in the United States by (Son et al., 2020), highlighted the importance of addressing student's mental health and well-being during the pandemic, considering increased stress and anxiety levels. It revealed an increased in mental health challenges among students during the pandemic, including elevated levels of stress, anxiety and loneliness. It further revealed that the transition to online learning, disruption in academic schedules, uncertainties about exams and concerns about the future have been identified as significant stressors affecting student's mental health. The study highlights the importance of providing access to mental health resources such as counselling services and other support systems. The study of Son et al. (2020), revealed that when resources are well provided, and students are given access to explore and utilize mental health resources, it fosters and allows the academic community to be adaptive to coping strategies such as seeking social support, engaging self-care activities and developing resilience. The study is in line with the activities employed and resources provided and utilized by students, including academic staff at the GSB and Leadership UKZN.

5.6 Chapter Summary

The findings of the study are discussed in this chapter. The study found that strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN articulated a vision for academic resilience by outlining a clear vision and goals for the university. Strategic leaders communicated the direction GSB was taking, even though some processes were unclear. They strategically allocated resources, prioritising the areas that contributed to academic resilience. Strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN realised the importance of technology for remote learning by providing necessary infrastructure and tools such as internet data and laptops to academic staff and students to ensure academic resilience. Training was provided on navigating the new system, ensuring a seamless transition to online and hybrid learning modes. These activities and directions improved the coping capabilities of academic staff and students. The study note that strategic leaders engaged with internal and external stakeholders to use social capital to gain knowledge and build trust during critical times. They actively seek feedback to understand the needs and concerns of the academic community for effective decision-making. GSB and Leadership UKZN leaders prioritised the academic community's mental and emotional well-being by offering support services and support. The strategic leadership of GSB and Leadership UKZN showed strong motivation for flexibility and adaptability. Strategic leadership guided the university through the complexities of the Covid-19 pandemic. This involves a combination of vision, adaptability, effective communication, and resource management to ensure academic programs' resilience and continued success. The next chapter focuses on the conclusion of the entire thesis and recommendations from this study.

CHAPTER SIX

Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This study aimed to understand better how strategic leadership influences the direction of leading oneself and others during the Covid-19 pandemic at the UKZN's GSB and Leadership. This chapter seeks to connect the study's objectives to its key goals and conclude the study. This chapter, therefore, presents a summary of the study's findings. The conclusion is drawn from the findings in alignment with the research objectives. Furthermore, the benefits of the study are also discussed. Finally, recommendations from the study findings and areas of further research are presented.

6.2 Research overview and summary of findings

The qualitative study had three objectives, which were as follows:

- To explore how strategic leaders influenced the direction and activities of the GSB and Leadership UKZN in leading through disruptive times to ensure academic resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- To investigate the use of social capital by strategic leaders of the GSB and Leadership UKZN at the University to lead self and others during remote and hybrid work during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- To examine the practices of coping in times of uncertainty and instability used by strategic leaders of GSB and Leadership UKZN as they implemented new academic and work-related policies in disruptive times during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The researcher used purposive sampling to ensure that participants selected were the strategic leaders at the GSB and Leadership UKZN working during the Covid-19 pandemic, with three to five years of experience in the upper echelons of leadership. The participants had to be willing to provide insight and reflection on their strategic leadership experiences and observations during the crisis. The total number of participants was six, four of whom were men and two of whom were women.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with each of the strategic leaders with the aid of an interview guide. The interviews were done on Zoom and Teams and were audio

recorded. Consent was obtained before the recordings. This was a way of ensuring the accuracy of recording what the interviewees reflected. The duration of the interviews was 60 minutes on average. The data was transcribed and analyzed to derive themes on the strategic leaders' influence on activities and direction to ensure academic resilience during disruptive times, strategic leaders' use of social capital to lead themselves and others during remote and hybrid and the coping strategies used to ensure academic resilience. During the analysis, themes were reflected that the strategic leaders at the GSB and Leadership UKZN demonstrated exceptional performance in their overall strategic leaders' functions in guiding the university through the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Their effective leadership across multiple dimensions, including strategic decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and HR management, significantly contributed to the university's successful delivery on its strategic goals and vision.

Key results of the study are that strategic leaders of the GSB and Leadership UKZN did indeed emerge and give strategic leadership by identifying academic continuity as a strategic goal. Their successful influence on the direction and activities of the GSB and Leadership UKZN to ensure online learning and academic resilience was a determining factor. Strategic leaders, jointly with academic staff, developed and implemented a comprehensive crisis response plan to achieve academic resilience and continuity. This included leveraging social capital for resources and ensuring the university community could cope. Internal policies had to be developed or adapted and tailor-made to support the crisis response plan as influenced by the Department of Higher Education and Training guidelines. These policies included access to the university, special assessment examinations for students, and flexible work arrangements to respond to the crisis. The university was led, and strategies were effectively implemented through Strategic Leadership functions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

One of the limitations of this qualitative study is that it only used interview data and included only senior leaders within GSB and Leadership UKZN who were working during Covid-19 and had experience in senior management for 3-5 years. The results cannot be generalized to all senior leaders in this case. However, the findings are transferable to a similar context. Future research on the influence of strategic leadership on academic resilience and continuity may broaden the participants by including employees in the middle and lower levels of management to get a more holistic and inclusive view of the school. It is important

that future research also adopt a mixed method approach and different sources of data rather than interview data.

6.3 Implications of this Research

This study contributes to the body of literature on understanding strategic leaders' influence during Covid-19 to ensure academic continuity and resilience.

The following stakeholders stand to benefit from this study:

1. Strategic leaders

This study focused specifically on the strategic leadership at GSB and Leadership UKZN. Top and senior management should prioritize providing regular and effective communication to ensure that everyone is effectively updated on what is happening. This knowledge aims to better inform strategies and decisions for effective communication within the GSB and Leadership UKZN.

2. External Stakeholder

Improving the communication strategies at the GSB and Leadership UKZN has a greater impact and benefits external stakeholders. Any gains from communication improvement at the GSB and Leadership UKZN can serve a good image and improve service delivery.

3. Academic staff and Students

Academic staff may experience confusion when communication from different sources is conflicting. This can lead to misinterpretation and errors in the execution of the responsibilities. Academic staff may lose confidence in leadership if they perceive a lack of consistency in communication. Inconsistent communication can lead to confusion among students regarding academic policies, schedule changes and expectations. This can create a sense of uncertainty and anxiety.

6.4 Recommendations to solve the research problem

Considering the research findings, the crisis response was intuitively developed during the pandemic. There is a need for a proactive approach to the establishment and development of an emergency and business resilience strategy and plan. Hence, the following recommendations are appropriate:

1. The University needs to investigate and review the crisis response plan that existed prior to the pandemic. This must be followed by a review of its crisis response and

an evaluation of the effectiveness or lack thereof. Corrective actions should then be undertaken.

2. A formal, comprehensive risk assessment, identification, and evaluation of risks in the key processes and systems that are critical towards the delivery of core services of the university (strategic and operational deliverables) of the GSB and Leadership UKZN need to be conducted.
3. The University should consider conducting a formal Risk Assessment to identify potential emergencies and crises that could affect the university's hybrid and blended online and face-to-face learning processes and systems. Possible events could include man-made and natural disasters, fire, cyberattacks, health emergencies, and other relevant scenarios. These scenarios should be evaluated for each identified risk's likelihood, impact, and severity. Measures should then be implemented to prevent and mitigate the possibility of those disruptive events from happening. The university should then establish a dedicated crisis response team that will develop and implement a response plan should those events happen. Crisis management and emergency preparedness plans, strategies, and policies should be in place and on standby to guide all during unprecedented crises. These must prioritize the main processes and systems of academic teaching and learning. Drills, dry-runs, and practices must be planned and practiced regularly to sharpen the university's response in the event of a crisis. Key role players and contacts internally and externally need to be identified, and their roles established and defined. Regular training and simulations on a variety of emergency and crisis scenarios need to be conducted for practice, familiarity and sharpening of response techniques. The plan should be communicated and made known to strategic leaders and relevant staff. The success of an emergency response plan depends on preparation, communication, and regular testing. Regular engagement with internal and external stakeholders and the crisis response team to refine and update the plan as needed is part of a responsive and effective resilient crisis plan.
4. Top and Senior management should prioritize developing strategies that will improve the organization/ academic resilience. They should be transparent about these strategies as part of the strategy development process. This will ensure employee buy-in, especially when implementing the restructured coping strategies. In addition, it is also recommended that managers invest more time engaging with their subordinates when constructing coping strategies during disturbances to yield

benefits from the use of existing social capital within the University. This will establish a shared understanding of what employees/staff need to do and how to do it during an emergency.

5. The University Management could consider a well-resourced remote and off-site facility for campus and administration if current facilities are unavailable for use because of any eventuality of a disruptive crisis.
6. Establish a communication team with clear protocols and a plan that outlines how information will be disseminated during an emergency. It can be reinforced with pre-determined templates tailored to a variety of situations. The plan should have defined communication channels, protocols, and key contacts internally and externally. The use of the internal faculty of communication can improve and correct all challenges experienced during the pandemic.
7. The University should consider collaborating with local authorities, establishing relationships with local emergency responders, law enforcement, and healthcare providers, collaborating on planning and response efforts, and ensuring that your plan aligns with local emergency management protocols.
8. The University Management needs to regularly review and update the emergency response plan to reflect changes in the university's structure, technology, or external threats. Conduct after-action reviews following any real emergencies to identify areas for improvement.
9. Management at the UKZN needs to ensure mental health promotion and support for staff, faculty, and students, which is critical during a crisis response, including preventing and managing the psychological impact of emergencies and crises.
10. The University Management should ensure legal and compliance considerations when developing a response plan. Privacy concerns, data protection, and compliance with educational regulations should also be ensured.
11. Senior Managers and Supervisors should ensure that the Employee Wellness Strategy Policy for GSB and Leadership UKZN and Action Plan should be made easily available to all to assist everyone with mental and emotional support during challenging times.
12. Professional student support services providing both walk-in and virtual services, easily accessible to those struggling to cope during challenging times should be made

available. Access to these services should be well communicated and known to students. One of the suggestions from a strategic leader interviewed was that compassionate and supportive leaders and managers manage them.

13. Top and senior management should prioritize providing regular and effective communication to ensure that everyone is effectively updated on what is happening. Some strategic leaders were critical of the communication during the pandemic. It was not clear and sometimes not effective.

6.5 Conclusion

This research investigated the influence of strategic leadership on activities and direction during disruption within GSB and Leadership UKZN. This included social to lead self and others and the coping strategies used to cope during disruptive events. With respect to the above, this research was successful in that it was able to identify the weaknesses of strategic leaders within the GSB and Leadership UKZN and gave insight into areas where the strategic leaders could improve.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance



23 May 2023

Nonhlahlhla Lucia Sindane
(219041843) Grad School Of Bus &
Leadership Westville Campus

Dear NL Sindane,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005436/2023

Project title: The strategic leadership for academic resilience: The case of graduate school of business and leadership of the University of KwaZulu-Natal during coronavirus disease of 2019

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 24 March 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

This approval is valid until 23 May 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).



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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

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

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 2: Gatekeeper's Letter



11 July 2022

Miss Nonhlanhla Lucia Sindane (SN 219041843)
Graduate School of Business and Leadership
College of Law and Management Studies
Westville Campus UKZN
Email: [REDACTED]

Dear Miss Sindane

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 studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"The Strategic Leadership for Academic resilience: The case of Graduate School of Business & Leadership of University of KwaZulu-Natal during Covid-19".

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample as follows:

- With a request for responses on the website. The questionnaire must be placed on the notice system <http://notices.ukzn.ac.za>. A copy of this letter (Gatekeeper's approval) must be simultaneously sent to (govenderlog@ukzn.ac.za) or (ramkissoonb@ukzn.ac.za).

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

- Ethical clearance approval letter;
- 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 PAIA and POPI 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

[REDACTED]

Dr KE CLELAND: REGISTRAR

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 7971 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

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

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 3: Introductory Letter

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

For research with human participants

INFORMED CONSENT

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

My name is Nonhlanhla Sindane, (Student no. 219041843), a Master of Commerce in Business & Leadership Studies (MCLS) student at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, University of KwaZulu-Natal. The researchers Supervisor is Prof, Macdonald Kanyangale .

I am contactable on [REDACTED]

You are being invited to consider participating in a study entitled: Strategic Leadership for Academic Resilience: The Case of the Graduate School of Business & Leadership of the University of KwaZulu-Natal during Covid-19. The aim and purpose of this research is to explore the influence of strategic leaders in leading the Graduate School of Business & Leadership at University of KwaZulu Natal during Covid-19 pandemic to ensure academic resilience. Census will be utilised for this study because the sample size is small, being the population of 15 strategic leaders. The researcher collects data until he or she reaches saturation of relationships, categories, and the theory. The research will take place at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban. It will involve the following procedures: having an interview with the researcher at your most convenient, face to face or online interview using Zoom or Teams. The duration of the interview is expected to last between 45-60min. This is a self-funded study.

The researcher will ask the participant to describe their typical personal routine outside work to better understand how they balance their career and personal lives. The study will provide no direct benefits to participants. The research will also help to fill a gap of research that aims to best define and provide understanding to the role of Strategic Leadership in bringing about academic resilience in organisation.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequence. Withdrawal from the study can be communicated via email or telephonically. There will be no monetary gain from participating in this research study.

1

There are no cost implications in participating in this, unless a participant chooses to do a Zoom or Teams interview, therefore in this instance the researcher requests that the participant/s uses their own data.

Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained throughout the study by the researcher.

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

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at (provide contact details) 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

Appendix 4: Informed Consent Letter

CONSENT (Edit as required)

I _____ have been informed about the study entitled *The Strategic Leadership for Academic Resilience: The Case of the Graduate School of Business & Leadership of the University of KwaZulu-Natal during Covid-19* by Nonhlanhla Sindane.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

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

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

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at _____

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

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview YES / NO

Signature of Participant _____
Date

Signature of Witness _____
(Where applicable) Date

Signature of Translator _____
(Where applicable) Date

Appendix 5: Interview Schedule/Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section A: Demographic Information

Please mark with an (X) in the box with the appropriate response. Mark one box only.

1. Category of your position

Top management level (Head of the school)	
Senior management level (Academic Leaders)	
Middle Management (Operations Management)	
Other (please specify below)	

2. How long have you been working for the Graduate School of Business UKZN?

Less than 1 year	
1 -5 years	
6 -10 years	
More than 10 years	

3. Age?

19- 29 years	
30-39 years	
40-49 years	
50 years and over	

4. Gender?

Male	
Female	

Section B: How did strategic leaders influence the direction and activities of the Graduate School of Business and Leadership at the University of KwaZulu Natal in leading through disruptive time to ensure academic resilience during Covid-10 pandemic?

This section contains questionnaire that seeks to explore how strategic leadership influenced direction and activities within the Graduate School of Business & Leadership at the University of KwaZulu Natal?

In your view...

1	<p>Resilience : Influencing direction and activities in disruption time</p> <p>What activities did YOU as a strategic leader in this school take during Covid 19 which you think helped to achieve academic resilience? Give me at least three different activities.</p> <p>What activities did OTHER leaders in the school do which you think contributed to academic resilience of this school? Give me at least three activities.</p> <p>How did the activities influence the direction of the Graduate School of Business & Leadership to achieve academic resilience? ? Give me examples of each type of activity you have mention? Why do you think this influence the resilience of the school ? Elaborate</p> <p>Overall, what do you think were the positive and negative consequences of YOUR activities on staff? Students? During the disruptive times. Give an example of positive/negative consequences?</p> <p>Looking at Covid-19 what do you think the meaning of academic resilience in a business school?</p> <p>Overall, what were the positive and negative consequences of the activities by OTHERS on staff? Students during the disruptive times to ensure academic resilience?</p>
2	<p>What directions were they taking or pursuing for the Graduate School of Business & leadership to continue operating?? Give me at least three examples which reveal these directions of the school during disruptive times.</p> <p>How were the directions similar or different from the way the school operated before the disruptive times by Covid 19 pandemic?</p> <p>In what way was the direction taken by the school similar or different from other schools also trying to achieve academic resilience?</p> <p>What were the positive and negative consequences of taking these directions for staff? Students? School as a whole to achieve academic continuity? Give me examples of positive/negative consequences</p>
3	<p>Overall, give me what you think were the positive and negative consequences of the activities in the Graduate School of Business & Leadership during disruptive times?</p>
4	<p>If you look at the activities and directions of the school, why do you think this school achieved academic resilience during disruptions caused by Covid-19? Give me examples which supports your answer.</p> <p>Tell me, what do you think the schools needs to do in times of disruptions to ensure academic resilience in future? Give me examples and their reasons?</p> <p>How can the school build resilient staff and students to survive and thrive during disruptive times? Give me at least three clear examples of doing this.</p>

Section C: How did strategic leaders of Graduate School of Business and Leadership at University of KwaZulu- Natal use social capital to lead self and others during remote and hybrid work during Covid- 19 pandemic?

This section contains questionnaire that seek to determine how did strategic leaders of Graduate School of Business and Leadership at University of KwaZulu- Natal use social capital to lead self and others during remote and hybrid work during Covid- 19 pandemic?

In your view...

5	<p>(a) SOCIAL BONDING</p> <p>How did YOU as a strategic leader in the school use social connections with people like you to help lead the school? Give me examples.</p> <p>How did social connections and networks helped YOU as a leader in the school during Covid 19 disruptions when working from home? When we started hybrid work? Give me examples?</p> <p>How did social connections and network help in leading OTHERS in the school during remote work and hybrid work during Covid? Give me examples.</p> <p>(b) SOCIAL BRIDGING</p> <p>How did YOU as a strategic leader in the school used social connections with people NOT like in other circles to lead the school? Give me examples.</p> <p>How did social connections and networks which served as bridges to other people helped YOU as a leader in the school during Covid 19 disruptions when working from home? When we started hybrid work? Give me examples?</p> <p>How did bridging social connections and network help in leading OTHERS in the school during remote work and hybrid work during Covid? Give me examples.</p> <p>(c) SOCIAL LINKING</p> <p>How did YOU as a strategic leader in the school use social connections to link up with powerful people to lead the school? Give me examples.</p> <p>How did linking social connections and networks helped YOU as a leader in the school during Covid 19 disruptions when working from home? When we started hybrid work? Give me examples?</p> <p>How did linking social connections and network help in leading OTHERS in the school during remote work and hybrid work during Covid? Give me examples.</p> <p>Overall, how do you think the strategic leaders of the Graduate School of Business and Leadership use social capital to lead self and others during remote and hybrid work during Covid- 19 pandemic?</p>
6	<p>What activities did they engage with to cope during remote and hybrid work ? Give me example of the activities.</p> <p>In what way did the activities help you or did not? Give me at least three examples</p>
7	<p>What were the positive and negative consequences during remote and hybrid work in this school?</p>

Section D: What practices of coping were used by strategic leaders of Graduate School of Business and leadership of University of KwaZulu-Natal in times of uncertainty and instability as they implemented new academic and work -related policies in disruptive times during Covid -19 pandemic?

This section contains questionnaire that seek to identify practices of coping were used by strategic leaders of Graduate School of Business and leadership of University of KwaZulu-Natal in times of uncertainty and instability as they implemented new academic and work -related policies in disruptive times during Covid -19 pandemic?

In your view...

8	What specific practices of coping did strategic leaders in this school use during disruptive times? Give me examples of at least three practices
9	What coping strategies were used by YOU as a strategic leader when remote emergency teaching and learning policies were implemented? Give examples
10	What were the Covid related policies that were implemented which necessitated coping strategies for you as a strategic leader ? Give me at least three key policies
11	What were the positive and negative consequences of the practices of coping used by you in times of uncertainty and instability related to the new remote emergency teaching and learning policies that were implemented ? Give me at least three examples.

Appendix 6: Turnitin Report

The strategic for academic resilience:A case of Graduate School of Business and Leadership of University of KwaZulu-Natal during Covid-19

ORIGINALITY REPORT

9% SIMILARITY INDEX	9% INTERNET SOURCES	5% PUBLICATIONS	5% STUDENT PAPERS
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PRIMARY SOURCES

1	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	3%
2	ir.canterbury.ac.nz Internet Source	1%
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	www.researchgate.net	
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