

Exploring how NPO leaders maintained effective organisational performance amid the Covid-19 pandemic.



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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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Abstract

For an organisation to function effectively and accomplish its goals, it must have effective leaders, who can lead the organisation towards the fulfilment of its objectives. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic affected the organisational performance of companies and NPOs across the globe, and it was the responsibility of organisation leaders to develop strategic action plans for how to maintain the achievement of their goals during these turbulent times. In this study, a qualitative research design was utilised to explore how NPO leaders maintained effective organisational performance amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Leaders from a sample of 16 non-profit organisations, based in the Western Cape, were purposively selected to voluntarily participate in the study by means of a virtual interview. According to the findings of this study, the leaders were responsible and effective which contributed to the maintenance of positive organisational performance. The Covid-19 crisis led organisations to suffer from financial issues and made it difficult for organisations to function virtually. Conversely, working virtually created hybrid working conditions that participants appreciated. Participants were resilient and agile, they empowered and motivated employees and clearly articulated their plans and worked with their colleagues, stakeholders, and partners, which contributed to participants meeting their goals and maintaining operations. It is recommended that leaders implement solutions, such as ensuring a wide pool of funders to mitigate the issue of NPOs struggling financially amid any crisis. Furthermore, the provincial government, through the Department of Social Development, should assist NPOs to develop financial sustainability plans that may be implemented to assist them in achieving financial sustainability.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Siphethangani Feona Mncube, who always believed in my ability to be successful in anything I put my mind to, including the academic arena.

You are gone but your love, trust, and belief in me has made this journey possible. I miss you and I love you.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by highlighting the statement of the problem, and the significance and rationale of the research. The research topic, research questions, major assumptions, and research objectives were then presented. Following that, the ethical considerations were discussed, and then main concepts of the study were defined.

1.2 Statement of Problem

“Leadership is a highly discussed phenomenon with many distinct interpretations held by many experts” (Stogdill, 1974, p. 7). Mullins (2016) asserts that there are over 400 definitions of leadership due to it being a difficult concept to define. The appropriate definition of leadership for the purpose of this study would be that leadership is an interactive influence process that occurs when individuals accept a leader as their guide in order to achieve common objectives in a specific situation (Silva, 2016). It is critical to consider the context because if the situation changes, the leadership process may change as well (Silva, 2016). Silva (2016) asserts that this notion emphasises that leadership is a collection of acts that produce a certain outcome, rather than a human quality. Both leader-follower and follower-leader interactive influence characterises the leadership process.

In organisations, leaders develop an enthralling vision, provide a course of action, and inspire and motivate others to achieve those established goals of the organisation (Cakir & Adiguzel, 2020; Tokar, 2020). Furthermore, in order to achieve common goals and preserve positive relationships, followers welcome a leader who wields power or accepts authority (Silva, 2016). Leaders are worthless without followers as they comprise the common denominator for purpose, relationship, and influence (Abbas & Cross, 2019). Thus, leadership is directed at and for people, guiding them, interacting with them, influencing them and the organisation toward a successful future (Abbas & Cross, 2019).

According to several studies, effective leadership is a crucial component for an organisation's success (Cakir & Adiguzel, 2020; Drucker, 2018; Schuetz, 2016). A leader's traits, abilities, attitude, and leadership style are all factors that have a direct influence on an organisation's effectiveness (Abbas & Cross, 2019). Organisational leaders can be effective by putting a number of measures in place, such as regularly monitoring the organisation's progress toward

its goals, which is a continuous process. When goals are fulfilled, it is up to the leaders and their teams to set new goals to keep the organisation moving forward. Conversely, when organisational leaders are ineffective, it leads to organisational goals not being fulfilled. Leaders are then obligated to devise new action plans for how they intend to achieve their specified goals (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018).

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, organisational leaders have faced the issue of balancing many conflicting goals simultaneously (Ramakrishnan, 2020). While being compelled to adhere to stringent Covid-19 regulations, they made efforts to continue operations, influence and encourage colleagues, and protect their own and their personnel's health. The South African government has implemented rigorous measures to prevent the virus from spreading (Republic of South Africa, 2020a), because Covid-19 may be transmitted when individuals come into close contact, inhale, exhale, or even touch their nose, eyes, and mouth with virus-containing droplets (Noi, 2020).

Grocery stores, banks, most medical institutions, and fuel stations were among the essential companies and organisations that were permitted to remain open, and individuals employed by the aforementioned businesses were required to adhere to strict Covid-19 protocols while on the job (Noi, 2020). This involved ensuring social distancing everywhere they go, constantly sanitising their hands and working spaces and always wearing a mask. As a result, organisational leaders were compelled to develop new strategies and alternative solutions to not only maintain effective organisational performance with employees working from home, but also to keep the economy moving and their organisations successful.

A crisis as detrimental as the Covid-19 pandemic has never occurred with the current generation of leaders and many organisations were never prepared for a drastic crisis like Covid-19 to disrupt their operations (Ramakrishnan, 2020). Subsequently, developing ways to sustain organisational performance during this Covid-19 pandemic is relatively new. In order for future strategic leaders to understand how to lead an organisation through a crisis like Covid-19, it is important for them to understand how today's leaders managed and strategically led organisations to continue performing effectively.

1.3 Rationale and Significance of Study

The significance of this study lies in comprehending the importance of having effective leadership in organisations, particularly in the midst of a crisis. Covid-19 wreaked havoc on

many organisations, and a few could have anticipated the extent of the damage, leading to a number of organisations closing their doors for good (Ramakrishnan, 2020). The pandemic has served as a reminder to the non-profit industry that conversations about preparedness and contingency policies should be taken seriously (McMullin & Raggo, 2020). While we cannot travel back in time to March 2020, organisations that are presently surviving may begin pre-emptive planning for the next possible crisis.

García & Chandrasekhar (2020), contend that it is impossible for organisations to be completely prepared for every potential crisis or tragedy. Even if their assertion is correct, organisations with resilient leaders and management teams may be able to develop contingency plans to mitigate the result of any crisis (Boin et al., 2013). For example, with all of these Covid-19 waves and variations on the horizon, Covid-19 has already established an awareness culture. An awareness culture, according to Weick and Sutcliffe (2007), simply means that people are becoming more aware of their surroundings since anything might go wrong and everyone should be prepared to deal with whatever happens next. In short, the purpose of this research study was to provide future leaders with knowledge and strategies for maintaining organisational performance during a crisis. These findings are significant because, while there are resources available for leading through crises, Covid-19 was a new and unprecedented phenomenon that brought along with it a range of complex and intricate issues that no-one in this 21st century had ever dealt with before.

1.4 Research Topic

Exploring how NPO leaders maintained effective organisational performance amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.5 Main Research Questions

The primary research questions for this study are as follows:

1. How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected the organisational performance of non-profit organisations in Cape Town?
2. What strategies have organisational leaders developed and implemented to maintain effective organisational performance during the Covid-19 pandemic?
3. What influence does leadership have on organisational performance?

1.6 Research Objectives

The main objectives for this study are:

1. To explore how the Covid-19 pandemic affected the organisational performance of non-profit organisations in Cape Town.
2. To understand the strategies developed and implemented by organisational leaders to maintain effective organisational performance during the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. To explore the influence of leadership on organisational performance.

1.7 Main Assumptions

The main assumptions for this study are:

1. Covid-19 may have negatively affected the organisational performance of NPOs in Cape Town.
2. Strategies developed and executed to sustain the organisational performance of non-profit organisations in Cape Town may have been developed under duress, and they might not have been developed if the Covid-19 pandemic had not occurred. This distinguishes the strategies since this generation of organisation leaders has never faced a crisis like Covid- 19.
3. Organisation leaders may have played a significant role in ensuring that their organisations continue to function effectively and efficiently. They had to lead during this turbulent period, develop and execute new strategies and visions, and motivate, advise, and inspire employees to perform to the best of their ability in order for the organisation's performance to remain effective.

1.8 Clarification of terms

Leadership – An interactive influence process when individuals accept someone as their leader in order to guide them to achieving similar goals in a given context (Silva, 2016).

Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) – A non-profit organisation is a legal body, a trust, a business, or an association of people formed for a public purpose, the money and property of which are not dispersed to its members or officer bearers except as reasonable payment for services rendered (Republic of South Africa, 1997). "Office-bearer" refers to a director, trustee, or any executive role (Republic of South Africa, 1997). Furthermore, NPO surpluses

are put back in the organisation rather than distributed to employees. This is what distinguishes a non-profit from a company (Republic of South Africa, 1997).

Covid-19 – Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) is a virus-borne infection caused by the SARS-CoV-2 viral (UNICEF et al., 2020). The letters "CO," "VI," and "D" stand in for corona, viruses, and diseases, respectively. The disease is brought on by a novel virus that is linked to a deadly respiratory condition known as the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and some varieties of colds (UNICEF et al., 2020). The vast majority of infected patients will suffer from mild to severe respiratory infection and will recover without requiring any specific treatment. However, some people will become really sick and require medical intervention. Those over the age of 65 are more likely to suffer from a severe illness, as are those with underlying medical disorders such as cancer, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, or cardiovascular diseases (UNICEF et al., 2020). Anyone of any age can become very ill or die as a result of Covid-19.

The virus is transmitted when a person comes into close contact with infected agents in the air (contaminated droplets), which are produced by an infected person's coughing and sneezing (Noi, 2020; Chyon et al., 2022). By touching their faces and virus-infested surfaces, people may contract the disease (e.g., eyes, nose, mouth) (Noi, 2020).

Strategy – an activity taken by leadership and/or management to achieve one or more of the organisation's objectives, especially in the face of uncertainty (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). Another approach to see strategy is as a broad direction established for the organisation and its many components in order to reach a desired end in the future (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018).

1.9 Ethical Considerations

Human participants must be protected in all research projects by adhering to appropriate ethical principles (Arifin, 2018). In qualitative research, ethical considerations are particularly crucial due to the extensive scope of the research process (Arifin, 2018). Ethical approval for this study was granted on the 15th of October 2021 (*Addendum A*) from the Department of Social Work and Social Development Ethics Review Committee at UCT. Confidentiality and informed consent are the most essential ethical considerations to keep in mind when conducting qualitative research.

1.9.1 Confidentiality

When a researcher is aware of a participant's identity but takes measures to prevent that identification from becoming known, this is referred to as confidentiality (DeVos et al., 2011). Among the precautions were signed agreements between the researcher and the participant (De Vos et al., 2011). Participants were more likely to participate and offer honest responses if they were certain that their information would be kept secret, especially in qualitative studies, because they would be aware that any sensitive information that they disclosed would be kept confidential (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Additionally, none of the participants' identities were revealed in this research study. Participants' identities or the names of their organisations were not used to identify them. To ensure utmost confidentiality, the participants' identities were replaced with pseudonyms that only the researcher knew about (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Furthermore, there were adequate measures put in place, such as secure record-keeping through the use of password protected files, the implementation of safeguards to ensure participants' privacy and information against unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss, and theft (Creswell, 2014).

1.9.2 Privacy

Privacy refers to the right to control how much, when, and under what conditions information about one's participation in research is disclosed (Steffen, 2016). Respect for participants' privacy is one of the prerequisites for informed consent (Ritchie, 2014). A participant should feel comfortable and consent to submitting or revealing any information pertaining to this research study (Ritchie, 2014). Should the participant choose to withdraw their involvement or something they have mentioned, they may not be coerced or compelled to participate against their will (Ritchie, 2014). Participants received a list of questions to be asked in the interview, before the interview, as a means for participants to acquaint themselves with the study. Also, the researcher's password-protected files kept the participant's identity and information private. Lastly, the interviews were conducted in a private space, free from disruptions or others hearing the information shared.

1.9.3 Anonymity

Anonymity in this study implied that the research study cannot link individual responses to the identity of the participants (Ritchie, 2014). The participants were not notified or provided any information about their fellow participants in this study, and all identifying information was erased during transcription.

1.9.4 Informed Consent

Participants were properly informed about what was expected of them, how the data would be utilised, and what (if any) consequences would occur (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018).

Participants explicitly granted their consent by means of a written name and signature to participate in the study. By granting their consent, they understood their rights to access their information, that their contribution was voluntary and knowing that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018; Ritchie, 2014). Consent is an important part of this research, and it entailed providing adequate information to participants about the purpose of the research, how the data they provide would be handled and used, the expected duration of the participant's involvement, their right to withdraw from the research, and finally, providing adequate time for participants to ask any questions they may have had prior to agreeing to participate.

Consent was solicited from participants by a letter of request from the researcher, which included the above-mentioned facts written in clear and understandable language. The letter of request was followed by information about the research as well as signed consent forms from the participants. All signed agreements included the aforementioned facts written in plain and understandable language (De Vos et al., 2011).

1.9.5 Avoidance of Harm

The researcher had an ethical duty to guarantee that participants were not harmed as a result of physical or mental distress caused by the research study (Creswell, 2014; Ritchie, 2014). The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in bereavement, loneliness, loss of income, anxiety, and other mental health issues (Brunier & Drysdale, 2020), thus discussing how to lead an organisation through these times could lead to emotional distress in some of the participants. To avoid harm, participants were clearly informed about the nature of the research, the types of questions that would be asked, and its potential impact ahead of time. With this knowledge, the participants could make their own decision about whether to take part in the research study (Strydom, 2011). After informing the participants about the study and the expectations of their participation, they were afforded the opportunity to accept or decline participation. The participants were also notified that they could end the interview at any time, without consequence, if they were unable to continue. Following the interview, a debriefing session was held to reflect on what had happened during the interview and to ease any concerns or discomfort.

1.9.6 Voluntary Participation

Voluntary participation means that participants participate in the study without being coerced (Ritchie, 2014). Participants were able to withdraw at any point throughout the research process without compromising their involvement in future academic studies or the present research study, as well as their relationships with the researcher or the research body involved (Ritchie, 2014). Furthermore, participants had the option to withdraw from this sort of study at any given moment (Strydom, 2011), therefore no pressure was used on those who did not desire to continue. Explanations were not required.

Furthermore, the issue of voluntary consent arises in this study because the researcher required participants who work for a non-profit organisation. Participants were informed in these cases that:

- The organisation granted permission for the researcher to interview a participant.
- Any participation was entirely voluntary.
- There were no consequences for failing to participate or withdrawing at any point during the research process.
- Specific information from the research interview was not given to their employer.

1.10 Summary

This chapter provided insight into the purpose of the research study. The chapter presented this research study and stated the study's research questions, objectives, and assumptions. The main ethical concerns pertinent to research were addressed as were key concepts. The next chapter is devoted to a literature review, which focuses on the literature pertinent to the topic at hand as well as the theoretical frameworks pertinent to the research study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses literature relevant to the study and how it relates to the research objectives. This is followed by the discussion of the theoretical frameworks which consist of the Systems Theory and the Behavioural Theory of Leadership.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Leadership and Organisational Performance

Leadership has a variety of meanings (Stogdill, 1974), but they all essentially imply the same thing: guiding people to a goal and inspiring them to achieve it (Tokar, 2020). Leaders are expected to have personal characteristics that enable them to effectively lead others (Drucker, 2018). Additionally, leaders differ greatly in terms of their personalities, strengths, weaknesses, and other characteristics, yet they also possess common characteristics.

According to Drucker (2018), an effective leader knows what they want and what is best for the organisation at all times. A leader is expected to devise action plans and make choices to achieve their objectives; and to be accountable for their actions (Drucker, 2018).

Similar to leadership, organisational performance is a phenomenon that is difficult to define as the concept 'performance' is commonly confused with productivity (Glänzel et al., 2016). (Richardo & Wade 2001 as cited in Adnan et al., 2016), assert that the distinction between productivity and performance is that productivity is how much work is accomplished in an organisation over a specific period of time, whereas performance is a thorough evaluation of how well an organisation performs in accordance with its most crucial factors, which are usually financial, market, and shareholder performance. Organisational performance is defined for this research as an organisation's capacity to fulfil its objectives through utilising resources in an effective and efficient way (Glänzel et al., 2016).

For an organisation to perform effectively and achieve its objectives, it is important that the organisation has effective leaders, who can guide the organisation toward achieving its objectives (Abbas & Cross, 2019). When an organisation has successful leaders, staff performance and motivation improve, and the organisation achieves its goals, thus increasing their organisational performance (Razak et al., 2018). Conversely, according to Abbas & Cross (2019), when an organisation's leadership is poor, staff morale suffers, development is

slow, performance is poor, and people are less engaged and driven to the organisation and its objectives. As a result, good leadership may lead to positive outcomes, whereas ineffective leadership may lead to poor outcomes.

2.2.2 Strategic Leadership

Every organisation needs a business strategy, sometimes thought of as a plan or set of goals that specifies the vision, mission, long-term goals and actions required to assure the organisation's future success. However, regardless of how large these objectives or goals are, an organisation's strategy can only be effective if it is implemented within the organisation's operations (Berenguer & Shen, 2019). Strategic planning occurs when leaders and their leadership teams collaborate to develop goals and objectives of the organisation. These strategic objectives are associated with mid- to long-term goals which span a duration of three to five years, however it can be extended (Berenguer & Shen, 2019). Many organisations realised during Covid-19 that conducting strategy meetings once a year, for example, was insufficient. During the pandemic, many organisations had monthly or even weekly strategic planning meetings to assess the impact of changing economic, legal, and regulatory conditions (Smith, 2021). A strategic plan could subsequently be updated and altered to reflect any strategic changes that occur throughout each meeting (Smith, 2021).

2.2.3 NPO Sector

Non-profit organisations in South Africa contribute to society by providing public social services to the marginalised people. Even though non-profits are considered private organisations, their function in providing services positions them in the larger public and social policy domain (Nwauche & Flanigan, 2022). Some non-profit organisations, for example, run soup kitchens to feed the homeless. Since most NPOs serve a public purpose, they must be registered with the Department of Social Development as well as the Companies and Intellectual Properties Commission (CIPC) (Republic of South Africa, 1997).

Registered non-profit organisations can get credibility and funding opportunities from companies like the National Lottery Board, open a bank account, and earn tax incentives (Republic of South Africa, 1997). To register, NPOs must submit to their provincial social development offices, a completed NPO application form along with two copies of the organisation's founding documents, which include the Deeds of Trust and letters of authorisation from the courts, as well as a certificate of incorporation and memorandum and articles of association (Republic of South Africa, 1997). It is compulsory for an organisation

to be registered at the provincial Department of Social Development office for it to receive the aforementioned benefits. Once an organisation has been registered, its information is entered into the NPO registry (Republic of South Africa, 1997), which was used to identify organisations for this study.

2.2.4 Outcomes of Covid-19 on Organisational Leadership

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified Covid-19, a highly contagious virus generated by SARS-CoV-2, and it has been a pandemic that affected the entire world since December 2019 (World Health Organization, 2021). The SARS-CoV-2 virus, like other viruses, mutates indefinitely, resulting in the creation of new variations; specific variants are particularly concerning to scientists (World Health Organization, 2021). The virus can be fatal if not managed. Managing the spread of the virus throughout the world entailed closing many non-essential organisations, prohibiting travel, and implementing lockdowns to ensure people stayed at home securely (Republic of South Africa, 2020b). As a result, many organisational leaders were compelled to devise strategies that would enable organisations to continue fulfilling their goals during the pandemic. Most organisational leaders prioritised finding alternative strategies to maintain organisational performance by achieving set objectives while simultaneously ensuring the health of employees, themselves, their families, and non-profit beneficiaries from Covid-19 infection (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018).

The unprecedented magnitude and speed with which the Covid-19 pandemic has spread has presented challenges for NPOs across a wide range of aspects of their operations. Many NPOs with programmes that required close interaction with people were unable to operate during the alert level 5 lockdown, resulting in many social services not being provided to people who needed them the most (Tshikululu Social Investments, 2020). To keep the organisations and some programmes running, NPO leaders, leadership teams and board members have had to formulate strategies and adopt new and innovative approaches to running their programmes (McMullin & Raggo, 2020).

Due to lack of funds, several NPO leaders were forced to make the agonising decision of letting down employees by laying off certain staff members or even closing down the entire organisation (Fuller & Rice, 2022). Other leaders took a different approach which comprised stepping away from their primary programmes and launching new ones in order to keep the organisation operating (Orensten & Buteau, 2020). Furthermore, practically every leader had to embrace innovation by adapting to new methods of working. Covid-19 essentially required

leaders and their colleagues to transition to a virtual environment and experiment with new ways of working, which included managing virtual teams and ensuring that everyone working from home, had access to work materials. Since most organisations had people working from home, all staff needed to embrace technological advancements in their organisations and in their personal lives. Virtual meetings, as well as the delivery of programmes and projects via virtual platforms, have become a reality in the absence of people meeting in person (Fuller & Rice, 2022). Technology has also improved the lives of beneficiaries because according to Bam (2022), by utilising virtual platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, some leaders have devised a method in which beneficiaries and donors may converse on virtual platforms, allowing beneficiaries to interact in-person with donors.

Furthermore, as the Covid-19 requirements became less rigorous, several organisations adopted a hybrid working approach, while others altogether abolished physical working spaces. To provide flexibility and support to employees, many organisations felt the need to continue working remotely via the virtual environment as well as operate from their conventional physical workplaces, which is known as the hybrid working approach (Vinueza-Cabezas et al., 2022). Depending on the organisation, the amount of time spent in the office may have been scheduled by the leadership teams, on a daily or weekly basis, or as needed (Vyas, 2022). Furthermore, employees in a hybrid workplace often have more autonomy and a better work-life balance, which leads to higher levels of engagement (Vyas, 2022). Employers gain from more productive, healthier, and stable employees (Vinueza-Cabezas et al., 2022).

On the other hand, some leaders discovered that during the pandemic, while some jobs may be completed remotely amid a crisis, they are far more successfully completed in the office. These activities included developing connections with clients and co-workers, employing new personnel, dealing with negotiations and making important decisions, providing teaching, training and guidance, and jobs that benefitted from collaborative work, such as innovation, problem-solving, and creativity (Gemino et al., 2021). If onboarding were to be done remotely, for example, extensive rethinking of the activity would be required to yield results comparable to those obtained when in the office.

According to research done by Tshikululu Social Investments (2020), despite their challenges with the Covid-19 pandemic, non-profit organisations were the ones that truly aided poor and disadvantaged areas. On the one hand, NPOs in the food industry flourished because there

were so many people in need of food, while other organisations developed food distribution programmes to keep their organisations operating. Furthermore, the Tshikululu Social Investments (2020) research shows that non-profits have a significant role in improving society, particularly after disasters such as Covid-19. As a result, it is necessary that the government and other external donors fund non-profit organisations since they serve a crucial role in society (Tshikululu Social Investments, 2020).

Moreover, previous studies of how NPOs coped with crises have been conducted, and this seems to be a good source of inspiration for leaders of NPOs today. The 2015 European refugee crisis had far-reaching consequences for NPOs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who aided millions of refugees and actively advocated on their behalf (McMullin & Raggio, 2020; Yang & Saffer, 2018). Finding sources of income, reassessing service delivery methodologies, organisational structures, and the ability to adjust swiftly to changing situations were among the strategies used to keep non-profits operational during the pandemic (Meyer & Simsa, 2018). These are strategies that NPO leaders with adverse Covid-19 outcomes have considered.

2.2.5 Leadership Agility

In today's complicated, fast-paced world, leadership agility is the master competence required for long-term success of any organisation (Bremmer, 2015; Ramakrishnan, 2020). Agile leaders are individuals that are able to adapt to a constantly changing and uncertain environment and they are capable of making critical decisions, delivering change and great outcomes, and dealing with information in the face of adversity (Hayward, 2021). Following the greater financial losses in the stock market of the global financial recession of 2008-2009, which destroyed global confidence and rendered many organisations and leaders impotent all over the globe (Bansal et al., 2015), many leaders needed to be agile and resilient in order to survive the recession and the crisis. As a result, investor trepidation permeated all sectors of the economy, as organisations downsized or shut down, leaving a number of workers without jobs (Bansal et al., 2015). Organisations, businesses, and leaders were taken aback and unprepared for the financial crisis, rendering many of them inefficacious. Similarly, organisations were never prepared for a calamity like Covid-19 to disrupt their operations.

In March 2020, the South African government, along with some countries around the world, enforced strict lockdown restrictions as a measure to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Similarly, to the 2008-2009 economic crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic prompted many

organisations to either close down completely or find alternative ways for workers to work from home (Republic of South Africa, 2020b). Subsequently, leaders especially ones who have never had to lead during a crisis like Covid-19 or the financial crisis have had to be resilient and agile (Hayward, 2021). They have had to think quickly and devise strategies to keep the organisation functioning whilst the pandemic is ongoing.

Moreover, the rapidly changing nature of the pandemic as well as the continual readjustment and reinforcement of lockdown restrictions (Republic of South Africa, 2020b), demands agility more than anything in leaders, who must constantly identify and manage the most critical concerns at each stage of the pandemic (Ramakrishnan, 2020).

In addition, agile leadership not only helps people understand the process of change, but also favourably positions them to accept them willingly and flourish in an ever-changing workplace (Jadoul et al., 2020). Leaders may guide the organisation to success in times of VUCA by taking clear actions to communicate and assist employees through change (Jadoul et al., 2020). The acronym VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) defines the type of environment in which today's enterprises increasingly operate (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). The environment is described as chaotic, unstable, and rapidly changing work settings (Millar et al., 2018).

Volatility defines challenges in an environment that leaders have to face that are unstable, unexpected and may last for an indefinite period of time, an example being the Covid-19 pandemic, which was unexpected, unstable and it is ongoing (Taskan et al., 2022).

Uncertainty defines challenges in an environment which come from unknown causes and the future is unpredictable, whilst *complexity* is an environment that has a lot of information and variables that may be overwhelming to process. For instance, every lockdown level came with different rules and regulations that may have been overwhelming for most leaders to grapple with (Taskan et al., 2022). Lastly, *ambiguity* defines situations that are unclear, and no precedents exists (Taskan et al., 2022). Covid-19 is a new virus that has never been encountered before therefore it was unknown how it could be dealt with and the extent of its severity (Meyer-Rath et al., 2020). As a result, leaders now had no prior experience of how to operate under Covid-19 conditions and they had no control over the situation, however they knew they had to be agile and resilient if they wanted to survive and succeed.

2.2.6 Organisational Performance

The concept of "performance" describes how an individual, team, or organisation that completes a task may achieve in terms of achieving their primary objectives (Cakir & Adiguzel, 2020). Therefore, with relation to this study, organisational performance establishes an organisation's future position, desired size, and areas of focus (Glänzel et al., 2016).

Leadership has a direct cause and effect correlation on the performance of organisations (Drucker, 2018). Leaders determine values, culture, flexibility for change, and employee motivation (Glänzel et al., 2016). They influence organisational objectives, as well as their implementation and effectiveness. In addition, leaders exert influence over people around them in order to maximise the benefits of the organisation's resources and employees (Atmojo, 2015). Employees at non-profit organisations can be directly motivated to achieve their objectives through the influence of leaders and their effectiveness of leading others to a common vision. Furthermore, leaders in the Covid-19 situation identified and solved the most significant concerns one step at a time. They planned ahead of time and kept an eye on the broad picture to avoid making mistakes that would have had unforeseen negative outcomes now or in the future.

Many non-profits had to put their core programmes on hold in order to figure out how to deliver the services of their programmes while adhering to Covid-19 regulations. Since non-profits were not deemed essential, they were compelled to close during Lockdown level 5 (Republic of South Africa, 2020a). In addition, other programmes were suspended as a result of individuals staying at home and being unable to receive NPO services, and community workers and other social service practitioners were unable to operate in the field. Leaders and their teams were therefore compelled to devise alternate strategies, such as online programmes, to offer services to people while also pleasing programme donors (government, private organisations, individual donors etc), which subsequently enhanced organisational performance as well.

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

A theoretical framework is a fundamental study of other theories that acts as a guide for creating arguments that a researcher will employ during their research study to support their study's hypothesis (George, 2022). A theoretical framework provides and describes important

theories and explains why a particular research problem exists. In order to better understand the role of leaders in maintaining effective organisational performance during Covid-19, this research study was underpinned by two key theoretical frameworks, namely, systems theory and behavioural leadership theory. The behavioural leadership theory asserts that no one is born an innate leader, and that becoming an effective leader necessitates emulating and learning from the behaviours and actions of other effective leaders (Mulholland, 2019). Systems theory asserts that systems can be defined in a variety of ways, but it is best described as an open system composed of interconnected and interdependent parts that interact as subsystems (von Bertalanffy, 2015).

2.3.1 The Behavioural Leadership Theory

The style theory, also known as the behavioural leadership theory, asserts that learnable behaviours may be used to build successful leaders rather than innate qualities (Mulholland, 2019). The theory examines how leaders perform and contends that other leaders may emulate a leader's traits (Mulholland, 2019).

Additionally, behavioural leadership theory focuses on leader behaviour, suggesting that looking at how a leader behaves is the best indicator of leadership effectiveness (Western Governors University, 2020). In addition, behavioural leadership theory has a number of benefits, the most significant of which is that it allows leaders to choose the steps they want to take to evolve into the type of leaders they desire (Mulholland, 2019). Leaders that use this theory are more likely to be flexible and adaptive in reacting to changing circumstances. This leadership approach also has the interesting aspect of implying that everyone can lead (Mulholland, 2019). Conversely, while behavioural leadership theory allows for flexibility, one downside is that it does not explicitly outline how leaders are expected to react in certain contexts. The behavioural leadership approach has given rise to a variety of leadership theories, yet none of them is optimal in every context (Western Governors University, 2020).

The behavioural leadership theory is relevant to this research study since it focuses on behaviours rather than attributes of a leader (Mulholland, 2019). During the Covid-19 pandemic, leaders were compelled to make decisions and devise solutions that would allow organisations to continue operating while also protecting the health of their employees and clientele. Characteristics are unimportant; what matters is how leaders lead the organisation to continue operating in the face of Covid-19. For example, when Lockdown level 5 was

imposed, most organisations including non-profits were compelled to close abruptly, and this decision did not allow leaders and their teams the time to adequately plan their next steps. Instead, in order to follow Covid-19 protocols, many leaders were compelled to make hasty decisions.

Leaders had to quickly decide what steps would be taken to ensure that organisations continue to operate even if it required working remotely. In such urgency, leaders would not have the time to discuss and get feedback with their teams, instead they would have had to make the decision themselves because employees need to be led, assured that things would be fine and guided as to what the next steps would be (Berenguer & Shen, 2019). As a result, the authoritative decision-making action was undertaken by many leaders and this action is not something a leader will be born with, but it is something a leader can adapt and learn from how previous leaders led during a crisis, which is what future leaders will learn from this research study. This research study may not be able to predict the precise behaviour of a leader, but it will ensure future leaders that anybody may strive to be the leader they want to be.

Furthermore, this theory classifies observable patterns of behaviour as "styles of leadership"(Western Governors University, 2020). Task-oriented leaders, people-oriented leaders, transformative leaders, status-quo leaders, authoritarian leaders, and others are examples of leadership styles (Western Governors University, 2020). The behavioural leadership theory helps leaders focus on their activities and use excellent judgment, regardless of the habits they adopt (Western Governors University, 2020). Ultimately, pursuant to this idea, success is defined by a leader's activities and real behaviours (Mulholland, 2019).

2.3.2 Systems Theory

In the early 1950s, Ludwig von Bertalanffy formulated the General Systems Theory. His insights laid the groundwork for what is now known as Systems Theory (von Bertalanffy, 2015). The study of how subsystems interact with one another within a larger, more complicated system is known as systems theory. Regardless of the subject to which it is applied, the underlying tenet of systems theory is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (von Bertalanffy, 2015). Systems theory was initially developed as a way to comprehend how organisations functioned from the outside, but it is now frequently applied to comprehend how organisations function on a daily basis (Kast & Rosenzweig, 2017).

This theory is pertinent to this study because it helps people understand how organisations operate since NPO leaders did not work independently to manage and maintain the performance of their organisations. Different subsystems must collaborate for the organisation as a whole to thrive and operate effectively. In this context, subsystems refer to donors, funds, NPO leaders, co-workers, leadership teams, the relevant departments in government, organisational departments, or board members. These subsystems must all come together to make sure the organisation functions as one system. It would be difficult to envision how the subsystems can be combined individually to form a well-functioning non-profit organisation. According to von Bertalanffy (2015), no single subsystem can produce a well-functioning non-profit organisation on its own. Without one of the subsystems, organisations would not be able to be effective.

According to systems theory, there are essentially two types of systems, namely open systems, and closed systems. An open system responds to external factors, whereas a closed system has essentially little contact with its external environment (Van Assch et al., 2019). NPOs are considered open systems in this respect since they rely on their external surroundings to some level to function, as they accept various types of input from other systems (Van Assch et al., 2019). NPOs, for example, get funding, supplies, raw materials, and so on. These inputs are turned into outputs such as programmes and food hampers, which have an impact on other systems, in this case the beneficiaries.

Systems may be influenced by a variety of factors, and in this case, the Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on the systems. Since the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Van Assch et al., 2019), maintaining the operations of the NPOs could not be done by leaders or any of the other systems alone. To enable the successful operation of NPOs in Cape Town, all the other systems had to be involved and working together.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has covered the literature that provides evidence of preliminary readings on the research topic. This chapter was separated into two sections. The first section addressed the literature review on the research study's major ideas. The second part addressed the theoretical frameworks to be applied in relation to the research topic. The approach used for this research were briefly discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research design is critical for obtaining data that assures a response to the study's primary question. Roller & Lavrakas (2015), state that research design is critical in research because it entails the step-by-step approach of how data will be gathered, stored, and analysed.

3.2 Research Design

The nature of this research design was an exploratory qualitative research paradigm, because this research study required the experience, meaning, perspective and viewpoint from the participant in order to effectively respond to the primary research question (Yazan, 2015).

3.3 Population and Sampling

The term population refers to the entire number of humans, objects, events, and organisations from whom data may be gathered (Gray et al., 2016). In the context of this study, the population was non-profit organisations situated in the Western Cape province of South Africa. As a result, regardless of the field the organisation specialises in, all future organisational leaders may find this research study beneficial.

Sampling is often used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich examples related to the topic of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). Terre-Blanche et al., (2006) mention that when it comes to sampling, in most cases the researcher will always have access to more participants than are required for the research study but will need to select participants from whom the most valuable information will be collected. The sample for this study comprised 16 non-profit organisations in the Western Cape. Eight of the 16 non-profit organisations fell under the category of economic, social, and community development; one fell within the education sector; one fell within the health sector; one fell within law and advocacy; four fell within the social services sector; and one fell under philanthropic intermediaries and volunteerism. The categories of NPOs varied and were individually unique, despite the fact that they should have been considered essential as they played a major role in food distribution programmes during Covid-19, as well as advocating for the underprivileged.

A non-probability sampling technique was employed in this research study. Non-probability sampling techniques guarantee that the researcher gets knowledge and tests a hypothesis on a small, understudied population rather than a huge population (Pace, 2021). Purposive sampling, a non-probability approach, was utilised in this study. It is a strategy in which participants are “chosen subjectively rather than at random” (De Vos et al., 2011, p. 231), thus not everyone in the population has an equal chance of participating in the study. Purposive sampling implies that the researcher used their own discretion in selecting the organisations that provided the leaders who participated in this study (Palinkas et al., 2015). A set of sample characteristics guided the selection of the sample.

3.3.1 Sample Characteristics

The sample characteristics for the 16 NPOs were as follows:

- The selected participants were in leadership positions such as Directors, CEOs, Founders and Managers of their respective organisation because they develop the vision and guide the strategy of the organisation.
- It was important that the selected organisations had leaders that had been in the leadership position for at least one to two years prior to Covid-19 so that they could accurately see, experience and discuss the impact Covid-19 had on the organisation and the strategies that needed to be developed and implemented. It was also important that these leaders had access to organisation knowledge and history, as well as the authority to make strategic decisions that guide an organisation to perform effectively and efficiently (Drucker, 2018). It is therefore the case that the leaders had been in the organisation for at least three consecutive years with at least one to two of those years being in a leadership position in the same organisation, prior to Covid-19.
- Participants were required to have a matric level pass as their basic qualification.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedure

The non-profit organisations sampled were chosen from the publicly accessible NPO register maintained by the South African government's Social Development Department [<http://www.npo.gov.za/PublicNpo/Npo>]. This NPO register provides a list of all registered non-profit organisations in South Africa. The researcher hoped for a well-chosen sample of 20 interviews, but after 16 interviews, saturation was reached as the researcher had gathered enough data to reach the necessary conclusions, and any further data would have been repetitive and contributed little added value to the study (Malterud et al., 2016). According to

the findings, most of the organisations had comparable experiences with the Covid-19 crisis and had comparable reactions to the problem. When the data was repeated, it indicated that the necessary number of samples had been attained (Malterud et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the inclusion criteria consisted of registered NPOs situated in Cape Town, Western Cape and NPOs that have a an executive leader who had been in the organisation for at least one to two consecutive years prior to Covid- 19, because they would give in-depth information about leading and maintaining effective organisational performance through the Covid-19 pandemic. Their knowledge could assist other leaders in navigating any crises that NPOs may confront in the future.

The researcher sought possible NPOs and verified their legitimacy on the South African government's Social Development Department NPO registration website. The NPOs that were selected were those that had been registered for at least two years prior to Covid-19 and whose leader had been in a leadership role for one to two years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, some annual reports of organisations that were posted on their official website were viewed by the researcher. Viewing recent annual reports was helpful in indicating the financial status and progress of an organisation, and thus suggested whether the organisation was running effectively or not (Masters & Tyler, 2017). Organisations that showed good organisational progress in their annual reports were more prone to be chosen because they were more likely to have more information to give regarding strategies taken to maintain an effective organisational performance during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Moreover, each organisation was contacted via email by the researcher. The email included the participant information sheet (*Addendum B*), which explained what the research study is about, what the study's objectives are, and what is expected of the participant. Furthermore, the information sheet provided the researcher's contact information in case the participant had any questions and/or concerns about the research study. Once a participant confirmed their participation, the consent form (*Addendum C*) was attached in an email sent a couple days prior to the interview, which gave the participant time to go through the consent form. The participant filled out and signed the consent form once they agreed to the terms. The interview schedule (*Addendum D*) was provided 20 minutes prior to the interview to ensure that the participants were comfortable with the interview questions, and that they had time to prepare their responses in order to keep to the scheduled time of the interview. Furthermore,

receiving the interview questions prior to the interview may have been an ethical benefit for participants since they could withdraw if they were uncomfortable with any of the questions.

3.4 Data Collection

Data collection is the process through which a researcher collects information in order to answer the study's main research questions (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The exploratory research design was used to collect data since it includes several qualitative data collection approaches such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and projective techniques (Singh, 2021). The data for this study was collected through in-depth interviews which ranged between 35-90 minutes. For this study, a semi-structured interview was used since it allowed for a conversation between the researcher and the subject. It also allowed the researcher to discover the answers to questions as well as the reasoning behind the responses given (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Moreover, because Covid-19 was such a sensitive issue, semi-structured interviews gave participants time to speak on the sensitive issues they encountered (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). All of the interview questions were created by the researcher, who utilised others as a guide during the interview. The researcher's interest in a greater knowledge of the experiences, events, and context of the Covid-19 pandemic inside organisations motivated and inspired the study's interview questions.

Participants' identifying details and the identities of their organisations were not disclosed in this study since it required information on experiences, and strategies created and executed to sustain organisational performance. Only the industry of the NPO has been revealed. To ensure utmost confidentiality, the participant identities were replaced with pseudonyms that only the researcher knew about (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Subsequently, unlike group sessions, one-on-one in-depth interviews preserve privacy by preventing participants from meeting each other. Also, in-depth interviews offered a chance for the researcher to get great insight into the primary topic, as well as probe the participant for greater details (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Some organisations operate remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic, while others do not. All participants had the right to choose whether they preferred an in-person or virtual interview, after the researcher would have explained that virtual interview would be the best option in light of Covid-19 restrictions and regulations. Fortunately, all interviews were done virtually. All interviews were only conducted once participants had read the information sheet and

interview guide and had completed and submitted their consent form. The researcher scheduled the virtual interviews and conducted them with participants via online platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom. The researcher scheduled all interviews and conducted all interviews on their password protected device. Although using virtual platforms may come with some risks, all possible measures were taken to ensure that the virtual interviews did not infringe on participants' privacy. As such, all of the Microsoft Teams and Zoom interviews had end-to-end encryption, ensuring that communication between the researcher and each participant in each interview was encrypted using cryptographic keys known only to those participants' devices.

The consent form was provided via email, and after the participant was satisfied that they wanted to participate, they signed the consent form and emailed it back to the researcher. Before the interview, the researcher went through the consent form with the participant again. Participants had to verify that they still understood what was expected of them and that they were confident they still wanted to participate in the research project, regardless of the recording. One of the conditions included in the consent form was that participants were required to cover the costs of the data charges for the interview. All participants agreed to pay for their own data when they signed the consent form.

Furthermore, the researcher ensured that during the interview they were alone in an environment that protected the privacy and did not expose the identity of the participant to anyone else. Additionally, all Microsoft Teams and Zoom interviews for this study were recorded and transcribed.

It was critical to record all responses from participants to ensure that they were correct and were not lost in translation or forgotten (Creswell, 2014). All participants were informed that the interview was recorded when they gave their consent to participate in the study. Participants had to grant permission to have the interview recorded and this was stipulated clearly and in understandable language in the consent form. All recordings were securely stored on the researcher's password-protected personal laptop storage and a password protected Google Drive folder.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis process, according to Creswell (2014), is the precise procedure that a researcher takes to analyse the various forms of qualitative data obtained. The researcher

initially analysed the data during the interviews, taking notes that directly addressed the objectives of this research study. To maximise efficiency and handle data, the researcher listened to the audio recordings again and used Microsoft Word to transcribe the data. During transcription, the researcher sought a computer programme called Otter AI, which was used to assist with transcribing the interviews. Otter AI was provided with data to transcribe that was stripped of the participant's information.

Furthermore, a qualitative data analysis computer software, NVivo was used to analyse and code the data in order to form themes, categories and subcategories (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative data was then organised and grouped according to emerging themes. While the researcher waited to conduct further interviews, the researcher began transcribing the recording of the first interview and prepared notes that contributed to this report.

Tesch (2013) outlines an effective method for organising acquired data in her eight phases of data analysis. Overall, the researcher developed Tesch's (2013) data analysis steps as follows:

1. In order to have a sense of the interviews as a whole and to acquaint oneself with the material, the researcher read through every documented transcript. During interviews and after transcriptions, the researcher jotted down thoughts regarding the findings.
2. The researcher went over each transcript one by one to ensure that they understood each one in connection to the study objectives, and to discover potential participant comments deemed significant. This was done through coding.
3. Using the study objectives in mind, after analysing and categorising comparable topics throughout all the transcripts, the researcher came up with a list of potential themes and categories.
4. The researcher created a framework for the topics that emerged from step three, making sure to incorporate all the participant comments recognised as relevant in step two.
5. The researcher improved each theme's description, sketching out categories and sub-categories to demonstrate correlations important to the study objectives.
6. The researcher made a final selection on the study's categories and sub-categories, as they were the most challenging.
7. The researcher began analysing the data after coding the appropriate participant comments to the nodes which formed the themes.
8. The researcher went through the data as needed.

3.6 Data Verification

Validity, which is based on establishing if the conclusions of a study are accurate from the perspective of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of a report, is one of the advantages of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative data analysis computer software NVivo, was used by the researcher to improve the validity and auditability of the qualitative data. In addition, there are four aspects that are crucial for analysing the quality of the data gathered (dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as cited in (Forero et al., 2018). The dependability aspect investigates if the research study findings are consistent with the raw data gathered, and whether utilising the same data with a different and new researcher would generate similar results (Forero et al., 2018). In this study, dependability was established by ensuring that rigorous data collection methods were used and that the data collection techniques and analysis was well-documented.

Moreover, a research study's credibility is determined by its relevance and appropriateness (Creswell, 2014). The NVivo software as well as the researcher's supervisor would be able to go through the collected and transcribed data and ensure the relevance and appropriateness of it. The researcher would also acknowledge any bias that may have influenced the findings. To further eliminate bias, the researcher enlisted the participants who work in non-profit organisations from a range of sectors. This means that based on the contributions of a diverse variety of participants, individual opinions and experiences were validated against others, resulting in a rich picture of the perspectives, needs, or behaviour of people under assessment (Shenton, 2004).

Furthermore, the degree to which other individuals agree or confirm the research findings is referred to as confirmability (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). In this research study, confirmability was found through findings that were strongly related to the experiences of many leaders who had played a role in maintaining organisational performance through these turbulent times of the Covid-19 pandemic. The idea of confirmability is equivalent to the quantitative researcher's concern for objectivity (Shenton, 2004). This implies that the researcher must guarantee that the findings they present are based on the participants' experiences and methods and are not affected by the researcher's personal ideas. To achieve that goal, the researcher clarified the study's assumptions, the methodology used, and addressed the study's limitations or failures, which have been highlighted in the study's reflexivity section. Additionally, a thorough methodological description assists the reader in determining the

authenticity of the data and the structures that come from it (Shenton, 2004). The transparent explanation of the research procedures, from participant selection through development and the final analysis, was crucial in confirmability because it allowed any observer to trace the study's progress through the decisions taken and methods specified.

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings may be generalised to different situations, conditions, or settings (De Vos et al., 2011). Because most qualitative research studies have small sample sizes, transferability is considered to be difficult in terms of generalising findings to larger groups (Shenton, 2004). However, Shenton (2004) cites writers such as Bassey (1981), and Lincoln and Guba (1985) who assert that transferability in qualitative research studies occurs when practitioners and readers can apply the findings to their own contexts. It was consequently the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the study problem was sufficiently contextualised. Furthermore, it was also critical for the researcher to provide a sufficiently detailed explanation of the phenomenon under investigation so that the reader may fully comprehend it and compare the instances of the phenomenon reported in the research study to those they have noticed manifesting in their own circumstances (Shenton, 2004).

As a result, before attempting transference, the researcher must ensure that the reader knows the study's limitations by including the following information in the study. The following concerns were addressed by the researcher from the outset:

- a) “The number of organisations taking part in the study and where they are based.
- b) Any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data.
- c) The number of participants involved in the fieldwork.
- d) The data collection methods that were employed.
- e) The number and length of the data collection sessions.
- f) The time period over which the data was collected.” (Shenton, 2004, p. 70)

3.7 Limitations of study

In this study, the specific difficulties mentioned below were experienced.

At the time the researcher began the research study, there was a dearth of academic research papers on leadership maintaining organisational performance under Covid-19, but that has since changed as more authors have written on the subject. Additionally, it was difficult to

acquire South African literature that talks about the subject of leadership. Most literature found was American based. The American-based literature helped correlate how leaders were able to maintain effective organisational performance and how leaders were able to operate organisations during other crises like the 9/11 tragedy in 2001, Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the economic depression of 2008. Using the aforementioned information, this study can offer the rest of the world with an insight of how NPO leaders in South Africa, particularly the Western Cape, dealt with adversity and led organisations to continue operating despite the Covid-19 pandemic or other crises. As a result, this study may provide future leaders with a notion of what to do in the event that they experience a catastrophe such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.8 Reflexivity

The most essential learning for me was the experience of honing my abilities as a researcher and ensuring that I was providing great work and a paper that would be valuable to the development of non-profit organisations in South Africa. My abilities as a researcher were tested several times, as were my virtues. I had to restrain myself from empathising too much with the participants because the Covid-19 pandemic had a terrible impact on all of us. To avoid empathising too much with participants, the researcher anticipated that the participants would be unhappy and possibly agitated, so it was not surprising to empathise slightly. My attention had to be drawn to how we recovered. During the interviews, I had to make sense of what the participants were going through and begin creating some themes. I guarded my emotions by taking deep breaths, and talking to my supervisor about how I felt after the interviews helped.

The lengthy, tedious, time-consuming, and nerve-racking process of collecting, typing, and coding data showed me the value of patience in producing thorough and accurate results when developing categories and writing up findings. Also, I am capable of being resilient and agile. We were all affected by Covid-19, but I was still able to continue writing my paper and take the necessary measures to complete it and perform well.

3.9 Summary

The methodology that was used in this study has been addressed in this chapter, namely the research design, population and sampling, and data collecting and analysis procedures. This

chapter outlined the methodological approach and explained why a qualitative approach was chosen. Moreover, the limitations of the study and reflexivity were also briefly discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Presentation and discussion of findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is based on the data obtained and analysed from the undertaking of 16 interviews with CEOs, Executives, Managers and Directors of non-profit organisations in Cape Town, on how they maintained effective organisational performance amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The first section provides a detailed profile of the participants (*Table 1*). The second section is devoted to a thorough analysis of the findings that have been structured as represented by the Framework of Analysis table (*Table 2*). The framework discusses three data-driven themes. To present data and discuss the main findings in greater depth, the themes are grouped into categories and subcategories. Additionally, to accentuate findings, participants' own words are quoted, and references to relevant theory and other research studies are made.

4.2 Profile of participants

The profiles of study participants are listed in *Table 1* below:

Table 1: Profile of Participants

| Participant No. | Age | Highest Education level | Current Position |
|------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | 59 | Honours in Social Sciences | General Manager |
| 2 | 35 | Bachelor of Social Sciences | Founding Managing Director |
| 3 | 56 | Honours Degree | CEO |
| 4 | 53 | Honours in Social Work | CEO |
| 5 | 46 | Master of Social Sciences | CEO |
| 6 | 43 | Master's Degree | Executive Director |
| 7 | 52 | LLB Postgrad | Executive Chair |
| 8 | 53 | BCom Degree | Director |
| 9 | 45 | Accounting Diploma | Manager |
| 10 | 45 | MD- Medical Doctor | CEO |
| 11 | 52 | Matric | Founder & CEO |
| 12 | 52 | MBA | CEO |

| | | | |
|----|----|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| 13 | 55 | Master of Medical Anthropology | President & CEO |
| 14 | 60 | Honours in Education | CEO |
| 15 | 30 | Master's degree | Founder & CEO |
| 16 | 60 | PhD | Director |

A total of 16 organisational leaders from non-profit organisations in Cape Town, Western Cape, participated in this research study. Participants comprised males and females aged between 30 and 60 years old, with the average age being 49 years old. The average age of the participants was 49 years old, implying that the participants had been in the NPO field for some time and may have previously led their organisations through challenging times.

Four of the participants in this research study had multiple leadership roles, such as Founder and CEO, although the majority of participants, including the aforementioned four, were CEOs (9), followed by Executives/Directors (5) and Managers (2). Regardless of their titles, all 16 participants were in charge of leading their organisations. One can infer that the research's findings are more pertinent and dependable in relation to the study topic and objectives than they would be if a lower level of management had responded. This is because, instead of making strategic decisions and overseeing an organisation's operations, lower-level managers concentrate on carrying out duties and delivering results while serving as role models for the employees (Satyendra, 2022).

Based on the information above, all participants received formal education. One participant had a Matric certificate as their highest qualification, and three had an undergraduate degree. All the others had post-graduate degrees between Honours and Doctoral level degrees, such as PhD or medical doctor. Considering that all the participating organisations were led well and functioned effectively during the Covid-19 pandemic, this implies that effective organisational leaders come from a diversity of higher education backgrounds and that experiences gained in higher education other than the learning itself is critical to the development of successful leaders (British Council, 2015). For instance, a Master of Business Administration (MBA) or other advanced degree is not a prerequisite for CEOs and other senior leadership positions, however it is desirable (Ethier, 2017).

4.3 Framework for discussion of findings

To present and analyse the primary study findings, including topics and categories, an analytical framework was developed. The framework is explained in further depth in the section that follows.

Table 2: Framework for Analysis

| THEME | CATEGORY | SUB-CATEGORY |
|---|-------------------------------|--|
| Influence of Covid-19 on NPOs | Negative Outcomes of Covid-19 | Change in Operations |
| | | The downside of virtual and hybrid work. |
| | | Financial Issues |
| | Positive Outcomes of Covid-19 | Organisational Resilience and Agility |
| | | The advantages of virtual and hybrid work. |
| | Managing Covid-19 | Managing the spread of Covid-19 |
| Effective performance management strategies | Strategic Planning | Conducting strategic meetings |
| | | Decision-making |
| | | Identifying priorities |
| | Strategy Implementation | Collaboration between internal staff |
| | | Establishing professional relationships |
| | | Hybrid working model |
| | Evaluation | Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) |
| | | Organisational Effectiveness |
| | Influence of Leadership | Self-leadership |
| Integrity | | |
| Influence on team members | | Enabling team to lead |
| | | Motivation |

4.4 Research Study Findings

This section provided the findings in line with the previously specified framework for analysis table, and each theme was addressed in further detail. This research study had three research objectives, and after thorough data analysis, one theme emerged for each objective. In order to give a more in-depth explanation of the findings, the topics were further separated into categories and subcategories. Additionally, the key findings were discussed in reference to pertinent literature on the research topic. Lastly, participants were quoted in their own words to effectively demonstrate the findings that have arisen from the data.

THEME ONE: INFLUENCE OF COVID-19 ON NPOS

The first theme of this study gave insights to how non-profit organisations were affected by Covid-19. This theme emerged from the first research objective which was to explore the results that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on organisational performance of non-profit organisations in Cape Town. During the analysis process, three prominent categories emerged from this theme which were: negative outcomes of Covid-19; positive outcomes of Covid-19; and managing Covid-19.

Negative Outcomes of Covid-19

When Covid-19 was declared as a national disaster, many organisations had to close to curb the spread of the virus. As a result, many non-profit organisations were deemed non-essential and had to close or find alternative ways to operate (Republic of South Africa, 2020a). This led to many non-profit organisations experiencing a range of challenges that had negative outcomes on their organisations, three of which were raised by participants. These comprised changes being made to operations; the difficulties and downsides of the virtual and hybrid workspace; as well as financial issues. These sub-categories are discussed.

Change in Operations

When the lockdown began, most of the participants had to modify their operations. They had to stop operating in the way they used to, and either find alternative solutions to keep the organisation running and/or change their operations entirely. Finding alternative solutions meant that some organisations developed new programmes and ways of working that were aligned with the goals and objectives of their organisation, while others completely changed

their operations and developed new programmes that were not aligned with their goals and objectives, such as feeding programmes and programmes developed to obtain Covid-19 funding. However, those solutions were not without challenges.

“And at that time, we already knew that people were going to need feeding, food, and people were going to need PPE and they were going to need information. So, we quickly changed from what we were doing to, to providing food.” **Participant 1**

“Just actually restrictions in actually being able to carry out some of our programmes. You know the limitations of what we can do, obviously opening up a bit now, but it certainly levels three to five, uhm, the actual physical limitations on what we could do. I would say that's probably been the main areas that it's affected us.” **Participant 5**

“Uhm, over time, as the lockdown extended and extended and extended, we also then had to repurpose and rethink how we did our work. Uhm, and so some of that was moving onto virtual platforms. Uhm, and that then brought a whole range of other challenges.” **Participant 7**

“All of our country kind of offices and head office were shut down at various levels because we were not, we for example, in head office were not considered essential workers, so the organisation had to quickly pivot to an organisation that is a deep touch face to face service provider into being an organisation that had to figure out how to deal with hybrid.” **Participant 13**

“But it definitely wasn't the same. Our projects weren't able to, to run today like in their former glory as they previously were and yeah, and also like I mentioned, we introduced new programmes which we had never done before, which was the food programmes which, as a human rights organisation, is not really what we do.” **Participant 15**

Similarly, a study done on non-profit organisations in South Africa by Tshikululu Social Investments (2020), found that non-profit organisations had to embrace and adjust to new ways of operating in order to continue serving their beneficiaries, stay safe, and to maintain performance of their organisations. Most non-profit organisations had to change their programmes and services in order to provide emergency response and relief (DuChene, 2021; Strub, 2021), like food packages, to their beneficiaries (Tshikululu Social Investments, 2020).

Furthermore, the frequent shifting of lockdown levels, each with its own set of rules and regulations, meant that leaders were overloaded with information of which decisions to make

in order to continue operating under Covid-19 (Millar et al., 2018). The Covid-19 pandemic comprised many complex and interconnected variables, such as an abundance of the information around Covid-19 vaccines, people needed information on the safety of the Covid-19 vaccines, people wanted to know when Covid-19 would end and if we were ever going to go back to the way things were (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Millar et al., 2018). Leaders were confronted with so many questions which for some they had no answers to as they themselves had to comprehend what Covid-19 meant for their organisations, for themselves and for their families.

The downside of virtual and hybrid work

Covid-19 forced many organisations to deal with waves of uncertainty and constant change. Most participants described how they adjusted through this unprecedented time by implementing strategies such as remote work and moving onto virtual platforms. While some participants positively embraced remote work and the use of virtual platforms, other participants, quoted below, experienced various challenges, not only for the organisation alone, but for their beneficiaries as well.

*“We have that, we have a staff of, of about 50 and just trying to you know, having a staff meeting by Zoom, the cost of that for data for staff was just so crazy expensive so yeah, just uhm yeah, challenging on so many levels, yeah.” **Participant 4***

*“And then you had a whole range of other challenges, uhm, also of let’s say family at home, uhm sometimes even the space, uhm, at home wasn’t necessarily conducive to you know work arrangements.” **Participant 7***

*“And so, we tried to move a lot of our work online, but that was just really difficult because we work with the poorest of the poor.” **Participant 15***

*“So, in the conventional workspace, if somebody slips and trips and you know, break, they, break their arm. Uhm, you know there’s workman’s compensation that covers for that. In terms of a remote and virtual work arrangement working from home, if you trip and fall and you know have an injury at home, you know your home space didn’t, although you’re working remotely, your home space didn’t become part of the office, you know. So, you can’t say in the course of the work at home I had I had an accident.” **Participant 16***

In addition, emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion was another factor that was a concern for some participants.

“And what we had to manage was that we were running the risk of getting burnt-out because there was just no separation of when the day starts and when the day ends. What’s work? What’s home? You know, we were just carrying on working all hours.” Participant 1

“Also, we’ve had some staff leave because they didn’t want, they weren’t comfortable adapting to online programme delivery. We had a woman, one staff, who said to us, ‘I can’t work this way. I just, I don’t like working this way. I can’t see myself continuing in this way’.” Participant 4

“There was definitely a fatigue for online meetings, uhm, around about September.” Participant 12

An article by Davey (2021), highlights that one of the major challenges of virtual work was trying to get all staff members in the same place. This is related to the systems theory, which states that all components of a system are interdependent (Kast & Rosenzweig, 2017). Given that not everyone was technologically skilled, and many others battled with connectivity, virtual work had a negative influence on the performance of many organisations. With employees working from home, scattered in different areas and environments, there were challenges of connectivity and whether or not employees worked in conducive environments (Davey, 2021). For instance, under Covid-19 lockdown and remote working conditions, many employees felt burnt out as a result of having to navigate the multiple layers of pressure between family and work life.

From a family life perspective, employees had to take care of their children, learn how to do home schooling, teach children how to adapt to the new conditions of schooling, do house chores and lots more (Parmar, 2021). Additionally, from a work life perspective, employees had increased workloads, had to adapt, and implement the new ways of working, those who had internet sometimes endured slow speed internet connectivity, to mention a few, while also having to be productive and efficient with their office work (Sanhokwe et al., 2022). Working under the aforementioned circumstances led to employees being emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted. Leaders could have given employees leeway in terms of deadlines as well as micromanage them less (Sanhokwe et al., 2022).

Finance Issues

The study findings demonstrated that with many non-profit organisations reliant on grants, donations, membership fees and fundraisers for their operational income, the Covid-19

pandemic really hit the industry hard in terms of finances. Many organisations had to close their doors due to finances declining, lack of reserves and lack of income. In this study, none of the organisations had to permanently shut down, however the majority of the participants interviewed, experienced a decline in their finances. This is what the leaders of the NPOs had to say.

“I mean economically, the country felt it, I think worse than we had, in decades. So, now, if NGOs are getting funding from corporates, that funding you know those budgets kind of got whittled away.” **Participant 2**

“I think the second thing is not just operationally, but secondly, also, we’ve been affected financially. Because of Covid, we lost some of our donors and some, a lot of our donors either in their personal capacity, either lost their jobs or had salary cuts.” **Participant 8**

“I think that for all of us in this space, the most important thing that we can try to do and what [name of organisation] is trying to do is to have a way forward process where we’re looking at things like endowments or secured funding streams to help us in the advent of crises or the advent of catastrophe that shuts down normal services. Uh, we were at a, at the most difficult point of the epidemic here in South Africa.” **Participant 13**

“Uhm, from a negative perspective, uhm, the 2021 financial year, uhm, was the worst year, worst financial year that we’ve had in 18 years. Uhm, it’s the least amount of what we have grossed in 18 years.” **Participant 14**

Interestingly, one participant pointed out that pulling out funding from one social issue into another may have inadvertently contributed to other social issues exacerbating.

“Funding, it had a major effect on us ‘cause a lot of funders pulled out their funding for projects in order to reinvest them to Covid-19 projects. Uhm, and that was very damaging because you know, I said to a lot of people, for example, ‘GBV doesn’t stop just because Covid’s here.’ You know all these issues were still continuing, but a lot of funders were shifting their funds, uhm, from those other fanatic issues into Covid-19 and so funding-wise it also had a major effect.” **Participant 15**

These findings are supported by systems theory because it suggests that any organisation is a single, coherent system of interrelated pieces or subsystems. Each component of the entire system is interconnected and cannot function properly in isolation (Kast & Rosenzweig, 2017). Without donors, membership fees, fundraisers or government subsidies, many

organisations struggled to operate effectively, which also affected the beneficiaries of these organisations. Similarly, with Covid-19 affecting everyone including donors, they themselves were ineffectual without funds to donate. Tshikululu Social Investments (2020) also supports the findings because their survey revealed that Covid-19 had a negative outcome on the income of non-profit organisations, as many of them reported that their income had declined, and some were experiencing difficulties in raising funds and finding donors. Schneider (2020, p. 1) concurs, and identifies that, “NPOs now face serious challenges on all their funding fronts”, particularly since the South African government has not provided any financial relief to NPOs that provide and support the nation’s poorest communities.

Conversely, in other countries, according to a survey conducted by Forbes’ author Strub (2021), donors have been flexible with funding. The survey indicates that most of the business respondents have provided grantees with flexibility in financing arrangements, allowing revisions to grant objectives to allocate funds to the most pressing requirements (Strub, 2021). Moreover, the survey indicates that “grant extensions have been offered by 54 percent of corporate respondents, and 49 percent indicated a willingness to fund overhead costs” (Strub, 2021, p. 2).

Positive Outcomes of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic had negative outcomes on a lot of organisations in various ways, and it created multiple challenges, but conversely, it also resulted in some positive outcomes. The participants indicated that many organisations experienced a surge of creativity, innovation, and agility in the face of the global economy's calamity and devastation. In this category, organisational resilience, and agility as well as the advantages of virtual and remote work were the significant positive outcomes discussed amongst the participants.

Organisational Resilience and Agility

Organisational resilience and agility are essential in times where organisations need to respond to disruptions and constructively adjust in the face of adverse conditions such as Covid-19, maximising opportunities and providing sustainable performance improvement (Raynolds, 2018). Some of the interviewed participants would be characterised as agile leaders in this study, as they pivoted quickly and found ways to operate despite the pandemic. Whether it was implementing food programmes, changing their operations partly or entirely

or even moving to virtual and remote working conditions, participants raised the impression that these changes made them agile and certainly increased their resilience.

*“So, we were very quick to adapt. And we were also then ready with our funding proposals. So, by the time the lockdown was announced, we could send out our funding proposals and donors responded very positively, because they themselves weren’t quite sure how they would deal with, with Covid-19, and we presented a solution.” **Participant 1***

*“When Covid-19 looked as though it might be becoming an issue, we drafted a grid which actually turned out in retrospect to be quite a good starting point document which just showed the five different options of Covid-19 and how we will respond with regard to travel, with regard to coming to the office, with regard to all our different events”. **Participant 3***

*“I mean, what I don’t think anyone knew what was coming, uhm, and I never ever thought of a humanitarian crisis. When Cyril Ramaphosa mentioned national lockdown, I knew at that moment that I had to hit, I had to go into crisis mode. I didn’t know how I was going to do it, but I knew I had to do it.” **Participant 11***

*“One of the things that, uhm, I don’t remember who said this but the uh, famous quote, which is, ‘never let a crisis go to waste’. And what I mean by that and why that’s important is there’s a lot of things that Covid-19 made us do. There’s a lot of things that we probably should have been doing already. And so, with Covid-19, it gave us the energy and the platform to be able to move forward aggressively on several things that I think is going to make the organisation overall much stronger.” **Participant 13***

Agility distinguishes between leaders who are resilient and excel at their roles and those who are not (Krupp, 2020). When in crisis mode, such leaders are able to think better, pivot quickly, adapt to their circumstances extremely quickly and intelligently, and look forward to seeing how they will make the best of the situation they encounter (Bremmer, 2015; Krupp, 2020). In accordance with the Behavioural Leadership Theory, agile leaders have traits that may be cultivated and embodied by every leader who wants to manage a successful organisation (Mulholland, 2019). During Covid-19, the food industry in the NPO sector clearly flourished (Schneider, 2020), and this had a knock-on effect for other organisations that were resilient and quickly pivoted to running food relief programmes as well.

When the lockdown was implemented, individuals in impoverished communities needed assistance such as food parcels (Tshikululu Social Investments, 2020), and this required many organisations to make decisions more quickly in order to make their organisational models fit the changing requirements of Covid-19 (Jadoul et al., 2020). In terms of adjusting to the

Covid-19 pandemic, these agile organisations outperformed others. A survey done by the Charities Aid Foundation of America reported that “agility has been one of the most significant factors in non- profits’ ongoing resilience” (Uchida, 2021, p. 1), which is what most participants experienced.

According to research done by Jadoul et al., (2020), agile organisations outperformed others in adjusting to Covid-19. They quickly changed their organisational strategies and operations to manage through this crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, Jadoul et al., (2020) states that agile leaders should help staff comprehend change as well as embrace agility and the new ways of operating in order to thrive in this VUCA environment.

The advantages of virtual and hybrid work.

Organisational resilience and agility meant organisations had to quickly change operations and one of the most common shifts undertaken by organisational leaders, was the shift to working remotely online, with the use of virtual platforms. Some participants stated that virtual and hybrid work created some positive spinoffs for their organisations, such as:

“Some members have found that actually, they like everything online. And before it wasn’t even an option, so we now looking at ways that we can provide hybrid solutions everywhere.”

Participant 3

“Having less transport money to be able to come through to the organisation and where we are placed. And hence being able to communicate by WhatsApp channels and WhatsApp groups etc allows people still to access services but without incurring in the traveling costs as the data cost in comparison is much lower.”

Participant 6

“And we also launched an entirely new virtual methodology which, uhm, we were able to work very quickly in a 6–7-week period to launch a hybrid WhatsApp-based tool that clients could access, pull down information 24/7. Our frontline staff were able to engage with clients 24/7 and we were able to help to triage their access to healthcare and provide them with support even when they couldn’t see us face to face.”

Participant 13

“I think, uh, provided us with opportunities to look at how to deal with the challenge. How to deal with, uhm uh, what was, uh, you know what we were being confronted with. And I think before Covid-19, uh, there were certainly lots of, uh, discussions around artificial intelligence, uhm, dealing with the Fourth Industrial Revolution, uhm, and embracing all of that, you know. So, I, I think what the Covid-19 pandemic has done was provide opportunities for us to as organisations, as businesses, as civil society to look at opportunities for innovation and opportunities for creativity.”

Participant 16

Furthermore, due to the advances of technology and virtual platforms, people all over the world were able to connect with one another despite being under lockdown.

*“The virtual world also allows you to now have a meeting with a hundred people you know. So counterintuitively, you can also have a meeting with a hundred people at the same time sitting in Singapore and Berlin and Johannesburg and Cape Town and Tierra del Feugo, so you don’t have to wait for organising like a massive international conference in Dakar, right? And then the costs of flights and whatever.” **Participant 7***

*“We also created new fora such as WhatsApp-based team lines to make sure that we had continual conversation and engagement with our staff everywhere. From the very front lines on the Nile in Uganda to, you know the offices in Pretoria that we were able to reach up and down into our staff and just engage them, tap them to see how they were doing.” **Participant 13***

Bam (2022) postulates that technology and web-based communication has created a global shift, where transacting with one another using digital devices has become easier. Employees have been productive because of flexible schedules of being able to choose when their day starts and ends (Lorinkova & Perry, 2018). The idea of virtual and hybrid working conditions allowed people to balance their professional and personal lives. For example, during lockdown, employees could not commute, giving them more time to accomplish their work and spend time with their families, which for some led to great job satisfaction and overall high performance (Davidescu et al., 2020). Ultimately, it all came down to one’s personality, because whilst some people preferred to work in an office alongside their colleagues, others preferred to work alone (Cramer & Zaveri, 2020).

Managing Covid-19

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, hybrid working conditions have provided some organisations with the flexibility they require to maintain operations while prioritising employee and client health and wellbeing as part of their public health responsibilities.

Managing the spread of Covid-19

Organisations put into place practices that would help maintain the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace. Most participants appeared to have been prepared to follow safety measures, such as wearing personal protective equipment (PPE), having safety committees as well as encouraging vaccinations. One participant mentioned that during Covid-19, they had

paramedics on site and required indemnity forms from their beneficiaries because their services required them to work and host events in Covid-19 hotspot communities.

“If we are doing a very big event in you know risky areas, we will have security on site. We have paramedics on site. And yeah, indemnities are signed so that if there is a situation that arises, we’re not held liable, because at the end of the day it does come with its risks.”

Participant 2

“We quickly, fairly quickly, developed a Covid-19 policy, health and safety policy in accordance with the, uh, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, ensuring that we’re compliant with the government legislation.” **Participant 4**

“So, besides introducing a Covid-19 policy in terms of how we work, and you know, uhm, mask wearing and shared office spaces etc, social distancing and temperature checks all the usual protocols that were requested [...] nobody with comorbidities or pregnancies, or just vulnerable in any way was allowed to come to the office.” **Participant 6**

“We actually have also had health and safety organisation that we consult with, and they give us guidance and direction. So, we actually have a consultant, uh, a health and safety consultant that comes once a month [...] we also then make sure that we comply with all required Covid-19 restrictions and guidelines and those we get from the Department of Health, we get those from the Department of Education, uhm, and the Department of Labour.” **Participant 8**

“We have provided all the necessary, uhm uh, PPE. You know personal protective equipment, uhm, mask, uh, sanitizer, surface spray, uhm, you know. Uh, every field worker, every month, uhm, we have provided them with a, uh, PPE pack. Uh, you know, disposable mask, washable and masks that can be recycled.” **Participant 16**

In terms of vaccinations, participants said:

“As soon as vaccinations opened, we encouraged vaccinations. We’ve never gone mandatory vaccination. Just feel that it’s something that we don’t have the right to order people to take certain medicine.” **Participant 3**

“Uhm we’ve been promoting a vaccine vaccination, so we haven’t gone the route of mandatory, uhm, vaccination. Er, but we have been promoting, uh, vaccines, uhm, amongst our staff and the participants too.” **Participant 7**

“We also made sure that we provided as much education as we could to our staff. Everything from the normal Covid-19 information to actually doing research with our frontline workers when vaccines became available to find out, about hesitation, to find out about myths and

disinformation so that we could recraft our messaging to really drive vaccination within the organisation so that individuals had a place to ask questions to voice their fears and to really come to grips with the importance and the power of vaccination as a way of getting out of this epidemic.” Participant 13

The findings show that given the serious threats posed by the pandemic, organisations had a moral obligation to take the necessary steps to maintain their legitimacy, conform to governmental constraints and demands, as well as protect the health of their employees and consumers (Boiral et al., 2021). Employers were expected to implement all the required safety measures that were compatible with the overall national plans and policies to minimize the spread of Covid-19, as per the Covid-19 Occupational Health and Safety Measures in Workplaces Covid-19 (C19 OHS) (Department of Employment and Labour, 2020).

The aforementioned findings show that the outcomes of Covid-19 varied. Some organisations were able to manage the spread of Covid-19 by ensuring that all relevant safety protocols were followed, such as, regular sanitising of office spaces and the use of PPE. Some organisations experienced a range of negative and positive Covid-19 outcomes. Negative outcomes involved organisations having to modify their operations or finding alternative ways to remain operational. Additionally, some organisations had unpleasant experiences with the use of virtual and hybrid work which made their jobs difficult. As much as some participants tried to remain resilient, for some the resiliency gave way to employees feeling burnt out. The decline of finances was also a negative contribution to the outcomes of Covid-19. With funding dwindling and donors pulling funding, many organisations had a terrible time trying to maintain their operations.

Conversely, there were some positive outcomes of the Covid-19 pandemic, meaning that the pandemic, to some extent, was not all detrimental. Most organisations had leaders who were characterised as agile in managing the outcome of Covid-19 that proved that their organisations were resilient and survived this pandemic. Virtual and hybrid working conditions positively affected some employees who may now work from anywhere as long as they had an internet connection due to advancements in digital technology.

It can thus be seen that Covid-19 presented varied outcomes that were both positive and negative. However, all the organisations were able to maintain operations through the 2+ years of Covid-19 existing. This shows that ultimately all organisations were resilient and were able to overcome the negative outcomes and embrace the positive outcomes more. This

is also connected to the Behavioural Leadership Theory (Mulholland, 2019) since leaders demonstrated agility and resilience during Covid-19, and this is a behaviour that any future leader may emulate in order to deal with any crisis, especially one that is unexpected.

THEME TWO: EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The second theme of this study explored the strategies that were implemented in order for leaders to keep their organisations operating effectively. Three sub-themes emerged from this theme which were: strategic planning, strategy implementation and evaluation.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is the process through which organisations define their strategic direction by developing particular plans, implementing them, and assessing their effectiveness in reaching long-term goals (Smith, 2021). When questioned about their strategic planning approach, all participants mentioned how they did not plan their organisational strategy on their own. This category highlights the strategies and processes that organisations use to ensure successful organisational performance.

Conducting strategic meetings

The first step most participants took when strategic planning was to conduct strategic meetings. Participants would come together whether virtually or in person with other colleagues from their organisations and they would discuss their strategic plans together. During Covid-19, these strategic meetings were either conducted every week or monthly. Participants needed to constantly discuss their strategies and repurpose or reset them where applicable.

*“We do have a strategy that we’ve been working on, is to firm up on that. This week in fact, we set aside 3 meetings where we’re just looking at the strategy.” **Participant 1***

*“Whenever there is like very high-level strategic planning needed, we’re all in the room, whether that’s virtually or whether that’s in person and we’re discussing the way forward. Uhm, the strategy planning takes place with executives and non-executives.” **Participant 2***

“So, for us to see where we’re going, uhm, every for the year, we normally meet every second month, bimonthly. So bimonthly full board and bimonthly is the ex co of the board.”

Participant 9

“So, we set up a, uh, emergency council, basically we usually meet every two weeks. But at that point we started meeting twice a week, uhm, to just discuss where we’re going.”

Participant 10

“So, but then we also started implementing weekly organisational meets, so all heads of department meet every Monday and we discuss what’s going on and what needs to be done, what needs to be changed, etc.” ***Participant 11***

A strategic meeting is a group discussion on how to best use an organisation’s resources to achieve specified goals and objectives (Smith, 2021). It is important to conduct strategic meetings because it ensures that organisational leaders and their colleagues establish clear and collaborative visions (Drucker, 2018). Prior to Covid-19, organisations would ideally schedule strategic meetings every quarter; but, after Covid-19, quarterly meetings became insufficient, and leaders began holding strategic meetings weekly or even monthly.

Many organisations had long-term objectives that they were already working toward when the virus struck (Fuller & Rice, 2022), but without knowing the magnitude of the virus or how long it would persist, new goals had to be established, goals that would be pertinent during the course of the pandemic. When the hard lockdown was announced by the president, leaders conducted their strategic meetings and set effective priorities that they had to accomplish (Wenzel et al., 2021). Because Covid-19 was unpredictable, as the pandemic conditions changed rapidly, it was crucial for participants to frequently conduct strategic meetings as well, in order to be able to make appropriate plans on ways to effectively manage through the pandemic and continue to be operational.

Decision-Making

During strategic meetings, participants met with their colleagues to determine the direction their organisations would take. In those meetings, decisions had to be made determining which strategies the leaders would implement for effective organisational performance. Participants did not work alone in maintaining organisational performance. They made choices in collaboration with their personnel, and some even consulted their boards.

“I report to the board four times a year, you know. Uhm, and they give us good guidance and good support. They’re really, really impressed with how we’ve managed to survive Covid. Uhm, they feel that we’ve done better than a lot of corporate companies in terms of our ability to change and to maintain, uhm, staff and to, uhm, pivot so quickly.” **Participant 1**

“So, it’s really by consultation, but still understanding that the buck stops with the CEO and the board.” **Participant 4**

“The more you consult people, the more they will be supportive towards whatever you want to do. If people feel excluded of the decision and consulting making process, it tends you know to cause resentment and then less maybe support and participation.” **Participant 6**

“A lot of decisions are obviously made in our meetings. Anything that’s above line, I then take to the board and as a board we all make a decision, yes or no we go with it.” **Participant 11**

“And we then came up with a plan that the management committee, which are also all volunteers except for me, uhm, that we finalized the plan and then we had a virtual meeting with any member of the programme that wanted to take part and that’s where we presented the plan to them. So, it was quite consultative.” **Participant 12**

Covid-19 came as a shock to many people, and naturally at first, leaders alone did not know how to tackle it. Some organisational leaders decided to involve their management teams, board members, staff members and even volunteers in their strategy decision making process. Since Covid-19 affected everyone differently, it was important for leaders to allow other colleagues to express their thoughts before making big strategic decisions that could affect the aforementioned parties.

Additionally, Drucker (2018), states that leaders have to be decisive when making decisions and planning their strategy. For some leaders that meant changing their programmes or starting new projects like handing out food parcels. However, as decisive as leaders had to be, they did not make decisions by themselves. Although leadership under Covid-19 required leaders to make decisions quickly in order to navigate through the pandemic (Fuller & Rice, 2022), leaders did not solely make decisions. Instead, they took the time to consult with others before making a decision. Also, because Covid-19 was unpredictable, new decisions would need to be made, necessitating frequent strategic planning meetings.

Identifying Priorities

Participants also spoke about the process of identifying their priorities because when the pandemic began, some of their priorities shifted. During their frequent strategic planning meetings, participants identified what was important for their organisations, in order to clearly understand their goals and set out flexible plans of how they would achieve those goals.

“So, we’re looking at our strategy. We are on board; we know what we’re going to do. We know who we’re going to do it with. We, we pretty soon, going to put the budgets together to have a good sense of how much money we need. Who we are going to target for that money that we need. Uhm, we know what ventures we’re going to invest in. And uhm, we know what we’re going to do with our foundational programmes, which is our three main programmes. How we’re going to make sure those are operating.” **Participant 1**

“We always are trying to look strategically into the future as to where do we want to be going and getting that balance right all the times is difficult”. **Participant 3**

“We look at our work, what was practical to achieve and so the strategies had to be reviewed in the sense of under the current restrictions what is practical? What is feasible? What is achievable? What is reasonable? And so, I had to look at our strategies and with that in mind.” **Participant 8**

“Uhm, look, we at the beginning and especially in terms of Covid we had short term, uhm, strategies that we couldn’t do during the Covid times because our staff is just in, our project staff is in different projects. And so, we had to park the short-term strategies, but we continued to work on the long-term strategies throughout the Covid.” **Participant 10**

“So, it’s not really finding a one size fits all strategy. It’s as I said, our sort of global thing is flexibility and creativity and then looking at the goals that are specific to each of the projects and then just bringing that together.” **Participant 14**

“What we wanted and in fact what the pandemic then created was a platform for us to streamline that operation, you know. So uh, we then discussed, uh, policy. We discussed, uh, you know virtual agreements in terms of what staff needed to have.” **Participant 16**

Participants were also able to identify a critical and common priority for their organisations which was sustaining finances.

“Uhm, in terms of plans to develop and work on that funding, we have actually put together a fundraising committee, which is not just about fund raising events, and we have somebody on

that committee who does a lot of fundraising with a very big organisation in Cape Town who is helping to train volunteers on how to write funding proposals, how to put together the information that is required, how to follow up, how to connect.” **Participant 5**

“I think that for all of us in this space, the most important thing that we can try to do and what [name of organisation] is trying to do is to have a way forward process where we’re looking at things like endowments or secured funding streams to help us in the advent of crises or the advent of catastrophe that shuts down normal services.” **Participant 13**

“And so, I think the need to ensure that an organisation has reserves is vital.” **Participant 15**

“I think what we’ve learned over the last few years, uhm, through strategic planning is that you can’t have all your eggs in one basket. And you know one’s got to look at, uh, a diverse pool of, uh, donor support.” **Participant 16**

Leaders had to identify priorities and implement relevant strategies in order to reimagine what they wanted their organisations to do and how they wanted to do it (Zimmerman, 2020). Hence, leaders needed to be decisive whether or not the priorities they were planning were the right ones or not (Botelho et al., 2017). Additionally, effective leaders ask what needs to be done then they set priorities and stick to them (Drucker, 2018). As the behavioural leadership theory asserts, another trait that prospective leaders may acquire and improve is decisiveness (Mulholland, 2019). Other tasks that are not prioritised get set aside and priority tasks are handled (Drucker, 2018). Organisational leaders, for example, had to suspend some of their main programmes, especially if they were not a priority at that moment. If personnel were unable to work remotely on particular programmes, in-person duties had to be suspended and the focus shifted to other relevant programmes. Leaders also had to worry about keeping their finances in order. Overall, the most important thing that everyone had to prioritise was their health.

Furthermore, data from a survey clearly shows that almost a third of the leaders mentioned that they would re-prioritise strategies in order to include new services and/or programmes (Strub, 2021), which is what most participants chose to do as well. Of the new methods they had implemented since the onset of the pandemic, more than half of the leaders said that "online programming was a priority to maintain moving forward" (Strub, 2021, p. 2).

Identifying priorities helped participants to strategically plan where and how they would focus their energy in order to maintain the effective performance of their organisations. For the aforementioned participants, identifying their priorities was a great plan. It worked because they were able to focus on acquiring funding and creating sustainable funding plans which is critical in keeping an organisation operating effectively.

Strategy Implementation

Leadership is crucial in the strategic implementation process because it determines how the change will be executed by setting operational goals and making decisions about when and how hard to push for change (Hitt et al., 2017). Leaders should set the strategic direction for their organisations, which, if executed correctly, contributes positively to effective strategic implementation (Hitt et al., 2017). This category gives insight to the process leaders took to turn their plans into actions. Participants shared the same objective of keeping their organisations operating, although their plans differed. However, there were three common concepts that emerged from most of the participants. There were collaborations between internal staff; establishing professional relationships; and employing a hybrid working model.

Collaboration between internal staff

In this study, participants pointed out that collaboration between internal staff proved to be very effective when it came to implementing their plans. Participants noted that working together and communicating with one another improved the way they worked, and it helped them to achieve their goals.

*“We’re working collaboratively, and you cannot go rogue when you work collaboratively. Uhm yeah, so that’s our process, that’s our process.” **Participant 2***

*“I think we need, or the leadership team just needs to continue having a collaborative approach. Uhm, good listening, offering training and what’s really crucial is acknowledgement. I think one needs to take time to acknowledge people as people, but also in their professional roles because if we don’t see each other in the workplace, ain’t going to work to implement and do activities.” **Participant 6***

*“The challenge of Covid meant that we also needed more agile, flexible supporting of each other. So [. . .], finding ways of collaborating became really important, and so certainly that shift, uhm, has occurred.” **Participant 7***

“We do collaborate, we don’t work in silos. I think that’s the other, proven, uh, reason why we, why we are effective.” Participant 10

“I believe the collaborative model of leadership here makes our organisation very resilient and robust because we constantly have various lenses through which we are strategizing and planning and implementing the project.” Participant 14

According to Gniadek (2019), having an effective collaborative team culture tends to have a positive influence on programme effectiveness as well as organisational effectiveness. When colleagues collaborate with leaders, they are motivated and feel valuable which in turn leads to them being productive and reaching the goals of the organisation (Gniadek, 2019). Deming (1982 as cited in O’Daniel & Rosenstein, 2008) concurs that teamwork is inherent in a structure in which all employees are working towards a common objective and collaborate to attain that goal. He further notes that, rather than each person focusing on their own task, accomplishing common goals becomes simpler when people collaborate (O’Daniel & Rosenstein, 2008).

Furthermore, collaboration is crucial when implementing strategies because when stakeholders, managers and their colleagues collaborate and share their perspectives on the strategies an organisation should undertake, it is more likely that the strategies will be simpler to implement as there is more buy-in and understanding of the plans to be put in place (Konstan-Pines, 2016). The findings are supported by Systems Theory because every organisation is a coherent system of interrelated parts or subsystems (von Bertalanffy, 2015). Collaboration between NPO leaders, their co-workers, and other stakeholders had a considerably larger impact in the organisations' success than if everybody worked independently. Even though they worked from home, they were able to support one another for the organisations’ overall success. This collaboration between leaders and internal staff works towards the effective operation of organisations.

Establishing professional relationships

Covid-19 has created a situation in which individuals must collaborate with external parties in order to withstand this pandemic. Leaders of non-profit organisations implemented the strategy of establishing and cultivating relationships with other organisations to guarantee that their programmes continued to operate, and the organisation remained effective. Half of

the participants interviewed for this study have implemented partnerships with other non-profits, government, communities, and funders in order to become more effective. This is what they had to say.

“Online exams have shown that we don’t have to set up venues everywhere. People write online exams and so we have been speaking to associations up in Africa and to see if their students would be interested to look to write our exams and fortunately, we just in the last month, signed agreements with four different associations.” **Participant 3**

“So really the importance of collective, you know, collaboration is becoming, with resources, uh, dwindling, that you know lobbying together becomes even more important.” **Participant 4**

“We’ve got beneficiaries down south in like the Southern Peninsula. We don’t work there, so for us to take food hampers there, it’s going to cost us money. So, we partnered with organisations.” **Participant 5**

“We’ve got four programmes, four programme managers. Where in the past they’d each focus on their own programmes. We’ve now through Covid, the collaboration has worked, where instead of only focusing on your area of responsibility, we actually all work together to help each other and solve each other’s challenges and find solutions to improve each other’s areas.” **Participant 8**

“Uhm, we were finally working in partnership with people that we’ve been trying to work with for years. Uhm, it was the first time in my experience that the private sector, non-profit sector and government were all working together to try and resolve an issue.” **Participant 15**

According to Gough (2018), for an organisation to succeed, it is crucial that they form partnerships and relationships, which is echoed by Förschner et al., (2006), who agrees that “a partnership is a valuable instrument or ‘organisational’ model to overcome weaknesses” (Förschner et al., 2006, p. 3). Partnerships within the non-profit sector, whether local or national, may give non-profits in that partnership several benefits to attaining its vision and mission (Gazley & Guo, 2020). This relates to Systems Theory, which defines a NPO as an open system (von Bertalanffy, 2015). NPOs would have struggled to remain effective if they had not established relationships with other organisations and individuals in order to achieve their objectives and serve beneficiaries. External factors had an influence in the success of these organisations.

Additionally, establishing professional relationships enables disparate groups to work together to achieve greater goals towards bettering individuals, communities and the world (Wilkinson, 2017). During Covid-19, it was crucial that organisations worked together in order to implement their strategies and accomplish their objectives. One participant, for example, stated that they needed to interact and engage with other organisations in a different location from their own, in order to effectively deliver their food hamper programme. Although an organisation may be considered a system on its own, during the pandemic, organisations formed partnerships and leaned on one another. Their collaboration and reliance on one another inadvertently created a new system, one in which organisations relied on one another to survive during the pandemic.

Hybrid working model

When asked about remote working practices, most participants discussed how they had either reverted to staff returning to the office or adopting the hybrid working approach. As Covid-19 has started to subside, several leaders saw the significance of following what works well for their organisations and what has proven to be effective thus far.

“We will you know where it makes sense we will also, continue with allowing certain staff to work from home. Uhm, it’s a new way, the world is going. It’s a new way of operating.”

Participant 4

“It’s about keeping what worked well and what’s efficient for, uhm, in terms of our work. So, we work remotely when there is need to work remotely.” **Participant 6**

“So, our staff meetings these days people who are on site, uhm, we meet in the boardroom and then we still have the zoom link, which means that people like therapists who weren’t on site would never have been in a staff meeting, now have the ability to also join virtually. So, it’s really helped and more of that kind of hybrid approach and becoming more techno savvy I think will be helpful going forward.” **Participant 14**

“We’ve always had a policy here that you know, however, you do your work best we will support you to do it in whatever model that is. If that is remote working, then it’s something we’re definitely open to as an organisation.” **Participant 15**

“I think, uh, we will probably continue to have a hybrid model of you know, uh, staff largely working remotely, but that we will continue to, uhm, uh, you know to have, uh, a, an office

bound as supporting, uhm, you know the people that will make sure that that all the necessary documents are filed.” Participant 16

A hybrid workplace's main objective is to provide workers more freedom over how and where they work while also promoting a healthier work-life balance (Kirkham & Fowell, 2022). Employees in a hybrid work environment should be able to transition between the workplace and their homes without compromising performance. According to a 2019 survey conducted by Global Workplace Analytics, a hybrid working practice made most of their interviewed employees happier; made them feel more trusted; improved their work/life balance; and recommended their organisations to a friend (Lister, 2019).

Additionally, after a year of remote work, a survey of thirty thousand working individuals conducted by Microsoft (2021), found that most of their workers expected flexible work from home options to continue post-pandemic. Moreover, the responses above reflected data from another recent survey which stated that -more than a third of organisations have already opted to become hybrid (Kirkham & Fowell, 2022). Furthermore, two thirds of those organisations enabled employees to decide when and how frequently they wanted to come into the workplace (Kirkham & Fowell, 2022).

Despite Covid-19 necessitating that people go into lockdown, the statistics above show that most employees performed effectively under remote and hybrid working conditions. The strategy of hybrid working may be unorthodox especially pre-pandemic, but now, in a post-pandemic time, it is proving to be a critical component for the successful functioning of many organisations, including for some of the participants.

Evaluation

This category is about evaluation, which is a process that critically reviews a programme (Patton, 2015). It comprises acquiring and analysing data in relation to programme tasks, characteristics, and results. Collecting information on a programme is the objective of evaluation in order to enhance the efficacy of a programme, as well as influence programming decisions (Feilhauer & Hahn, 2021).

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) is important for organisations because it enables leaders to improve their programme plans and implementation. Monitoring comprises tracking the progress of a programme as it is being delivered so that, if necessary, adjustments may be implemented, whereas evaluation is the process of assessing if the actions conducted had the desired impact on the target population of the programme (Surbhi, 2017). M & E work in conjunction, as monitoring improves efficiency and evaluation improves the effectiveness of programmes and organisations (Surbhi, 2017). Most participants briefly stated that their M & E systems, enabled them in determining the efficacy of their organisations and where they needed to improve.

“So, with the [name of project], for instance, we’re able to, uhm, monitor how many people are being fed you know. How many people are being educated, uhm and, so that’s how you can quantify, if the initiative is successful or not [...] we are continuously, you know, learning and evaluating and then changing things all the time. Uhm, but yeah. So, from that point of view, that’s how we can assess that we are kind of reaching our goals.” **Participant 2**

“Uhm, we as an organisation we already, one of our priorities is to continuously monitor and evaluate our programmes to ensure that we actually do, are delivering evidence informed and evidence-based services. So, our programmes are regularly, well or continuously monitored, evaluated, we have internally. So, we have our own internal systems, uh, you know, pre-programme evaluations or mid programme evaluations or even post programme evaluations.” **Participant 4**

“So, we obviously have an M & E, uhm, M & E in place for all our projects. But we also do, at least once a year, an external review, get one that we get an external reviewer in and then to write it up. Uhm, and we also tried to get community feedback ‘cause I think that is usually I mean you can play around with a lot of numbers and figures, uh, write good reports. But in the end, I think you need to go to your, to the people that you serve and to find out from them whether you, whether they think it’s effective.” **Participant 10**

“So, we’ve got the qualitative, qualitative and quantitative, uh, feedback which allows us to look at impact studies from a numbers perspective and then also from the quality of the interventions that we offer.” **Participant 14**

“Uhm so, we have an M & E system and an M & E officer who oversees all the work that we’re doing. We collect, uhm, yeah, all types of data, quantitative, qualitative, significant change stories, uhm, and we always yeah, we’re constantly monitoring to make sure that

we're meeting our targets and ultimately, we yeah, I mean we met all of them, which was fantastic, was a surprise, but uhm yeah, we managed to meet all our targets.” Participant 15

Evaluation allows leaders to demonstrate the success or progression of their organisational programmes (Patton, 2015). The data collected for monitoring and evaluation enables leaders to better explain the outcome of their programmes to others, which is important for public outreach, employee morale, and gaining and keeping support from existing and potential donors (Patton, 2015). A well-planned and meticulously implemented evaluation is programme-specific and draws on existing evaluation knowledge and resources, which in turn will benefit all stakeholders more than a haphazardly assembled one (Feilhauer & Hahn, 2021).

It is critical for organisational leaders to establish M & E practises in their organisations because it demonstrates accountability (Kingston et al., 2023). These M & E techniques help organisational leaders understand what they need to keep doing right to stay effective and where they need to improve to increase the organisation's effectiveness. M & E practices not only hold the leader accountable, but they also support organisational leaders in encouraging both individual and group efforts to comprehend and influence individuals to work toward achieving common goals (Yukl, 2013).

Most non-profit organisations in the industry changed operations, and some modified their programmes, during the Covid-19 pandemic, so it was an agile strategy for leaders to create M & E systems and put them in place to evaluate whether their implemented Covid-19 management strategies were effective or not, and where they needed to improve and modify. The organisation as a whole would have underperformed if leaders had not identified, improved, and rectified specific components of the system that were failing.

Furthermore, because the Covid-19 pandemic and its resultant restrictions were foreign to everyone, the findings of this study support the literature by Kingston et al., (2023), that having M & E systems in place to establish the actual needs of beneficiaries demonstrated that leaders prioritised their beneficiaries when making decisions on how to operate during Covid-19, whilst simultaneously meeting their objectives. Additionally, because many organisations relied on their reserves for funding, it was critical for leaders to demonstrate to donors, in a clear and compelling manner, how and where the organisation was successful in order to attract funds (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016).

Organisational Effectiveness

Organisational effectiveness refers to how an organisation has attained complete self-awareness as a result of, amongst other things, leaders formulating well-defined goals for employees and establishing strategies to efficiently execute those goals (Castelli, 2016). When asked about the effectiveness of their strategic visions, most participants said their organisations were effective.

*“Yes! We, I really think we are making progress. We’ve been able to, we are now busy looking at our strategy for the, for this year. For the new financial year.” **Participant 1***

*“I think we are being effective and if I look at our vision while we exist, the reason why we exist is to improve the quality of education for the learners and through that to allow for community upliftment. Uhm, and I really believe as far as that is concerned, we definitely back on track.” **Participant 8***

*“I think our vision is effective because we know that these are the services that we need to render. And if we see that we are not going to make it when we sit down and then we go back to the drawing board and say but how do we do it different.” **Participant 9***

*“Even with Covid almost coming and kind of hitting us, you know a crash on the side, the organisation was able to keep focused on its strategic vision even though we had to account for and start dealing with Covid in a way that we not, would not have in the past. We were able to still accomplish our primary mission as an organisation, and so, I think because of that, our vision was both focused and yet not so focused that it gave us some flexibility to handle Covid.” **Participant 13***

*“And so yeah, I think a lot of ensuring that yeah, our financial management controls are in place and working effectively, and our M & E systems are pristine and yeah, I think those are very important things because if those ships sink the entire organisation does.” **Participant 15***

Castelli (2016) asserts that an efficient and effective organisation operates like a well-oiled machine, as postulated by Systems Theory. Its moving parts all operate flawlessly together to effectively and efficiently achieve the objectives that the team members and leaders set out to attain (Castelli, 2016). Despite how challenging Covid-19 was for many organisations, two years later some organisations have managed to be resilient and effective. The findings of this study support research by Dobru et al., (2021) and Castelli (2016) who also found that most

leaders developed clear and direct strategic visions, which were communicated to their colleagues and that resulted in their organisations accomplishing their goals. Additionally, understanding the drivers of organisational effectiveness is important because it helps many individuals to do a better job and simultaneously helps the organisation develop in a variety of ways, whether you are in a leadership or operational position (Dobru et al., 2021).

The aforementioned findings for this theme in the study explored the prevalent strategies that organisational leaders carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to maintain good organisational performance. According to the responses in this study, none of the participants worked in silos. Instead, they collaborated with colleagues, employees, and board members to develop strategies that included identifying priorities, making decisions, and evaluating those strategies in order to use the data to better influence further decision-making and to remain operational while navigating the pandemic. Strategy formulation, according to Jooste and Fourie (2009), is less important than strategy execution since strategy implementation is regarded to be more difficult than strategy formulation. As seen above, creative strategies can be devised, but if the implementation process is inadequate, those strategies could fail. Fortunately, the participants directed and influenced their organisations to pursue well-executed strategies that resulted in effective and efficient organisational performance through collaborations, M & E systems, and new relationships with other non-profits, the government, and institutions. Overall, all strategies adopted resulted in success, implying that all components collaborated to operate an efficient system, as well as those generated via partnerships.

THEME THREE: INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP

The third and last theme of this study explored the influence of leadership on the people they lead and themselves, which in turn led to effective organisational performance. Two major concepts emerged from this theme, which were self-leadership and influence on team members.

Self-leadership

According to Rosenbach (2018), self-leadership can be defined as a leader intentionally recognising, learning and improving their own leadership skills, as well as influencing themselves to achieve their objectives. Bryant & Kazan (2012) mention that “self-leadership

is important as a foundation for personal, team, business and strategic leadership” (Bryant & Kazan, 2012, p. 2). Leaders become effective and have a positive influence on those they lead when they continuously learn and improve their leadership skills. Participants reported that they needed to develop themselves to prepare and perform better in their roles in order to effectively lead during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Leadership Development

The Covid-19 pandemic threw a wrench in the operations of many organisations, forcing them to adjust to the new reality. Research demonstrates that leadership development is important as leaders should adapt and improve their leadership skills in order for their organisations to perform effectively (Day & Dragoni, 2015). When asked how the Covid-19 pandemic influenced their leadership, the majority of the participants said it influenced them to improve and evolve the way they lead and did things prior to Covid-19.

“It has evolved very much. It has. I, I’m a very empathetic leader and very respectful and, and engaging. And then I’m also very directive, but the ratio has shifted. So, there’s less of the ... so less of the engaging because, and more of the, the directive. Which is necessary when you go through a crisis. Right! So, you... so it’s less sort of, taking direction and more giving direction but balancing it also with communication, engagement, uhm, and that sort of thing, empathy.” **Participant 1**

“I’ve never pictured myself as natural in that position. So, for as long as I’ve had leadership roles, I read and listened and study a lot to find out what other ways, best ways to make this organisation more effective and to me few things beat having the right people there and giving them confidence that they can actually make things happen and have that thinking cascade through the organisation.” **Participant 3**

“What I do think has changed, and potentially it’s because I’m getting older; potentially it’s because I’ve been in the role longer, I see a more urgent need to focus on younger staff. Individuals that are newer in their careers and really focusing on not just their capacity, because individuals come to us with incredible capacity. It’s around helping them develop and challenging their critical thinking and challenging their creativity and innovation.” **Participant 13**

“I am always learning, uh, about leadership. I have a coach who I meet with regularly, uhm, who I work with on that. Uhm, so yes, how to be a better leader to people of different personality types, different communication styles. It’s always something that I’m continually trying to learn and get better at.” **Participant 15**

“I think yes my approach to leadership and to, you know, organisational development evolved in the organisation based on the experience of or my experience in the sector and, uhm, and what the sectors needs were, you know.” Participant 16

The findings support an article by Schooley (2023), which states that leaders should always have room to grow as they continuously learn and improve their leadership skills. Improving their leadership skills is critical for leaders to fulfil their organisation's visions and goals, as well as to create a clear path for staff to follow under their guidance (Gleeson, 2020). This is a typical application of the Behavioural Theory of Leadership. Leading in a VUCA environment has become the norm for many leaders, thus it is critical that they improve their leadership abilities to effectively lead in this VUCA setting (Gleeson, 2020). There was a lot of uncertainty during the pandemic, and employees wanted to know that they are following a skilled leader who was able to quickly make decisions and successfully navigate through this Covid-19 pandemic.

Anthony (2017) concurs that leaders may improve their communication skills and learn how to empower and encourage themselves as well as individuals on their team by studying about leadership, working with a coach and/or a mentor, or even self-reflecting and understanding that they want to do things differently. According to the journal article by Anthony (2017), leadership coaching improves leadership performance because leaders get to assess where they are weak, obtain a better perspective of their own strengths, and learn how to use them more effectively.

The research findings support the conclusion that leaders had to develop themselves whether that was through coaching, reading books and learning about leadership, and self-reflection on their abilities and where they have changed, lacked, or improved (Anthony, 2017). Furthermore, the findings support the behavioural leadership theory since developing, growing, and evolving one's leadership skills speaks volumes about a leader's behaviour (Mulholland, 2019). Many people can learn from a leader's behaviour, such as striving to improve their leadership skills, rather than learning from attributes (Mulholland, 2019).

Integrity

Leaders value and demonstrate a variety of leadership qualities, such as empathy, ethical leadership, accountability, and so on. In this study, participants mentioned three leadership

qualities that they valued the most and some of the participants had a common leadership quality: integrity.

“I think first of all, uhm, integrity is very important for me. Uhm, so being with when I talk about integrity, I talk about honesty. I talk about, uhm, you know what you see, what you see is what you get. That this isn't two different people, uhm, by saying what I mean, and my word is my bond.” **Participant 4**

“I think in terms of what I value would be, uh, integrity. And integrity I use, but it encompasses a couple of things because it encompasses our honesty, but it also is about being, uhm, true to ourselves, to what we stand for, what we believe in, how we act out, what we believe.” **Participant 5**

“Integrity and honesty. Because one thing with lockdown, people are working from home. You have no idea what they're doing. Uh, you know, we've got no cameras on all staff and can't be watching what they're doing. And you can't, you don't want to be micromanaging people and being in their faces all the time. And so, one's had to look at integrity and honesty as a team.” **Participant 8**

“Uh, integrity, uhm, and I think accountability and honesty, work hand in hand with honesty.” **Participant 10**

“And uhm, for me, integrity in any form of leadership integrity. Having personal integrity that feeds through to corporate integrity is absolutely critical.” **Participant 14**

Leadership qualities are important for leaders to be able to guide their actions (DuBrin, 2022). These qualities may be thought of as internal tools that assist leaders in motivating employees, managing organisational performance and efficiency, and leading the organisation toward common goals in order to achieve its vision and mission (Day & Dragoni, 2015).

According to Mulholland's Behavioural Leadership Theory, the specific skills, knowledge, and talents that leaders may independently learn or develop are critical because they may be emulated by other leaders, allowing them to lead successfully (Mulholland, 2019). Northouse (2015) also asserts that leaders use technical, human, and conceptual talents in diverse ways to achieve their objectives. When participants mentioned what their greatest qualities were, integrity was the common leadership quality mentioned. Integrity may also be considered as a skill because it benefits not just the leaders but also organisations in a variety of ways

(Johnson et al., 2011). The findings support the theory because a skill such as integrity for example, may be taught to others, learned, and developed by anyone that aims to be an effective leader. In the study, the participants that led with integrity, were able to maintain the performance of their organisations and achieve most of their objectives, despite the pandemic.

Additionally, integrity in the operations of an organisation entails transparency (Huberts, 2018), which, for instance, ensured that leaders led with honesty and strong moral principles which was upstanding for many leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, leaders that value and demonstrate integrity, foster trust and motivation amongst their direct subordinates who are more inclined to emulate them (McCann et al., 2017; Mulholland, 2019). When the Covid-19 pandemic was announced, one participant mentioned that while they were absent, the management team was able to make decisions for the organisation, suggesting that the leader leads with integrity, which the team fosters. Furthermore, the findings support the behavioural leadership theory (Mulholland, 2019), by revealing that when a leader demonstrates integrity as their greatest skill, and other skills that encompass integrity, employees garner trust and are more likely to work harder, perform better, be more loyal to the organisation, and become leaders themselves, which is exactly what is required of leaders during times of crisis (Fuller & Rice, 2022). By the participants leading with integrity, they simultaneously develop that skill within themselves, their colleagues, and their organisations.

Influence on Team Members

For effective organisational performance, effective leaders have to maintain team spirit and keep employees motivated to perform well. Razak et al. (2018) states that one of the most important responsibilities of leaders is to increase the team's collective. Team members are more likely to choose to engage in their organisational goals if they feel their team is capable of reaching its goals, and the organisation being successful (Razak et al., 2018).

Enabling team to lead

Leaders foster creativity and innovation in their staff, by encouraging team members to be willing to step up and lead, when necessary, in order to maintain effective organisational performance. Participants expressed support for their team taking initiative, becoming

innovative, and making decisions, as this would empower them and demonstrate that they do not need to be told what to do all of the time.

*“It’s very easy when you clear about what you want to do. You have your team of experts, and you allow them to do the work. You have to give them authority, given the responsibility, but also the authority to carry out their jobs.” **Participant 1***

*“The other key measures exist if I’m not there, does it keep working? And I think we saw a key thing of that when lockdown started staggering. That week before lockdown, I happened to not be at the office that week. It was all fully sorted out when I got back the next week. So, it wasn’t a, you know, it was one that people had the confidence which we put the framework in place, that they could make the decisions and we might need to tweak a few of the decisions afterwards, but we’re up and running and that was the important component there that people are empowered in this structure.” **Participant 3***

*“So uhm, I work with a notion of leadership being, uhm, not necessarily hierarchical, but the leadership is about anyone who is willing to step forward and, uhm, do something right. So they have a role, but they’re stepping into their role. So that requires handing over direction to the person who is doing the role.” **Participant 7***

*“You then have heads of departments you, uhm, and everyone you’ve gotta give leeway for everyone to make decisions within their department that don’t need me. Otherwise, if I have to decide on everything, then I don’t need the people to work.” **Participant 11***

*“Uhm, I try not to be a bottleneck of the one that has to decide, or the one that has to say yes. Uhm, I usually tell people that if they’re waiting for me to say yes, they’ve already lost the battle. They should either be pitching to me on something that they really think I need to say yes to, or they should say yes and make it happen because it should happen. Uhm, as long as we understand where we’re doing in our strategy and that its mission aligned, I shouldn’t be the one that’s having to answer everything.” **Participant 13***

*“They pretty much have, uhm, a lot of leeway to do what they know is best in their project, in their area of authority.” **Participant 14***

Furthermore, participants mentioned how crucial it was for them to empower their teams throughout this crisis. Empowering the team means allowing them to take the initiative and make decisions.

*So, it really is about empowering people and making sure we see a common purpose and that we are aligned to the values.” **Participant 3***

*“I think decisions are secondary. It’s empowering everybody to collectively contribute to those decisions.” **Participant 6***

*“So, empowerment being a big thing, ‘cause you realize that with Covid you can’t do everything yourself. Working as a team is even so much more important, uhm, and empowering people. We also find people through empowerment by a bigger sense of being part of and playing an important role in.” **Participant 8***

*“And so, I do try to empower, especially my subordinates, uhm, directly below me so that that team can lead, and they can move quickly.” **Participant 13***

Silva (2016) states that leadership is a very important role in any organisation. For an organisation to be successful, leaders must encourage team members to lead when necessary (Joseph, 2019; Silva, 2016). The findings corroborate the literature by DuBrin (2022), that found for a leader to be effective, they not only promote and allow others to take on leadership positions, but they also create the environment and opportunity for them to do so.

When team members feel encouraged and supported by their leaders, they feel empowered and believe in themselves that they, too, can lead, which is especially important given that according to Mone & London (2018), not everyone is born an innate leader. Mulholland (2019) concurs, stating that the Behavioural Leadership Theory suggests that leaders can be developed based on learnable behaviours; they are not automatically born successful. Leaders learn to develop skills and their professional experience, empowering others to lead and environmental variables such as Covid-19, influence one’s attributes into becoming an effective leader.

Moreover, by empowering teams, effective leaders are essentially demonstrating trust in employees' skills to accomplish their duties autonomously. Furthermore, employees feel psychologically empowered when they see value, competence, autonomy, and influence in their job (Allan et al., 2019).

Motivation

Employee motivation is a fundamental component in ensuring effective organisational performance. Employees that are motivated tend to perform better, which benefits the organisation as a whole. One of the Covid-19 challenges was that people work from home; thus, it became difficult for leaders to effectively motivate their employees. However, some

participants were able to find alternative ways to keep their employees motivated, despite Covid- 19 challenges.

“Group has put together what they call Wellness Wednesdays, where they are going to call a certain lunchtime on Wednesday as well have either a motivational speaker or speaker on, uhm, finance, you know. So personal finances or that have someone doing a yoga session or Zumba, whatever that is [...]. So, trying to get a range that you know not everyone wants to do yoga or Zumba whatever it is, but there’s something for everyone in the course of each month. And to just return and levels some team spirit through informal, having fun together.”

Participant 3

“We’ve made sure to do things like have end of year in person connections where we just acknowledge the role of each person and I think for me it’s very much one of the things I try to do, is staying on each of my committees once a week or so just something to acknowledge what they’ve done.” **Participant 5**

“Uhm, I think now at the end of the year, just, there was, we made a small gesture, thank you gesture, uhm, to them, uhm, really acknowledging the strain that the pandemic had put on them both personally and professionally. So, we have tried in small ways just to keep the humanness, uhm, alive.” **Participant 7**

“We try to meet with each other face to face every now and again. Uh, we have, uh, a large outside area at the moment where we can have lunch. So, we try to have at least lunch together.” **Participant 10**

“So, to make sure that we’re meeting regularly as a team that we’re having regular team building, that we’re, uhm, spending time together to get to know each other on a personal level to identify the human behind the title. Uhm, yeah, I mean we have a very flexible working environment, and we create a really nice space where people can feel comfortable.” **Participant 15**

The findings support Hauser’s (2014) research that found that it is an important role for leaders to prioritise the actual process of inspiring and motivating their staff, which has become critical in achieving effective organisational performance. Additionally, “managers have not only the task of motivating employees in order to achieve the objectives set by the organisation, but also of motivating employees in achieving their personal goals” (Hauser, 2014, p. 240). Chanana & Sangeeta (2021) posit that leaders must build positive morale and make employees feel valued and empowered. By being empowered, team members and leaders may realize their full potential and take responsibility for their work (Joo et al., 2016). Leaders that foster an environment of empowerment enable their staff to succeed (Joo et al.,

2016). Although, this may prove to be difficult with employees working from home. According to Kouzes & Posner (2023), motivation and relationship building is achieved better when employees work together face-to-face. The author advocates that as Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted, leaders should encourage employees to return to the workplace and engage in face-to-face interactions in order to boost morale and motivate staff during this time of crisis (Kouzes & Posner, 2023).

Conversely, one of the disadvantages to systems theory is that it encourages leaders to focus on making sure that all systems and subsystems work coherently to achieve the organisation's goals (Kast & Rosenzweig, 2017). It may then be difficult for leaders to convey empathy and motivation to employees, and not all of them will be inspired and empowered by such an approach.

The aforementioned findings for this theme in the study explored the influence that participants had on themselves and the people that they lead within their respective organisations, during the Covid-19 pandemic, as a way of maintaining effective organisational performance. The findings of this study demonstrated the practical implementation of behavioural leadership theory and systems theory as participants were able to improve and develop themselves which is a positive reflection on their behaviour and the kind of leaders they are. Furthermore, for an organisation to operate effectively, leaders needed to positively influence their colleagues. Participants motivated, empowered, and enabled their colleagues to lead, which was an effective leadership strategy to influence staff to continue their hard work and keep the organisation operational despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.5 Summary

The primary findings of the study on how leaders maintained effective organisational performance during the Covid-19 pandemic were presented in this chapter. The chapter began by outlining the demographics of the participants which comprised leaders from non-profit organisations in Cape Town, Western Cape. For the in-depth discussion of the findings, the framework of analysis, which comprised three themes drawn from the research objectives, was then presented. The recommendations and conclusions are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the conclusions as well as the recommendations drawn from the results of the findings and analysis chapter. The aim of this study, the problem statement, and the research objectives are briefly discussed. The sample and data collection techniques are then outlined in a concise manner. Based on the knowledge gaps identified in this research study, a summary of suggestions for further research is presented.

5.2 Recap of Problem Context and Research Objectives

The importance of this study was in understanding the strategies of leaders and the necessity of effective leadership in organisations, especially during turbulent times. Covid-19 was wreaking havoc on several non-profit organisations, and few could have predicted the magnitude of the impact. As a result, establishing some strategies to maintain organisational effectiveness during this pandemic was a relatively new undertaking. For future non-profit organisational leaders to be able to lead organisations through a catastrophe like Covid-19, they must fully comprehend how today's leaders effectively managed and strategically led organisations to continue performing well through these turbulent times.

Leading through times of crisis has been studied before, but Covid-19 is a new phenomenon, and there had been little to no study done on leading through times of crisis for South African non-profits. The topic chosen for this study was, "Exploring how NPO leaders maintained effective organisational performance amid the Covid-19 pandemic".

The research objectives explored how a sample of NPO leaders in the Western Cape had managed to maintain effective organisational performance during the Covid-19 crisis. The objectives were:

1. To explore how the Covid-19 pandemic affected the organisational performance of non-profit organisations in Cape Town.
2. To understand the strategies implemented by organisational leaders to maintain effective organisational performance during the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. To explore the influence of leadership on organisational performance.

5.3 Research Sample and Data Collection

In this research study, virtual interviews with 16 NPO leaders who have effectively led an NPO through the Covid-19 pandemic were conducted. CEOs, founders, executive directors, and managers were among those who participated in the study. All participants were well-established in their leadership roles and had at least two years of NPO leadership experience prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The participants represented sixteen non-profit organisations that all maintained their performance amid the Covid-19 crisis. The sixteen NPOs were from diverse industries within the Western Cape and provide distinct services within the NPO sector. Given that it comprises various qualitative data gathering methodologies, the exploratory research design was employed to collect data. The exploratory research design was utilised to collect data since it includes multiple qualitative data collecting methodologies, and in this case, in-depth interviews were used.

5.4 Summary

The following is a summary of findings that emerged from the study according to the main research objectives of the study.

5.4.1 Objective 1

To explore the outcomes that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on organisational performance of NPOs in Cape Town.

- Participants experienced negative and positive outcomes of the Covid-19 pandemic. With regard to the negative experiences, some participants stated their performance struggles were due to the lack of funds they had and financial issues in the NPO industry, as well as having to change or implement alternative solutions such as introducing new programmes that were not part of their organisation's programmes. The shift to virtual, hybrid and remote working conditions further exacerbated the challenges.
- Some participants thrived as a result of the positive experiences, particularly those who led NPOs in the food and security sectors.
- Some participants were more agile and resilient, and they performed better when it came to adopting virtual, hybrid, and remote working conditions.
- With regards to managing Covid-19, participants complied with the safety norms and regulations that were set by the South African Government, such as social distancing

and the wearing of masks. Furthermore, participants did not compel their staff to take vaccinations, but they did advise and encourage that they do so.

5.4.2 Objective 2

To understand the strategies implemented by organisation leaders to maintain effective organisational performance during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Participants identified their priorities and implemented strategies that helped their organisations perform better and remain operational during the pandemic.
- Participants did not strategise and make decisions on their own. Instead, they engaged with colleagues and board members to determine the next steps for their organisations. They accomplished this by convening frequent operational meetings, either virtually or in person, with all stakeholders involved.
- In order to withstand the pandemic, participants collaborated as staff, in decision-making, as well as established relationships with other non-profits, organisations, and the government.
- Participants discovered that the hybrid working approach worked effectively for keeping their organisations operational. This approach worked so well, that many organisations have maintained this working model to a certain extent.
- Participants implemented monitoring and evaluation systems to assist them in determining the progress of their services, what needed to be prioritised, where they needed to improve, and what they were achieving.

5.4.3 Objective 3

To explore the influence of leadership on organisational performance.

- Participants revealed that they were always learning about leadership and that they had grown and evolved in their leadership style during the pandemic.
- Some participants led with integrity because they believed that leading with honesty and integrity was one of their greatest qualities as leaders and it was evident that leading in this manner benefited their organisations and the work ethic of their staff.
- Participants empowered their colleagues and employees to lead as a means of developing them as leaders and supporting them during times of crises.
- Some participants were able to develop fascinating and creative ways to inspire their colleagues, particularly during lockdown, when maintaining face-to-face contact was difficult. One participant revealed that their organisation offered Wellness

Wednesdays, whereby varied events were held for all employees, including management, to participate in. Another participant revealed that they would all gather outdoors for lunch as workers and refrain from discussing business, pushing employees to get to know one other on a personal basis.

5.5 Conclusions from Objectives

These conclusions have been developed from the summary above:

5.5.1 Objective 1

- Participants understand and accept that anything can happen at any given time, and that it is alright to suspend core activities and modify operations as a possible contingency during a crisis.
- To continue serving their beneficiaries, all the participants reported embracing innovation and/or adjusting to new methods of functioning. Pivoting during a pandemic let all the participants maintain their performance.
- Agile non-profits are best positioned to manage future crises, and they are the organisations most likely to survive.
- The most difficult challenge for NPO leaders was ensuring financial sustainability in order for their organisations to function successfully in the face of a crisis.

5.5.2 Objective 2

- The virus eliminated the technological and cultural hurdles that previously precluded remote labour, causing a structural change in where work is done, at least for certain individuals.
- Despite the pandemic, most participants were effective in maintaining the operations of their organisations. Participants clearly articulated their plans and worked with their colleagues, stakeholders, and partners, which contributed to participants meeting their goals and maintaining operations. Strategic leadership is versatile, and it includes managing through others, and supports organisations in dealing with change, which appears to be expanding rapidly in today's globalised economic climate

5.5.3 Objective 3

- Despite the negative impact on South Africa's NPO industry, optimism abounded. The participants were positive and motivated to accomplish more objectives after Covid-19 had subsided.
- A leader cannot lead by oneself; therefore, it was important that leaders enabled and empowered others to lead.

5.6 Recommendations

Considering the key research findings that were discussed and presented in the preceding chapter, there are a number of recommendations that can be considered by non-profit organisational leaders in their strategies to maintain effective organisational performance in times of a crisis.

Recommendations for Future Leaders:

These challenges experienced by NPO leaders in the study provide insight for future leaders on how to navigate similar challenges appropriately.

- It is recommended that leaders understand that maintaining financial sustainability is a constant challenge, and that solutions such as ensuring a wide pool of funders, creating endowments, and establishing fundraising committees be implemented to mitigate the issue.
- Work-from-home and hybrid working conditions made it difficult for non-profit leaders to further influence and motivate their staff by adding value to their lives and careers and understanding what drives and motivates them. Many employees had mental health challenges, and executives needed to find ways to help them. The pandemic resulted in serious mental health challenges among those who, at times, feared the pandemic's difficulties, and who thought they were not performing well or were not good enough (Parmar, 2021). Despite being at the tail-end of the pandemic, these mental health challenges remain as people have experienced two and half years of trauma and many have been left feeling depleted. It is, therefore, recommended that organisations support their staff by employing an organisational therapist or offering to pay for a number of sessions in the event a staff member requires this form of

support. Additionally, leaders should have one-on-one regular check-ins with employees and assist them where possible.

- It is recommended that leaders prepare and learn how to lead in a VUCA environment because it places leaders in a better position to accept change, be flexible in the changing circumstances, and succeed in this turbulent and ever-changing environment.

Recommendations for Government:

- It is recommended that the provincial government, through the Department of Social Development, assist non-profit organisations to develop financial sustainability plans that may be implemented to assist NPOs in achieving financial sustainability and access to multiple funding sources. As a result, the government may no longer be the exclusive funder of many non-profit organisations.
- Non-profits were compelled to shut down normal operations when lockdown level 5 was enforced because they were considered non-essential. However, non-profits were able to create food aid programmes that aided many communities who would have suffered much more had it not been for the non-profits. The contribution of non-profits in the third sector as economic contributors is not always recognised; thus, it is recommended that non-profit organisations be considered essential partners by the government, especially during times of crisis.

Recommendations for the Private Sector:

- It is recommended that for-profit organisations assist non-profits by offering support and mentorship to NPOs, as well as coaching sessions to help NPO leaders better understand how to run a NPO like a business. This will assist NPO leaders in addressing some of their challenges, such as learning about financial sustainability and integrating it into their organisations.

Recommendations for Donors/Funders:

- In times of crisis, it is recommended that, if possible, donors consider not withdrawing funds to support crisis causes like the Covid-19 pandemic, but rather negotiate with the NPO around what they are able to fund, as well as, come to an agreement on the possible reallocation of their funds to a programme more appropriate and suitable in the crisis.

Recommendations for NPOs and NPO Leaders:

- It is recommended that NPOs actively consider a contingency plan as part of their future planning. The contingency plan will allow an organisation to be resilient as it resumes normal activities as soon as possible following an unexpected event. In the context of recovering from a catastrophic change like the Covid-19 pandemic, the contingency plan will preserve resources, minimize beneficiary inconvenience, and identify and assign important individuals to specific duties (Chinn, 2019; Lai & Wong, 2020). Furthermore, this may inadvertently convince leaders to consider keeping greater financial reserves for rainy days.
- It is recommended that NPOs be proactive in their contingency planning, with documented plans in place for all types of contingencies for any crisis, especially one as vast as Covid-19.
- A key finding of the study was that the effective selection of board members held the NPOs in good stead during the pandemic as the members were powerful supporters and actively assisted the NPOs in times of crises. Thus, a recommendation is put forward to NPOs to carefully and strategically consider how and who is selected for the management board.
- It is recommended that NPO leaders strategically establish and empower their teams because, as the findings show, leaders do not lead alone, thus a leader needs empowered people to collaborate and work with in making strategic decisions for the organisation.
- It is recommended that NPO leaders embrace the new normal and keep doing what has worked for them since the outbreak began. For example, hybrid working conditions proved useful for certain participants, thus continuing with that post-Covid-19 would be advantageous to the effective functioning of the organisation and the staff.
- It is recommended that NPOs consider the aforementioned recommendations as well as build on what has worked effectively for them during these turbulent times.

Recommendations for Researchers:

- The NPO industry was the study's primary focus. This might not be applicable for all industries. Therefore, more industries should be included in future research to provide a holistic picture.

5.7 Suggestions for Further Research

This research study has revealed certain gaps that need addressing by means of further research endeavours. As a result, it is suggested that more studies be conducted around this topic.

To gain more knowledge of the effect of leadership on organisational performance, it is suggested that the role of team members and subordinates in preserving non-profit organisational performance during times of crisis be investigated. Furthermore, several participants complained about financial challenges that were beyond their control, implying that further study should be conducted to investigate the importance of financial sustainability for non-profits, particularly during times of crisis.

This research might have benefitted from a discussion of board members' responsibilities in crisis leadership because many leaders sought advice from their board members.

Understanding the responsibilities of board members and leaders would have provided some insight into the role of participants in maintaining their organisations' organisational performance.

Furthermore, resources and literature on the function of leaders in times of crisis based on South African organisations were scant to non-existent. The outcome of Covid-19 on non-profit organisations and the role of NPO leaders in accomplishing those goals for South African non-profits could be the subject of additional research studies and literature compilation. Further studies would be beneficial to local development organisations not only in terms of providing statistics for non-profits to better understand themselves, but also in recognising the significance of their role in improving societies, particularly during times of crisis.

5.8 Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic affected everyone, even non-profit organisations. Non-profit leaders, on the other hand, were able to adopt strategies such as collaboration with other NPOs, conducting operational meetings, amongst others, in an attempt to alleviate the negative outcomes of the Covid-19 crisis. The findings of this study indicate that, despite the negative consequences, non-profits proved to be agile and resilient to survive the Covid-19 pandemic and participants were optimistic and confident about the long-term results of Covid-19 on their organisations and their capacity to mitigate the damage. Participants were willing to

embrace innovation and new strategies of working in order to continue serving their beneficiaries and accomplishing their objectives. The world has evolved. Change has been rapid and pervasive, necessitating unprecedented levels of resilience from individuals, communities, organisations, and leaders. As a result of the pandemic, non-profits have become more agile, pivoting, and approaching challenges in new ways. It also pushed non-profits to reconsider how they operate in the future. While challenging in many respects, it has also been beneficial in altering their ways to be more flexible and digital. Collaboration is one component that is believed to be worth investigating in order to retain employees by sharing employee time along with the expenses of employment. The study contributes by revealing the numerous underlying challenges for non-profits; highlighting the changing nature of challenges during a pandemic; and highlighting the importance of NPOs' willingness to modify their strategies and adapt. In conclusion, this study revealed that leaders were responsible in the orientation and direction of their organisations which positively contributed to maintaining organisational performance during the Covid-19 crisis.

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Addendums

Addendum A: Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



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15 October 2021

Student: **Thembekile Mncube**

Outcome: **ACCEPTED**

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been given by an Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for your study, *Exploring how NPO Leaders Maintained Effective Organisational Performance amid the Covid-19 Pandemic*. The reference number is SWK-REC-2021-SR007.

I wish you all the best for your study.

Yours sincerely

Dr Khosi Kubeka

Senior Lecturer

Chair: Ethics Review Committee

The University of Cape Town is committed to policies of equal opportunity and affirmative action which are essential to its mission of promoting critical inquiry and scholarship.

Addendum B: Information Sheet

Exploring how NPO leaders maintained effective organisational performance amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic is creating problems for numerous organisations, and few could have predicted the magnitude of the devastation. Since the discovery of Covid-19, organisation leaders have been faced with the challenge of balancing many conflicting goals simultaneously.

Organisation leaders were compelled to develop new strategies and alternative solutions to not only maintain organisational, but to also keep the economy moving and the organisation a success. A crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic has never occurred with the current generation of leaders and many organisations were never prepared for a crisis like Covid-19 to disrupt their operations. The Covid-19 pandemic has acted as a wake-up call to the NPO sector that discussions regarding preparedness and contingency plans must be taken seriously.

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand how NPO leaders have maintained effective organisational performance of non-profit organisations, especially during the turbulent times of Covid-19. It aims to understand the strategies that had to be implemented in order to keep organisations from having to perform ineffectively due to problems caused by Covid-19. Furthermore, developing ways to maintain organisational performance during this pandemic is relatively new. In order for future leaders to understand how to lead an organisation through a crisis like Covid-19, it is critical to understand how today's leaders are managing and strategically leading organisations to continue performing effectively.

The research study objectives are:

- To explore the outcomes that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on organisational performance of NPOs in Cape Town.
- To understand the strategies implemented by organisation leaders to maintain effective organisational performance during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- To explore the influence of leadership on organisational performance.

Addendum C: Consent Form

Consent to take part in research

1. I have had the chance to ask questions regarding the study and have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me orally and in writing.
2. I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
3. I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview at any time after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
4. I understand that participation involves:
 - a. Being interviewed by the researcher from the University of Cape Town. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Notes will be written during the interview.
 - b. A recording of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. I must give my permission to be recorded. If I do not want to be recorded, notes will be taken down throughout the interview.
 - c. The researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
 - d. I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name(pseudonym) is used.
5. I understand that I am liable for my own data costs should I choose to be interviewed via an online platform.
6. I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
7. I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
8. I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
9. I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of my organisation.

10. I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the study.
11. I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in the researcher's password secured laptop and password-protected Google Drive folder.
12. I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for up to two years.
13. I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
14. I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.
15. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

For further inquiries I can contact:

The researcher- Ms Thembekile Mncube: ymncube@gmail.com

The Supervisor- Mrs Lauren Van Niekerk: lauren.vanniekerk@uct.ac.za

Signature of participant

Date

Signature of researcher

Date

Addendum D: Interview Guide

Research Study Interview Guide

Demographic Information

1. What gender do you identify as?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?
5. What is the title of your position and how long have you had it?

The following questions are based on objective 1 - To explore the outcomes that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on organisational performance of NPOs in Cape Town.

1. How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected your organisation?
2. How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected your industry specifically?
3. Following the lifting of government restrictions, has your organisation fully restored operations? How?
4. How does your organisation ensure the safety and well-being of your employees?
5. Did your enterprise have a written contingency plan prior to Covid-19?

The following questions are based on objective 2- To understand the strategies implemented by organisation leaders to maintain effective organisational performance during the Covid-19 pandemic.

6. How is your strategic planning process?
7. Do you feel like you're making progress on achieving your objectives? Why or why not?
8. How effective is your organisation's strategic vision?
9. What evidence do you have that your programmes are effective? Specifically, what results does your organisation achieve?
10. What are the most important issues facing your organisation? What plans are in place or are being developed to address these challenges?

11. Is your organisation model resilient enough to recover from the effect of Covid-19 and manage potential crises in the future?
12. How do you think your organisation can get more of the right things done despite the current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic?
13. What can your leadership team do to improve in ways that will help the organisation with its current objectives?
14. How would you describe the communication between different organisational functions and departments?
15. What measures have been put in place to enable that all employees transition smoothly to the digital environment?

The following questions are based on objective 3.- To explore the influence of leadership on organisational performance.

16. What are the expectations of your role?
17. How do you define success within your role?
18. Has your perspective on leadership evolved, and if so, how?
19. What in your own background prepared you to lead this organisation?
20. Tell me about the members of the leadership team. What capabilities and experiences do they bring and what are their roles in your organisation?
21. In a virtual or hybrid work environment, how do you instil trust and motivation to keep your team on track with the mission and vision of the organisation?
22. When faced with a difficult decision, how do you determine the best course of action?