A Leadership Capability Framework for South African Higher Education

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Keywords

Abstract

Rapid changes in economy, society, technology, and politics, alongside reduced subsidies, curriculum decolonisation, and Covid-19 disruptions, challenge South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This study examines leadership capabilities needed to navigate these complexities, identifying flexibility, collaboration, visionary thinking, and ambiguity tolerance as key to fostering innovation and sustainability. It offers a model for effective leadership in South African HEIs and other dynamic sectors.

1. Introduction and Background

The rapid pace of change in the economy, society, technology, political landscape and the different sectors across the world, places great demands on leaders, especially in South Africa (SA) and within Higher Education (Drew, 2010; Friedman & Edigheji, 2006; Heyneman, 2013; Shin & Kehm, 2013; Watson & Watson, 2013). Critical changes in Higher Education are the significant decrease in government subsidies, increased demands for Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to be fully accountable to the public and increased emphasis on ethics (Altbach et al., 2009; Friedman & Edigheji, 2006; Jameson, 2012), increased enrolment rates, massification, increased internationalisation, increased focus on research, increased running costs and the announcement on 16 December 2017 that the Government will provide free higher education to all University and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college students from South African households with a combined annual income of less than R350 000.00 (Altbach et al., 2009; Areff & Spies, 2018; Friedman & Edigheji, 2006; Jameson, 2012). Additional demands on HEI are to provide education that increases graduates' employability (not providing quality education but closer partnering and collaboration with the community and stakeholders from different sectors). Other matters that add to the global challenges are the expectation of HEI to reclaim their role as leaders of innovation and research in society, increased global competitiveness and the need to become entrepreneurs in creating "third-stream income" (Altbach et al., 2009; Friedman & Edigheji, 2006; Jameson, 2012; Tonini et al., 2016). Finally, new challenges have emerged such as the insourcing of previously outsourced services and the decolonisation of the curriculum (Kamsteeg & Wels, 2007; Luckett & Mzobe, 2016; Prinsloo, 2016).

Over the last 30 years, the pace and amount of change have increased dramatically, for example, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the drastic changes in information technology such as the use of smartphones, moving from ADSL lines to fibre and Wi-Fi hotspots, on-line shopping, from CDs to digital music sources, DVDs to movie downloads, from library searches to internet, the use of generative artificial intelligence (like ChatGPT), moving

from fax to e-mail, working and saving everything online (iCloud) (Block, 2013; Christensen & Overdorf, 2000; Weber, 2017). These changes have enabled organisations to overcome the constraints imposed by physical borders and time boundaries, revolutionised the way we interact and have resulted in higher expectations and impatient customers (Block, 2013; Christensen & Overdorf, 2000; Weber, 2017). By implication, it means leaders need to think, act and apply different behaviours to be successful. The influence of rapid and disruptive changes is not only limited to certain sectors such as healthcare, transportation, banking, construction and retail but also to Higher Education. Hempsall (2014), Jameson (2012), Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) and Watson and Watson (2013) discussed the influence of change in the broader world environment, which brought about a change in Higher Education resulting in a need for leaders to acquire new skills.

2. Motivation for the Research

Rapid and disruptive change is experienced in HEI through, amongst others, Covid-19 lockdown, reduced subsidies, increased diversity of students, demand for decolonising the curriculum, increased public scrutiny, increased competitiveness, increased focus on research, increased demand for online learning and increased enrolment figures (Altbach et al., 2009; Department of Corporate Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2020; Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020, Friedman & Edigheji, 2006; Jameson, 2012; Kamsteeg & Wels, 2007; Luckett & Mzobe, 2016; Prinsloo, 2016; Shoba, 2020; The Presidency, 2020; Tonini et al., 2016). In addition, recent student and insourced staffing protests at South African HEIs and the Covid-19 pandemic not only influenced the staff and students but also the public at large in the surrounding areas within which the Universities operate and exist (Department of Corporate Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2020; Department of Health, 2020; Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020; Duncan, 2016; Mathiba, 2020; Nkosi, 2015; Shoba, 2020).

The introduction of smartphones, Wi-Fi hotspots, uploading on and downloading from iClouds, globalisation, consumerism, changes in information technology, the use of Artificial intelligence (like ChatGPT) and

Covid-19 have excelled the dynamic and arguably rapidly changing Higher Education landscape, placing high demands on leaders (Altbach et al., 2009; Department of Corporate Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2020; Department of Health, 2020; Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020; Friedman & Edigheji, 2006; Hempsall, 2014; Jameson, 2012; Mathiba, 2020; Shoba, 2020; Tonini et al., 2016; Wang & Sedivy-Benton, 2016; Watson & Watson, 2013).

Various factors are necessary to navigate successfully in this dynamic, complex and disruptive world with leadership identified as the most important factor and in particular the need for different ways to lead (George, 2015; Hempsall, 2014; Simpson & French, 2006). Leadership is a process in which leaders influence followers to achieve organisational goals or individuals influence others to achieve a common goal through collective effort (Achua & Lussier, 2013; Daft, 2011; Western, 2013; Yukl, 2006). Leadership involves performing certain actions on the one hand (e.g. setting direction) and influencing others (e.g. inspiring and encouraging) on the other – it involves not merely getting things done but bringing about change through others (Landy & Conte, 2007). Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) and Jameson (2012) supported this view and stated that leaders need to be trustworthy, flexible and able to adapt to the dynamic environment of Higher Education. Hempsall (2014) and Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) added that leaders in Higher Education are often promoted to leadership positions because of their specialised knowledge and competence rather than their leadership skills. The situation can result in followers being led astray and becoming frustrated (Wang & Sedivy-Benton, 2016).

Research on leadership in HEIs appears to reject certain aspects as they are construed as attempts to corporatise Universities (Altbach & Petersen, 2007; Altbach et al., 2009; Friedman & Edigheji, 2006). In particular, managerialism, the demands for efficiency, accountability and quality assurance of qualifications offered are viewed as aspects changing Universities from being institutes of academic freedom (i.e. the right of academics to pursue their research, teaching and publishing without fear of punishment, restraint or losing their job) to simply "crunching numbers" and earning income (Altbach & Petersen, 2007; Altbach et al., 2009; Friedman &

Edigheji, 2006; Ntshoe et al., 2008). However, the factors that are criticised by these authors are the same factors that Shin and Kehm (2013) argued to be critical in establishing world-class universities, including the preservation of academic freedom. Similarly, Friedman and Edigheji (2006) argue that society demands that HEIs use their resources carefully (which come from society in the form of state subsidies) and respond to the needs of society.

While Universities should retain the principles of academic freedom, the current economical, technological, social, political, international and government influences, will require a fundamental change in how they operate to remain competitive and relevant (Jameson, 2012; Kimberly & Bouchikhi, 2016; Watson & Watson, 2013). Watson and Watson (2013) support this view and state that HEI will need to bring about systematic change to respond successfully to global changes, which includes a need for strong leadership.

Furthermore, models of organisational development such as the Burke-Litwin Model, The McKinsey 7S Model and Weisbord's Six Box Model have leadership as a key element for implementing and managing change to improve performance within organisations (French & Bell, 1999; Harvey & Brown, 2001). Arguably, these models are equally applicable to HEI. Leadership is a critical competency and process that enables or constrains organisations to adapt, grow and survive within their specific environments (Achua & Lussier, 2013; Daft, 2011; Western, 2013). It is, therefore, the key element necessary for all organisations and institutions to perform effectively, remain relevant, and maintain their competitiveness in this ever-changing environment (Achua & Lussier, 2013; Daft, 2011; Drew, 2010; Western, 2013).

Leaders need to be able to adapt, think critically, provide direction, inspire confidence, influence employees, take decisions with limited information, create an engaging workplace, drive innovation and efficiency, protect their brand image and ensure continued growth and sustainability, even during uncertain times, that usually present novel challenges (Achua & Lussier, 2013; Daft, 2011; Drew, 2010; Wang & Sedivy-Benton, 2016; Watson & Watson 2013). Therefore, leaders are responsible for setting the culture and

influencing the success of HEIs through their ability to successfully navigate complexity, deal with uncertainty, manage change and drive innovation.

Research on leadership in HEIs appears to focus mainly on the applicability of specific leadership models, leadership development and identifying the leadership capabilities (e.g. transformational leadership) necessary to lead successfully in the current social, economic and political contexts (Albino, 1999; Bodla & Nawas, 2010; Hempsall, 2014; Smith & Wolverton, 2010; Spanenberg & Theron, 2002; Tonini et al., 2016; Wang & Sedivy-Benton, 2016). However, little research on identifying the capabilities necessary to lead during rapid and disruptive times in HEIs in general and particularly within South Africa has been recorded. Several anecdotal accounts amongst academic staff within HEIs argue that leading a university is different from leading an organisation within the public or private sectors (Wang & Sedivy-Benton, 2016). Research conducted in HEIs by Jameson (2012), Tonini et al. (2016) and Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) identified several capabilities that are necessary to lead successfully. Some of the capabilities identified are flexibility, collaboration, tolerance of ambiguity, being a visionary, dealing with complexity and building relationships. While these capabilities are similar, if not the same as the leadership capabilities identified by Sharma and Kirkman (2015) and Raelin (2016) in other sectors, they have not been directly linked to successful leaders in HEIs, within SA, during times of rapid change and disruption. Research on leadership by Geier (2016) in high-risk and dangerous work environments, displayed similarities to the concept of leading in times of rapid change and disruption in HEI and other sectors (e.g. magnitude of potential consequences, physical proximity to danger).

Similarly, Bathurst et al. (2010) investigated leadership during times of uncertainty, particularly applying the components of aesthetic leadership to evaluate the leadership success displayed in New Orleans at the time of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. He highlighted that presence and concretisation, backward reflexivity, attention to both form and content and mythmaking are essential to successful leadership in times of uncertainty and crisis. However, they reported that these aspects were severely lacking in the handling of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Bathurst et al., 2010).

Even though the research did not specifically focus on Higher Education, it does highlight the capabilities necessary to lead successfully in uncertainty and crises. Uncertainty and crisis were present during the recent rapid change and disruptive events in HEIs (e.g. 2015-2016 student protest actions, the Covid-19 pandemic, etc.). The Council for Higher Education published a book called "Reflections of South African University Leaders 1981 to 2014" that details the leadership experiences of past Vice Chancellors and Principals, Vice Chancellors, or Deputy Vice Chancellors of South African universities but no alignment of capabilities into one coherent model were made or link to successfully leading South African HEIs during rapid change and disruption. Previous research may not have been done in HEIs, the influence and consequences of rapid change and uncertainty of the events were similar. Leaders had to respond to situations without any framework (previous exposure) on how to handle the situation successfully. Furthermore, the intensity and duration of change and disruption were unique. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on leadership, specifically in South African HEIs. The leadership capabilities identified can be adapted for other sectors and/or inspire interventions to capacitate leaders to lead successfully during times of rapid change and disruption.

3. Problem Statement

The rapid change and disruptive circumstances within HEI are a relatively new phenomenon (Altbach et al., 2009; Cervelo, 2023; Friedman & Edigheji, 2006; Jameson, 2012; Kamsteeg & Wels, 2007; Luckett & Mzobe, 2016; Prinsloo, 2016; Tonini et al., 2016, Walsh et al., 2023). This provides an opportunity to determine if contemporary leadership capability models are appropriate, if current leadership capabilities and behaviours are sufficient and whether different or additional leadership capabilities are required within SA HEI. The purpose of this study was to identify the leadership capabilities required to lead successfully in rapidly changing and disruptive times within South African HEIs. The study was approached from an interpretive perspective within the constructivist paradigm.

4. Phenomenology

Epistemology is a part of philosophy that focuses on describing, analysing and explaining the origin of knowledge and its value. Phenomenology as an interpretivist perspective aims to identify the crux of a phenomenon through the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants in their day-to-day life and environment (Creswell, 2009; Gray 2004; Willis, 2007). An "interpretive perspective" in epistemology refers to the belief that knowledge is primarily constructed through individual interpretations of experiences and social contexts. The researchers put aside their knowledge, opinions and experiences of the phenomenon and paid attention to what was presented by the participants (Creswell, 2009).

5. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered from various sources through semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Breakwell et al., 2012; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glaser & Holton, 2004). The researchers moved back and forth between the data in a continuous process of data collection and analysis until no new insights were obtained – a point of theoretical saturation was reached (Breakwell et al., 2012; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glaser & Holton, 2004). The research question and design were not changed because of the insights gained. During the analysis phase, open coding was used to identify and label concepts (incidents) that emerged, the process was systematic, moving from the start of the first paragraph and proceeding line by line up to the end (Breakwell et al., 2012; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glaser & Holton, 2004). Each line was carefully examined to capture any notable elements, patterns, or events that might contribute to understanding the phenomenon being studied. During the process of open coding similarities and significant differences (observable and latent) were constantly noted, compared and recorded as meaningful and contributed toward developing, explaining and describing the concepts of the phenomenon (Breakwell et al., 2012; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glaser & Holton, 2004). These distinctions could be observable, either explicitly stated or latent, meaning they were implied or indirectly suggested.

Comparisons were continually made (both between newly coded incidents and previously identified ones) allowing for the refinement of categories and ensuring that the coding process remained dynamic and iterative. Many categories that are relevant to explaining and understanding the data were coded (Breakwell et al., 2012; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glaser & Holton, 2004). At the point of saturation, the data was summarised under the same label into a definition of the concept. A process of comparing, linking, sorting and describing was followed for the relationship between categories so that eventually the number of categories (i.e. themes) was reduced to only core themes (Breakwell et al., 2012; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glaser & Holton, 2004). This iterative comparison and recording process ensured that the analysis was thorough, grounded in the data, and capable of revealing both surface-level trends and deeper, more nuanced insights. Eidetic reduction, as a systematic process of reflection, comparison, and imaginative variation was used to discover the fundamental essence of the phenomenon by stripping away non-essential elements and focusing on revealing the core meaning that underlies diverse individual experiences. The core themes should relate to as many other categories and their elements as possible and account for a large portion of the variation in a pattern of behaviour (Breakwell et al., 2012; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glaser & Holton, 2004).

Memoing and selective coding

During the process of data analysis, memos were used to make theoretical notes about the data (Breakwell et al., 2012; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glaser & Holton, 2004). Memos were used to note the connections between categories, develop ideas about the categories, present hypotheses about connections between categories and/or their properties (Breakwell et al., 2012; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glaser & Holton, 2004). Core category(s) (i.e. themes) were identified whereafter selective coding (i.e. a refining process) was used to relate the core category to other categories, confirming relationships and filling in where further refinement and development was needed (Breakwell et al., 2012; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glaser & Holton, 2004).

Grounded theory

Grounded theory allows researchers to discover additional or new insights about a phenomenon particularly when current theories or research about it are insufficient or do not exist (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, Gray, 2004; Heath & Cowley, 2004; LaRossa, 2005) as few studies could be found about the capabilities needed to lead successfully in South African HEIs during rapid change and disruption.

This research adopted a narrative literature review because the aim was to get an understanding of the status of research that exists on models of leadership capabilities needed to lead successfully during rapid change and disruption, with specific reference to those affecting South African HEIs.

6. Population

The participants were sampled from employees' different leadership and non-leadership levels within the 26 public HEIs across SA, namely, executives (e.g. Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Executive Directors) and senior leaders (e.g. Deans, Directors). Focus groups were used to collect the data from managers (e.g. Academic Leaders, Module Leaders, Finance Managers) and non-leadership employees (e.g. Security Officers, Groundsmen, Lecturers).

7. Sampling

A combination of purposeful and stratified random sampling techniques was used to achieve representativeness or comparability of the participants from different leadership and non-leadership levels within HEI across South Africa (Bordens & Abbott, 2011; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2008).

Once the HEIs were selected through purposeful sampling (purposefully selected one university from each of the nine provinces to enhance the trustworthiness), stratified random sampling was used to select participants from the different leadership and non-leadership levels within each of the selected HEIs. Permission was obtained from the registrars, relevant ethical committees and other related structures to conduct the study, before

commencement. Once permission was obtained, all potential participants were contacted telephonically and/or by e-mail where the context and purpose of the study were explained. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. All participants who had an e-mail address were sent a written informed consent form.

Challenges and how they were addressed

All HEIs in the sample were contacted to provide employee lists of all their employees (including e-mail addresses and telephone numbers) from which the sample could be selected. However, not all the employees had email addresses or contact telephone numbers so that they could be invited to take part. Furthermore, in some cases, as reported by the relevant HEI contact person, employees' names had been omitted because they had only recently joined the HEI and their names had not yet been captured onto the employee list at the time it was generated.

The researchers used e-mails to contact the employees. As a way of ensuring a high response rate, he also followed up with each potential participant in the sample, at least twice, through mainly e-mails and where possible by telephone. However, some institutions did not allow for reminder e-mails to be sent to employees who had been invited to take part in the research project, even though some had automatic out-of-office replies stating that they would return at a future date which was before the invitation response return date. which had the potential to create sample error or bias.

Overall, the response rate from the samples of the various HEIs sample was low. In several cases, the response rate was as low as 1,6% of the sample (i.e. five responses out of a sample of 305). Therefore, the responses of those who did not arrive after confirming they would or those who simply did not take part were not obtained or considered in the data collection process, potentially affecting the research findings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The researchers in most cases selected a sample double what the actual preferred size was to reduce the impact of sample bias and non-response. Of the 80 participants who took part in the research, 26 (32.50%) were from

the academic function and 54 (67.50%) were from the professional services function.

8. Data Collection Method

A combination of focus group discussions (middle and junior managers and employees) and in-depth, semi-structured interviews (based on the literature review) with Vice Chancellors and senior leaders were conducted to identify the leadership capabilities required to lead successfully in rapid change and disruption within SA HEI (Bordens & Abbott, 2011; Breakwell et al., 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2008). The researchers obtained written informed consent from participants to record their responses to the interview and focus group questions.

Recording of data

Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim. Before the start of the interview, the purpose of the research was explained and uncertainties were clarified (Bordens & Abbott, 2011; Breakwell et al., 2012; Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2008). During the interview, a reflective diary was kept recording observations of the participant's behaviour, notes about the context, notes about similarities and contradictions in the answers provided and notes about non-verbal behaviour. In addition, different techniques were used such as paraphrasing, summarising, clarifying and asking different types of questions (e.g. open, probing) to enable participants to provide as rich a response to the questions (Bordens & Abbott, 2011; Breakwell et al., 2012; Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2008).

Thereafter the focus group discussions commenced, the purpose was explained and matters arising were clarified. During the focus group discussions, the opinions of participants were recorded verbatim (as far as possible) along with the content of the discussion (including vocabulary uses), nonverbal responses, emotional reactions and important aspects of group interaction were recorded (Bordens & Abbott, 2011; Breakwell et al.,2012; Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2008).

9. Data Analysis

This research followed a participative action research design to identify, understand and describe the leadership capabilities (Mouton, 2016). This design allowed the researchers to be part of the participants' world of work and to express their views on the leadership capabilities required without the researchers placing their subjective interpretations and views onto them (Mouton, 2016). The research design followed a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews and focus groups to gather the data (Creswell, 2009; Gray, 2004; Maylor & Blackmon, 2005).

Content analysis was done to identify, code, categorize and elaborate on the primary themes to identify and understand the leadership capabilities (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Tesch's (1990) data analysis method includes the following eight steps:

(1) Step 1: The interviews are digitally recorded and typed up verbatim.

(2) Step 2: The researchers read all the interview transcripts to get an overall sense of the data and then begin to identify the main topics or themes. This includes selecting the data from the most comprehensive interview, which hopefully have the potential to become the main themes.

(3) Step 3: Different themes are recorded.

(4) Step 4: Different themes are clustered together, shortened and coded.

(5) Step 5: Themes that are most different are analysed.

(6) Step 6: Codes are alphabetised, and abbreviations are made after the final decision.

(7) Step 7: Themes are grouped, and materials are assembled.

(8) Step 8: Data are recorded and reported.

Through an iterative process, themes, relationships, discrepancies and frequencies were identified until saturation was reached (the point where no new themes emerge but rather the reoccurrence of themes that have already been identified and described). NVivo a software program that enables the researchers to analyse qualitative data gathered from interviews and focus groups was used to simplify the process and for triangulation, which

enhanced the quality of the results (Breakwell et al., 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Theory Building Model of Carlile and Christensen

This research followed the Theory Building Model of Carlile and Christensen (2004) to develop a model of capabilities needed to lead successfully in South African HEIs during rapid change and disruption. Although the Theory Building Model of Carlile and Christensen (2004) consists of a descriptive and a normative phase, this research only completed the descriptive phase because this research followed a qualitative approach. In other words, this research only identified, described and categorised constructs relating to the phenomena (i.e. leadership capabilities) and explored the relationships between them and the relevant outcome (i.e. Leading successfully during rapid change and disruption) (Carlile & Christensen, 2004).

The outcome of the descriptive phase is a model that diagrammatically shows the relationships between categories and the relevant outcome (Carlile & Christensen, 2004). To complete the normative phase of the Theory Building Model the researchers would need to confirm the theory and any hypothesis formed in the descriptive phase, by applying the model to a new set of data in the "real world" to determine its predictive validity (i.e. proceed to conduct the normative phase) (Carlile & Christensen, 2004). In other words, conduct a quantitative research study to confirm the theory or model (Carlile & Christensen, 2004). This research did not aim to confirm the theory or model, but merely to describe and explain it.

10. Ensuring Data Quality

Ethical consideration

Permission was obtained from the registrars, relevant ethical committees and other related structures to conduct the study, before commencement. Once permission was obtained, all potential participants were contacted telephonically and/or by e-mail where the context and purpose of the study were explained. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

All participants who had an e-mail address were sent a written informed consent form. The written informed consent included the purpose and nature of the research, voluntary nature of participation, confirmation of anonymity and confidentiality (including limits to confidentiality), how the results will be used and how their responses will be stored and secured (Bordens & Abbott, 2011; Breakwell et al., 2012).

11. Results

The final research report is an extensive construction and description of the phenomena being studied from the opinions, views, feelings, dialogue, meanings and actions of the participants involved in this study, including an extensive literature review (Bailey, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Gray, 2004). Furthermore, the researchers endeavoured to provide a logical structure and flow that links all parts of the research report into a cohesive whole while providing appropriate and enough evidence to support the findings (Mouton, 2016).

12. Themes

The researchers conducted thematic data analysis and independent coding by applying a grounded theory approach to establish the following emerging themes and sub-themes.

Theme 1: Perceptions of leadership and leadership capabilities

The theme developed into the following two sub-themes:

*Subtheme 1.1: **Defining leadership***

The researchers formulated and adopted the definition of leadership based on the most commonly occurring codes and categories extracted from the data, as follows:

> *"Leadership is the action of a trustworthy person who applies foresight to provide direction to the organisation and influences*

followers to successfully reach the end state through teamwork, within a conducive environment".

Subtheme 1.2: **Defining leadership capabilities**

The codes and categories that emerged revealed that leadership capability refers to skills, or characteristics that an individual must possess to lead successfully in a context and or situation.

"*Leadership capabilities are the abilities and competencies (i.e. knowledge, skills, abilities and attributes) needed, by the occupant of a leadership role, to be successful at achieving the goals and objectives within a given context and/or situation*".

Theme 2: Perceptions of rapid change and disruption

The responses were used to develop theme 2, with the following three sub-themes:

Subtheme 2.1: **Defining rapid change**

"Rapid change is a change that is involuntary, unexpected, occurs frequently and at a fast pace which results in new ways of doing things".

Subtheme 2.2: **Defining disruption**

"Disruption is any change that is unexpected, involuntary and fast-paced that results in a revolutionary new way of doing things along with far-reaching consequences which must be acted upon to ensure relevance and sustainability".

Subtheme 2.3: **Perceptions of the influence of rapid change and disruption on South African HEI**

From the analysis of the data and existing research, it is evident that rapid changes and disruptions that affected South African HEIs were political and government influences, technological developments, transformation, Fees Must Fall, effect on resources, insourcing, effect of leadership, staff turnover and systems and governance.

Theme 3: Perceptions of coping mechanisms to overcome rapid change and disruption

In this research, 46% (37 participants) reported that their university did not cope with the rapid change and disruption. Furthermore, 28% (22 participants) indicated that the leaders at their university did not cope with the rapid change and disruption.

Theme 4: Perceptions of leadership capabilities needed to successfully lead South African universities during rapid change and disruption

Each capability (i.e. category) that emerged comprised of competencies (i.e. codes) that emerged from the data analysis that were closely related to the capability into which they were placed. There were capabilities for which no specific competencies emerged, and because of their uniqueness, they were identified as capabilities on their own (i.e. agility, change management, decisiveness).

This research partially supports the leadership capabilities identified by Smith and Wolverton (2010) who investigated a Higher Education Leadership Competency (HELC) model necessary to lead effectively in Higher Education. Smith and Wolverton (2010) identified effective communication, influencing ability, innovation and providing strategic direction even though named differently. For example, what Smith and Wolverton (2010) named behavioural leadership (light-hearted, unselfish and people-focused), this research named it influencing ability.

Similarly, nine of the leadership capabilities that emerged from this research were also identified by Tonini et al. (2016) (named differently) who investigated a hybrid leadership model to develop leaders in Nanyang Technological University (NTU). The capabilities were effective communication, influencing ability, inspiring others, determination, emotional intelligence, teamwork, decision-making, change management and cognitive ability.

This research identified 11 of the leadership capabilities that were identified by Spanenberg and Theron (2002) in their research to develop a uniquely South African leadership questionnaire. The capabilities were providing strategic direction (which they named developing a challenging vision), inspire others, decisiveness, determination (which they call hardiness), environmental awareness and understanding (which they call environmental orientation), influencing ability (which they name influencing the external environment and is only one of the competencies under the capability named influencing ability in this research), effective communication (e.g. vision formulation and sharing, articulating a vision), trustworthiness (i.e. building trust), innovativeness (i.e. challenging current reality), drive for results (i.e. acting entrepreneurial, implementing performance plans) and management ability (e.g. facilitating interdepartmental co-ordination, developing and implementing performance plans).

The findings of this research support some of the research findings of Cronje and Bitzer (2019) (i.e. confirmed the need to be sensitive to the environment, provide development opportunities) and Zuber-Skerrit (2007) (i.e. confirmed self-reflection which this research identified as part of emotional intelligence, feedback which this research identified as part of effective communication and coaching which this research included under support and development which was part of influencing ability). This research agrees with Herbst (2007) who reported that leaders of South African HEIs need to have high levels of emotional intelligence. However, this research specifically identified emotional intelligence as one of the capabilities needed by leaders in South African HEIs during rapid change and disruption, whereas Herbst (2007) did not.
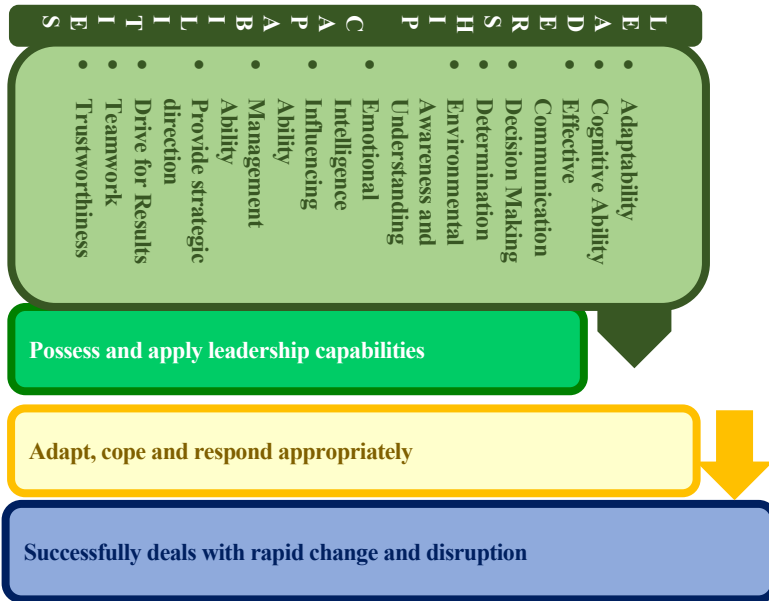
In addition to these findings, the Council for Higher Education published a book called "Reflections of South African University Leaders 1981 to 2014" that details the leadership experiences of past Vice Chancellors and Principals, Vice Chancellors or Deputy Vice Chancellors of South African universities during the aforementioned period. It includes their reflection on what they believed were the capabilities that leaders need to be successful (i.e. individuals who held positions such as the ones they did).

Leadership capabilities listed by the past leaders of South African HEIs in the Council on Higher Education (2016) are like the findings of this research, but there is no alignment into one coherent model or link to successfully leading South African HEIs during rapid change and disruption. Several leadership capabilities did not emerge from the literature but did emerge in this research (for example agility).

Figure 1 presents an LCRCD model as a summary of the conclusions of this research and depicts the different codes under each main category with a focus on the capabilities needed to successfully lead South African HEIs during rapid change and disruption.

Figure 1. Model of leadership capabilities required to lead successfully in South African HEIs during rapid change and disruption (LCRCD)

LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES

- Adaptability
- Cognitive Ability
- Effective Communication
- Decision Making
- Determination
- Environmental Awareness and Understanding
- Emotional Intelligence
- Influencing Ability
- Management Ability
- Provide strategic direction
- Drive for Results
- Teamwork
- Trustworthiness

Possess and apply leadership capabilities

Adapt, cope and respond appropriately

Successfully deals with rapid change and disruption

13. Conclusion and Unexpected Findings

This study formalised a definition for the concepts of leadership and leadership capabilities. The research highlighted the importance of leadership to organisational effectiveness, leadership in dealing with rapid change and disruption, the concept of leadership within sub-Saharan Africa and leadership and rapid change and disruption in South African HEIs. Leaders within South African HEIs need certain capabilities to lead successfully during such times, and little research could be found that identifies and describes such capabilities.

This research produced several unexpected findings. The first was the extent of the influence of the violence associated with the student protests associated with Fees Must Fall on employees. The level of fear, anxiety, trauma and concern for personal safety influenced the well-being of employees, including leaders at all levels. Most research focussed on the influence on students with little direct focus on employees. Yet employees are the key ingredient to

ensure that higher education is delivered and supported to educate our country to remain relevant and respond to rapid change and disruption.

The second unexpected finding was that none or only certain competencies or capabilities were relevant to some, or all the leadership levels even though clear evidence emerged to support the overall list of leadership capabilities and competencies needed to lead successfully in South African HEIs during rapid change and disruption. The reason for this unexpected finding could be the direct and varying experience of the participants with the level of leadership to which they directly report. Therefore, that could have influenced their expectations of what they believe is needed to lead successfully especially if they are not familiar with the functions and tasks of other leadership levels. In other words, they defined the leadership capabilities needed to what they expect versus their experience about the leadership levels they have been exposed to or with whom they have interacted. For example, not all participants report to a Vice Chancellor, Executive Dean, or Executive Director. Therefore, depending on their exposure, knowledge and experience with individuals performing those roles they may not identify the capabilities needed at that level to lead successfully during rapid change and disruption, but rather attribute to them the capabilities expected or displayed by their direct leader (e.g. middle leadership level) to the Executive level leaders.

Even though this research reported that the type of rapid change and disruption that influenced South African HEIs was the same, it was not expected. The final unexpected finding was the emergence of specific competencies within each capability, which helped to define each capability.

The leadership capabilities and competencies that emerged as being necessary to successfully lead South African HEIs during rapid change and disruption, along with the competencies per capability and the resultant theory and model, should be confirmed through future research. Empirical testing should be done on the extent to which possessing and applying the leadership capabilities and competencies found in this research contribute to leaders successfully dealing with rapid change and disruption. Even though this research does not appear to directly support the "alternate' finding of this

research that rapid change can be planned for and responded to, it may be valuable to investigate.

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