

LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION: THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP ON THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION AND SUPPORT OF REMOTE TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

The stimulus of collective leadership across all faculties is pertinent to the successful implementation and assessment of sustainable remote teaching and learning support. This study identified the role leadership had at a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in South Africa. Of particular interest was the collective leadership shown at all levels across academic faculties, departments, and professional support teams to ensure that remote teaching and learning were sustainable.

A mixed-method research approach was used, in which qualitative and quantitative methods were applied. Leaders agreed that the influence of leadership affected the implementation and support of remote teaching and learning for students both negatively and positively. The findings of the study agreed with other research conducted in this field.

The researchers concluded that the perceived sustainability of remote teaching and learning depends on HEI leaders' continuous review of programmes. This will ensure that improvements in the alignment of processes, technology and student-centricity are maintained.

Keywords: leadership, remote support, teaching and learning practices, assessments, qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis.

1 INTRODUCTION

At the end of March 2020, the President of South Africa declared the Covid-19 pandemic a National Disaster and introduced a three-week lockdown period. Universities were mandated to close. The closure required staff to re-think their teaching methods and to make provision for remote teaching and learning. This resulted in a sudden shift of focus as it was urgent to develop learning environments for the remote provision of teaching, learning and assessment. This shift of focus had an impact on leaders of HEIs as they had to find ways to successfully implement and support remote teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders had to reimagine their leadership styles in the context of the pandemic. Leadership in this report refers to UWC's (University of Western Cape) learning and teaching goals that encourage staff and students to promote the university's identity and sustainability in a holistic way.

As researchers, we take cognisance that leaders might have neglected to organize and utilise online resources; or else access to such resources might have been restricted. We also accept that not everyone tries to access online resource pages that include technical help, processes and procedures that could provide support for both lecturers and students.

Leadership can be described as the process of using interpersonal prowess, exercised through appropriate communication processes to influence the activities of an organized group toward achieving goals. This is akin to academic leadership that creates a vision based on science and research data for an HEI. However, leadership is a vast concept with many definitions. The following themes are explored: relational, situational, positional (e.g., dean, chairperson), personal and social interaction of leaders as well as formal and informal leadership practices in specific HEI communities. In the present study the term 'leadership' refers to collective leadership at all levels, including the academic leadership that allows HEIs to function optimally.

2 METHODOLOGY

The study reported in this article applied both qualitative and quantitative research methods that included a structured questionnaire and interviews. Lecturers in the faculties who taught remotely were approached to participate and interviews were conducted with leaders across faculties and professional support structures. The questionnaire was delivered online via a survey. The questionnaire was sent to

all academics and academic professional support staff. The questionnaire and interviews were designed to collect information from participants as leaders, their leadership styles, and the impact of leadership on the successful implementation and support of remote teaching, learning and assessment.

The present study was exploratory, a method that is a useful research design for those subjects about which there is very little existing research. The main aim of the exploratory analysis in this study was to identify the salient factors or variables concerning the assessment of the impact of leadership in the implementation of sustainable support for remote teaching, learning and assessment at the UWC.

The research sample comprised of leaders (Deans, Deputy-Deans and Heads of Departments) across faculties, and professional support teams (Directors, Coordinators, Teaching and Learning Specialists). In addition, the sample included academics across all faculties, as they were expected to create online environments during the pandemic. The participants were selected because during the pandemic academics were expected to find innovative ways of teaching, and their students across year levels had to engage in the online environments. The leaders had to ensure that staff and students were able to engage in remote teaching, learning and assessment.

A letter of consent was sent to the leaders along with a sample copy of the questionnaire, as well as the protocol of the researchers. Lecturers were approached to complete the online questionnaire. Leaders were interviewed to find out more about their support of staff, and their perceptions of the success of students. This exploratory research design was effective in laying the groundwork that could lead to future studies in assessing the impact of leadership on the successful use of support structures in remote teaching, learning and assessment.

During the analysis of the answers to open-ended questions in the online questionnaire and interviews, multiple themes and categories emerged. The data, derived from interview notes, required a type of analysis that provided us with a context and understanding of leadership. Content analysis is such a method and is often used in qualitative research [4]. In our content analysis of the data in the present research, we categorized, tagged and conducted a thematic analysis of the qualitative data. We combined the results of the analysis with the categorized data related to aspects of leadership to gain deeper insights. As we were performing the content analysis, we identified a hierarchical set of classifications that we used to code the qualitative data. As the leader's names were not to be disclosed, a number was allocated to each, namely L1, L2, L3, and so on.

The respondents were asked the following questions as part of the questionnaire: What is the role of leadership? As a leader what kind of support did you receive during the lockdown: online, personal, technical or other kind of support? What are the factors that contribute to a sustainable support structure for remote teaching, learning and assessment? Are you able to identify some of the challenges that impact the implementation of a sustainable plan for remote teaching, learning and assessment for the faculty?

2.1 Literature Review

In examining academic leadership, Lawton-Misra and Pretorius suggest that it is essential that leadership styles should change. In addition, past leadership theories should be combined or perhaps consolidated to give rise to a new approach to leadership during a crisis like Covid-19 [7]. These authors recommend that "leading during a crisis requires leaders to be agile and resilient", leaders required a certain skill set because of the uniqueness of the pandemic [7]. In addition, leaders need to be "open to the challenges that the crisis brings" [7]. These authors go on to argue that the pandemic called for collective and decisive leadership – one that was strong and decisive, that displayed "self-awareness, compassion, empathy, vulnerability and agility – characteristics that not all individuals in leadership roles may naturally possess" [7]. The authors conclude that the pandemic emphasized the need for "person- and people-oriented leadership" that focused on "caring, empathy and compassion" [7].

The focus on leadership has had to shift along with the constantly shifting landscape in education caused by the pandemic in a "conscious, deliberate and well-considered" planned way, because "the current scenario has provided a crucible for teacher agency, agility, resilience and innovation" [10]. The research presents different styles of leadership that can be implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic or post-pandemic. Amongst these styles of leadership are transformational and transactional styles. *Transformational leadership* styles relate to a "responsive attitude and an innovative environment" whereas *transactional leadership* styles require the "exchange relationship between leaders and their followers" [2]. Typically, in education, transformational leadership is used by deans, professors, and teachers, who, in most cases, must lead by example. This style of leadership places a high value on creating communication between students and lecturers. Conversely, transactional leadership

concentrates on the leader-follower relationship commonly used in HEIs, where lecturers make demands on students. The lecturer stipulates the conditions to complete projects, assignments and assessments, and often rewards excellent performance. In measuring the effect of transformational or transactional leadership styles, Azizaha et al. suggest that both transformational and transactional leadership styles significantly influenced leaders' performance when mediating the work satisfaction of lecturers [2].

Researchers Apkarian and Rasmussen identify instructional leaders as being radical because their influence is far-reaching "in multiple instruction-related networks", particularly among their peers, as they influence them robustly "on matters of undergraduate instruction" [1]. When the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic are considered, it is noted that HEIs who operated on shared leadership styles were more likely to benefit "from a greater degree of agility, innovation, and collaboration" than HEIs who operated on "an outdated and inflexible hierarchical leadership paradigm" [5]. In their study, Fernandez and Shaw suggest that the three leadership practices that would be of great benefit to an HEI during a crisis are: to connect with people individually to establish trust; to distribute leadership thoroughly; and have a clear organization of communication with all participants in the institution [5].

In discussing *crisis leadership* skills in different environments, particularly during a pandemic, Marshall, Roache and Moody-Marshall observed that there were many pitfalls for educational leaders during this time [8]. One area of concern was how leaders would manage the sudden change caused by Covid-19. In addition, if such changes were not managed properly, it would reflect badly on the quality of leadership of HEIs. Marshall et al., mention that "providing clear direction, communicating effectively, working collaboratively and engaging in adaptive leadership" would be essential at such times [8].

In contrast, the issue of trust in leadership has been researched over the past four decades and has become a key concept in leadership theories, particularly those of *transformational* and *charismatic leadership* [3]. In their summation of different types of leadership styles, Dirks and Ferrin observe that there is a clear relationship between leadership and trust. The most obvious was that transformational leadership is linked to organizational support, which is related to the degree to which people are treated with dignity and respect by their leaders [3]. Trust relationships were greatest when leadership styles were transformational, followed by the idea of fair processes, and the way people's perception of fairness was influenced by the quality of their experiences. Trust was least perceived when the leadership style was transactional, possibly because of the perceived fairness of the support or commendation persons received from leaders [3]. The issue of trust is often indicative of a leader's leadership style and personality. The researchers acknowledge that poor leadership is a serious problem in HEIs and a primary cause for low morale and lack of trust [10]. Ngambi goes on to caution that leaders in HEIs must "seek creative strategies to improve and maintain the performance and high morale" [10]. In addition, they should implement trust leadership skills to maintain high morale through communication, change management, goal setting and problem-solving mechanisms [10]. In his concluding remarks, Ngambi maintains that trusting leaders is directly linked to high morale, contentment, commitment, citizenship and performance [10].

Leadership calls for sustainable, innovative, supportive and adaptable pedagogical approaches. Taking into consideration the shifting pedagogical climate the pandemic brought about in educational institutions, an extreme or vigorous model of leadership would be beneficial to assist leaders of HEIs to navigate this 'dynamic landscape' [9]. Heifetz and Laurie were the first to develop a model for a vigorous style of leadership [6]. Since then, it has become a guide for many institutions to adopt *adaptive leadership* styles. The objective of adaptive leadership is to focus on processes and not persons. It encourages people to be actively involved in the change process. Adaptive leadership also "offers a route around historical constraints that reinforce the way change has been traditionally introduced" [12]. Therefore, given the potential of adaptive leadership to contribute toward sustainability and respond to the "ever-changing educational landscape, makes it [the most] viable as a leadership process" [9]. Thus, it is worthy of exploration when HEIs find themselves in challenging leadership situations. Generally speaking, adaptive leadership provides a diverse approach for HEIs. By directing their attention to intricate processes of collaboration and exploring solutions for problems "in order to construct an appropriate response" adaptive leadership can have a positive impact on HEIs [9]. Adaptive leadership assists collective leadership at all levels and across academic leadership structures like faculties, departments and professional support teams to "adjust to and thrive in challenging environments" [11]. These authors found that the pandemic caused both a crisis and realization among leaders of HEIs. They also found that changes and activities "based on broad, systemic thinking" were necessary to be driven by leadership but "undertaken by many people together" [11].

3 RESULTS

What follows are the categories and themes that emerged from the analysis of these open-ended questions, as well as the themes that emerged from interviews.

3.1 Category 1: Leader perception on the role of leadership

The questions of the online questionnaire and face-to-face interviews were designed to capture leaders' perceptions of the following areas of leadership: the provision of leadership; authentic qualities of leadership; support received during the pandemic; factors that contribute toward sustainability; and the leadership challenges with regard to teaching and learning that they faced during a pandemic.

In the theme of the *provision of leadership*, the most frequent response was that the role of leadership is cemented in the idea of providing support and training to academics, students and staff, particularly in the areas of teaching and learning. In essence, leaders from different fields agreed that the role of leadership is to provide knowledge, technical skills and abilities to inspire others to lead. They should also be equipped to engage with various experts in their field to ensure quality. The majority of leaders saw their role as professionals, having both the skills and qualifications to offer necessary support to staff and students. Opinions were not divided about the provision of leadership. Many responded strongly to questions on how the role of leadership should benefit students and staff. They mentioned that leaders should ensure that all students and staff have the same level of ability; this could be achieved by enabling the training of students and staff to make effective use of online platforms.

With regard to the *provision of staff*, leaders agreed that well-supported leaders encourage the pre-service and ongoing professional development of staff. In addition, they lead the process by making sure that all staff members are familiarized with new online environments. With regard to the provision of resources, participant leaders viewed their role as making sure of adequate access to resource platforms by being future- and goal-oriented; taking initiative and being informed; preparing appropriately; consulting broadly across campus; providing clarity of their vision to their staff; and providing adequate resources to adapt to digitalization. Their responses indicated that they were least concerned with the assessment of their leadership abilities based on the quality of their online skills, competency, and readiness before the pandemic – only one respondent expressed this concern. This respondent felt that a leader should track the progress and nurture a healthy team spirit among their staff. A leader should also learn and, in fact, perfect the skills necessary for remote teaching and learning. The most memorable remark concerning the provision of leadership was that leaders should recognize and support the different strengths among team members. By doing so collaboratively, leaders would be able to address challenges and encourage strategic thinking to create opportunities for the betterment of staff and students alike.

3.2 Category 2: Authentic Leadership Qualities

Leaders were asked to *identify* qualities of *authentic leadership* and to comment if these qualities enhanced their ability as leaders. While their responses were varied, a large number (68%) identified people-oriented leadership as authentic. This finding agrees with that of Lawton-Misra and Pretorius in their research on how the pandemic influenced person- and people-oriented leadership that focused on emotional or cognitive characteristics [7]. In the present study, the following emotional or cognitive characteristics of authentic leadership were identified: approaching the needs of students or staff with empathy and understanding; dealing with challenges of students or staff with transparency and integrity consistent with their own values; first mastering new skills themselves to remain functional, and allow students and staff feel held, supported and appreciated; following an inclusive, participatory approach tends to render good outcomes; maintaining clear communication and connecting with others on a personal level, even when working online and remotely; leading with a heart, transparency, and integrity; promoting self-care and connecting with others, which is an essential part of social cohesion; and building trust. The findings on 'building trust' agrees with those of Fernandez and Shaw who note that a leadership practice that benefits HEIs during a crisis is for authentic leaders to connect with people individually and to establish trust [5]. In addition, words such as nurturing, support, patience, compassion and empathy, seen as qualities of authentic leadership, agree with the research findings discussed in the literature review above.

These empathetic responses from leaders concerning authentic leadership are in accordance with the transformational leadership style. The responses also substantiate the research findings of Azizaha, et al. that transformational leadership styles are related to a receptive approach to progress in new

circumstances, particularly during a crisis [2]. This positivity is achieved by placing high value on maintaining good communication between academics, staff, students and lecturers.

The present study ranked authentic leadership qualities in the following order: first collaboration, then communication, followed by resilience. This substantiates Fernandez and Shaw's findings that leaders who operate on shared leadership styles benefit from a greater degree of collaboration [5]. In the same way, Marshall et al. remark that during a pandemic, authentic leaders should work collaboratively, communicate effectively, and provide clear direction [8].

3.3 Category 3: Leadership Support

Leaders were asked whether they had received online, personal, technical or other kinds of support during the pandemic. As expected, their responses to *identify leadership support* were uniform. The greatest degree of support (78%) was the online support received from the institution's Center for Innovative Education and Communication Technology (CIECT). Support had been sourced from CIECT even though leaders had access to online resource pages. The support requested by various departments was for the following online activities: troubleshooting, email, WhatsApp groups, setting up weekly webinars on technology integration, online teaching and learning pedagogies, instructional design during and after lectures, setting up assessments and meetings, facilitating lectures, and individual support from teaching and learning specialists.

A proportionate amount (61%) was for technical support from the Department for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) support. The support requested was for the following: the setting up of laptops, and tablets; providing data and wifi access; downloading updated software to various devices; assisting with collaborative communication between the ICT support team and external vendors; technical issues related to the institution's learning management system; offering guidance on the use of the new technology; supplying and delivering laptops, earphones and related devices; providing email support via an ICT helpdesk. A small amount (16%) was related to personal and 'other' support issues.

The participant leaders' responses were positive and they commended the support structures of the institution's Department for Online and Communication Technology and the Department for ICT; the positivity and resolve of this department; the way the ICT Department expedited the provision of laptops, earphones and email support; the additional, key support received from individual colleagues in the ICT Department who engaged with them and joined in online discussions to assist academics, staff and students; the institution's FreeCall Counselling Helpline that gave leaders, academics, staff and students a sense of someone always being available to support them in a crisis.

3.4 Category 4: Leadership and sustainable support structures for emergency remote teaching and assessments

Leaders were asked to identify factors that contributed to *sustainable support structures* for remote teaching, learning and assessments. Opinions were divided concerning the most important factors, and how to place them in order of importance. Thirty-eight per cent of respondents agreed that providing students and staff with resources was most important for sustainable support. They regarded the availability and reliability of resources, consistency of technical support and frequency of training to be most important to ensure that infrastructures remained sustainable. The leaders stressed that HEIs should have proper infrastructures (systems) in place and strong, competent, professional teams to offer ongoing support and advice so that technology could be used optimally. They were concerned that the infrastructure at the university was problematic, especially access to the learning management system and third-party applications like Google, Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Meet, recording and break-away rooms. The respondents felt that the availability of resources should include reliable hardware and uninterrupted internet connection. In addition, they credited the sustainability of the digital landscape to trained staff who were expert users of the resources, like equipment, hardware and software, and who could offer high levels of technical support to users. They also advised that sustainable structures should be user-friendly with integrated platforms that can communicate with each other and can be used by staff and students alike. They appreciated that the technical and non-technical support given to the staff and students to make a success of their work and studies was consistent.

In the respondents' opinions, training (19%) and communication (19%) were equally important sustainable support structures for remote teaching, learning and assessments. They recommended that HEIs should be responsive to students and staff training, and should explore different modes of online teaching and learning. The respondents considered ongoing training as being essential. In particular,

they suggested that experts sharing their experiences and wisdom should be responsible for training on aspects like online or hybrid teaching and learning, approaches to online education, and online education platforms.

The wellness of staff and students was identified by 19% of respondents as being an important factor that contributed to a sustainable support structure for remote teaching, learning and assessments. The respondents stressed that a genuine intent of addressing wellness should be encouraged through integrity, collegiality, and transparency. At the same time, realistic goals should be set in conjunction with available resources. Empathetic support and the show of appreciation of peers and students would foster a culture of trust and integrity. It would be especially valuable if data analytics and self-evaluation could be used for the early identification of challenges so that interventions could be provided.

The respondents felt that characteristics of empathetic leadership should include an understanding of personal circumstances of peers and students. They suggested that the institution should enhance its processes, particularly those related to the student experience, by making it possible for students to report problems and evaluate their remote teaching, learning and assessment experiences.

3.5 Category 5: Leadership and identifiable challenges

Leaders were asked to identify some of the challenges that impacted the implementation of a sustainable plan for remote teaching, learning and assessment in their departments and faculties. The challenges were categorized and grouped into themes in each category. The most prominent challenge was student-related (38%), followed by connectivity (33%), and the least prominent was related to academics (29%).

Respondents identified some serious issues pertaining to *student-related challenges* faced in online teaching and learning. The weightiest challenge they faced was students' dishonesty and plagiarism. They complained about their own inability to prevent students from copying and pasting basic information when they did online assessments. They revealed that students found ways to cheat in exams. Students did this by collaborating with each other to complete online tasks (off-site) using multiple devices and had ready-prepared notes at hand during examinations. Second to this was a lack of student participation during online interactive sessions. Also, respondents felt that teaching online, especially via recorded lectures was unsatisfactory because aspects of good pedagogy like dialogue, engagement, sense-making in a joint discussion, and face-to-face interaction were not available. Recorded lectures became challenging as students listened to 'mutations' of these recordings, for instance, setting the playing of the lecture to the highest speed. It seemed as if they considered jumping through the lecture at speed was sufficient for understanding. Other challenges concerned the preparation involved in teaching online which respondents thought was too time-consuming. This, even though the aim of the 'flipped classroom' model was to give students the responsibility to prepare before discussion sessions. The challenge remained because many students still did not prepare, which became a major challenge for them to interact productively.

Lecturers believed that academics should also attend training sessions to make use of the help that was offered. If 'others' were expected to take time for training, it should be demanded from all academics as well. A respondent reacted by saying: "I find that colleagues ever so often rely on me to help them, when in fact they can teach themselves to solve and overcome related problems". In relation to access respondents felt that e-pedagogy was challenging since students did not always have access to PC's, laptops, data, and internet connection. Many students lived in circumstances (lack of space, noise, sharing devices, etc.) that made online education challenging.

Respondents identified a variety of issues pertaining to *connectivity-related challenges* that had a negative impact on the implementation of remote teaching and learning. They were consistent in their opinions that connectivity should be re-evaluated even after the pandemic. The connectivity issues were attributed to the shortage of data, data availability, resources related to data, the disruptions created by electricity load-shedding (a uniquely South African phenomenon), dysfunctional technologies, ineffective hardware and software, and unstable internet connections. The aforementioned issues have been thoroughly researched and documented in relation to the 'digital divide' and its impact on access, affordability, quality and relevance and infrastructure.

In concluding the discussion on *leadership (style) related challenges* with online teaching and learning, respondents identified the following challenges. Teaching staff held that the lack of necessary trust and leadership characteristics could hamper a culture of trust and innovation. As mentioned previously in the literature review, the findings regarding 'building trust' confirm those of Fernandez and Shaw who stipulate that leadership practices should identify and establish trust [5]. Members of staff mentioned

that they needed to find some commonality or support template tailored to teaching and learning online in their specific field. Some staff members were frustrated with the distinction made by leaders. One respondent commented: "Titles that are seen as 'you are not in my class' – even though they are not in your field of expertise". Staff members felt that people in leadership positions did not have confidence in their abilities, and the institutional vision and mission did not result in action. In order to circumvent these challenges, staff suggested that there needed to be leadership at all levels so that online educational practices could be implemented by staff 'on the ground'. This could also ensure commitment from all stakeholders. In addition, recognition for achievements should be given by all stakeholders.

It is evident from these responses that there is a need for an adaptive leadership style at the HEI. This leadership style calls for sustainable, innovative, supportive and adaptive pedagogical approaches; all of which substantiate the research findings discussed in the literature review. One respondent used collaboration as an important aspect of adaptive leadership with the comment 'that online educational practices are in fact implemented by staff on the ground'. Adaptive leadership should be adopted by the collective leadership of all levels of academic faculties, departments and professional support teams so that the institution can adjust and thrive in the changing environment brought about by the pandemic [11]. What follows is a thematic analysis of leadership gathered from the interviews conducted with academic leaders of faculties, departments and professional support teams. questions, as well as the themes that emerged from the interviews.

3.6 Category 6: Thematic Content Analysis

This section highlights the response from lecturers who preferred to be interviewed. The interview questions were similar to the online questionnaire. Most of those interviewed were leaders in a specific field, as other personnel and academic staff preferred to complete the online questionnaire. As mentioned above, interviews were *conducted* to establish the impact leadership had had on the successful implementation and support of remote teaching, learning and assessment. Interviews usually yield more in-depth data and a higher percentage of return than questionnaires. Supplementary information can also be collected because it is a tool that can uncover underlying information about complex and emotional subjects. This thematic content analysis focuses on factors that contribute to sustainable support structures for remote teaching, learning and assessments.

When asked about the *role of leadership* in the context of the university, one participant said that leadership was essentially a communication role through which academic, departmental and professional support leaders communicated about online teaching and learning challenges. Secondly, these leaders had the responsibility to identify and obtain support for particular needs, contextual challenges and changes experienced by students, staff and academics. As a consequence, leadership develops into an information-gathering, communication, and connecting role.

The interviewee indicated that the role of leadership in communication was responsible for the wellness of students, staff and academics. The moral and value implications of using reassurance and affirmation to create a calm work environment are mentioned. Empathy and staying emotionally and psychologically close to students, staff and academics were also seen as being important. In addition, the interviewee suggested that the role of a leader was to work within the complexity and unpredictability of real situations and not to give up easily. Similarly, leaders should face challenges and uncertainties with creative problem-solving, thus maintaining the structure of the system.

The interviewees placed substantial significance on the transformational leadership style that values creating lines of communication between students and teachers. This finding agrees with the definition of leadership, discussed above, which describes leadership as a process that influences the activities of a group toward achieving definite goals in HEIs, typically through implementing the communication process.

When interviewees were asked to identify *authentic leadership qualities* and comment on whether these qualities enhanced their abilities as leaders, they had little to say. They were directed toward considering their engagement with students and further redirected toward labelling authentic leadership as the ability to communicate. An interviewee responded by saying: "Authentic leadership is not just about leading in technology, but how you use it to engage in a caring way, keeping students abreast of information. Leadership it's about constant communication".

Interviewees were asked to identify the *kind of support* (online, personal, technical and other) they had *received* during the pandemic. As expected, their responses were similar to those provided in the questionnaire. The majority of interviewees drew their support for engagement with technology, predominantly from the Center for Innovative Education and Communication Technology, which taught

them the skills on how to engage with technology. In addition, they learned from attending workshops, writing centres and co-writing with colleagues. However, the respondents also reported that they had received no support related to their well-being, particularly when it came to their overloaded workload.

The interviewees were asked to identify factors that contribute to *sustainable support structures* for remote teaching, learning and assessments. Opinions were predominantly related to support, especially regarding their workload. In answer to a question about sustainable support structures, the participants thought that leaders needed to acknowledge the differences between face-to-face and online teaching and use a differentiated approach when they were weighing the teaching load of large classes. Interviewees suggested that to maintain sustainability leaders needed to look at the workload of lecturers in courses, particularly in the social sciences where they needed to spend more time. Lecturers should be assigned teaching and marking assistants to allow them time to research and prepare thoroughly for their classes. In addition, the participants felt that the many administrative tasks included in their workload, like capturing marks, could be alleviated by having administrative assistance.

The participants viewed a sustainable university as one that builds networks of people who are innovative in using the technology related to online teaching and learning. In turn, these innovations would support academics, linking them with learning communities across the university. One interviewee compared sustainability to collaboration in research, writing and innovation that could feed into each other's work across faculties. It was suggested that scholarship in teaching and learning could be strengthened since the institution had a broad spectrum of teaching and learning specialists who could share their knowledge and strengths across the university.

The participants were asked to identify some of the *challenges* that impacted the implementation of a sustainable plan for remote teaching, learning and assessment in their departments and faculties. The challenges mentioned could not be categorized or labelled with a specific challenge or grouped with other related themes. The challenges that interviewees identified included that leaders often 'jumped ship' and left lecturers to fend for themselves; academics suffered from 'burnout' because leaders demanded that workloads had to centre around student support. Deadlines for assignments were often extended, causing lecturers to work under pressure and creating a stressful work environment. The participants suggested that there needed to be a differentiated approach to the issues of workload. Workloads should be reassessed in terms of online and physical involvement because lectures were not merely online. In fact, they spend much time online before and after giving their online lectures. In addition, participants mentioned data and wifi challenges, no compensation for resources used at home, or for expenses incurred working online from home. They were concerned that these challenges would not easily be resolved. In the next section, the interviews that shifted from academic leadership to a specifiable scientific context are discussed.

3.7 Category 7: Clinical leaders Interviews

As mentioned previously, interviews usually yield more in-depth data and supplementary information than questionnaires. This is because interviewers can coax interviewees to reveal information about complex and emotional subjects and uncover underlying unexpressed emotions. A supplementary advantage of interviews is that although all interviewees are asked similar questions, they can yield different responses, depending on the faculty in which the interviews are conducted. In our study, different responses emerged when we interviewed leaders in the clinical sciences department.

We direct our attention to these responses and discuss them, as previously, in the order, the questions were asked and answered. There were marked differences in the responses from academics in the clinical science. As there are practical aspects and different approaches to teaching and learning in the clinical sciences, leadership styles and roles are differently defined.

When asked about the *role of leadership* in online teaching and learning in clinical disciplines an interviewee who supervises part-time staff at various work sites described the leadership role as having to apply theory to practical experiences. It was also the role of a leader to help change the mindset of staff from clinical to theory in the online teaching and learning space. The participant maintained that they had to find the best way to make use of their skill set and their time to teach students how to use technology because most of their coursework was covered in the field. Leaders had to help their students to adapt to online teaching and learning. An interviewee responded by saying: "For me, it wasn't about my role, it's just that we had to get this thing done because there was no other option, we just had to adapt".

Interviewees were also asked to *identify authentic leadership* qualities and to comment if these qualities enhanced their abilities as leaders, but they did not have much to say. They saw authentic leadership

as taking initiative, being in control of their audience, knowing where they wanted to go, and having a positive direction when they were involved in online teaching and learning.

When interviewees were asked to identify the *kind of* online, personal, technical and other *support* they had *received* during the pandemic, their responses were alarming since they felt they had been 'thrown to the wolves' and that they had to either 'sink or swim'. Interviewees said that although they felt neglected, they accepted that online teaching and learning were new to their leaders too, specifically in the clinical sciences. Lecturers and students were all in the same situation. Interviewees from the clinical sciences felt that leaders had to point out issues and offer valid assessments of how to expedite their tasks via online teaching. It seemed as if lecturers could not understand that leaders did not appreciate that it was different to teach online in this field.

Interviewees who were leaders and practitioners in their fields were asked to identify factors that contributed to *sustainable support structures* for remote teaching, learning and assessments in their practices. In the discussion on the allocation of time in a clinical discipline course, one participant remarked that 'time is finite' and academics could not be forced into a compulsory timetable because they had to be flexible in many ways during the pandemic. Participants suggested that if the clinical course were extended, it would give students time to consolidate what they had learned online. For sustainable structures to work, the institution would need to provide an improved budget to finance adequate support. In addition, academic resources would need to be improved to ensure sustainability. Another aspect of sustainability that resonated with participants was that the leadership of the institution should offer additional direction from an academic perspective. They emphasized that if the clinical disciplines were to be managed differently, they would yield better responses and improve student success.

Lastly, interviewees noted that post-pandemic challenges the university would have to deal with include: the psychological effect of the pandemic on students, staff, academics and leaders; the provision of emotional support through counselling; and the resolving of budgeting problems. The researchers concluded that teaching clinical subjects conflicted with the academic approaches to online teaching and learning of other disciplines.

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper highlights the importance of collective leadership in the successful implementation of sustainable remote teaching, learning and assessment. We noted that the pandemic called for a collective and decisive leadership style that was a mixture of transformational, transactional, instructional, crisis, charismatic, and adaptive leadership styles. Interestingly, of the leadership styles presented in the literature review, our study found that adaptive leadership in conjunction with transformational leadership was the most common style used at all levels of academic leadership, in faculties, departments and professional support teams.

These findings agreed with other research conducted by scholars in the field of transformational leadership. The receptivity approach assisted positive advancement in new circumstances, particularly during a crisis [2]. The present study found that leaders who provided support to ensure that remote teaching and learning of students was sustainable, agreed that the influence of leadership affected support both negatively and positively. The pandemic and subsequent lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the successful implementation of sustainable remote teaching and learning support and assessment by leaders at an HEI. In an environment caused by a pandemic where leadership was supposed to thrive, this study confirmed the findings of Raines and Alberg that "leaders often find themselves feeling misunderstood, unappreciated, inadequate, frustrated, and discouraged" [13].

There is a need for further research in this area of leadership, particularly concerning practical work in science-related courses. The pandemic required leaders to adopt new skills and approaches to leadership that will remain with HEIs for a long while. The researchers recommend that human resource departments of HEI's should offer leadership programs on value-based, resilient and change management leadership, all of which could provide valuable skills for any future pandemic. More research on leadership and the challenges leaders face as they perform their duties is necessary. In particular, the way leaders can effectively contribute to the discourse on staff development needs to be researched, along with the perception of student success in remote teaching and learning settings. The researchers conclude that the success of the sustainable implementation of remote teaching and learning demands that HEI leaders continuously review the alignment of processes, technology and the student-centricity of their institutions.

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