

A CONCEPTUAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK AND PROCESS FOR LEADING IN A VOLATILE ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a feasible leadership framework for public and private organisations that will encompass the essential qualities and traits a leader should possess for effectively and efficiently leading organisations and their people in a volatile environment, like the present one created by the Covid-19 pandemic. The adopted approach was based on a review of the various leadership models, literature on leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the author's PhD research empirical findings that focused on the leadership of state-owned-enterprises (SoEs) in a volatile environment, where a total of 113 participants at a state-owned enterprise responded to the mixed methods online survey. The study found that leaders cannot navigate a VUCA environment in isolation and need to adopt an inclusive, collective, reflective leadership approach while having a holistic understanding of the interdependent, interconnectedness and integrative nature of departments, processes, and systems impact on service delivery, highlighting a need for leadership framework and process that addresses the requirements of the current VUCA environment.

Keywords: Leadership, Framework, Process, Traits, Qualities, Covid-19, VUCA.

INTRODUCTION

To date, the leadership frameworks adopted by leaders have proven to be archaic and ineffective in leading through radically volatile, uncertain, ambiguous and complex (VUCA) environments. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the inherent gaps in leaders current leadership approach across various industries and sectors, with leadership theorists being challenged with the urgency to create new models relevant to the current environment enveloped with VUCA and to manage and lead in a prolonged crisis as the current approach to addressing problems are reductionistic in nature and based on previous experiences and behaviour. Moore's (2015) SCAILES Framework does provide relevant leadership qualities for a VUCA environment; however, it was created in a very static environment. It does not consider the lived experiences of leaders and their employees as they navigated a global black swan event in a VUCA environment, resulting in a prolonged crisis that has changed the world and business on all fronts. The Covid-19 pandemic has tested leaders competencies and qualities at all fronts, with many not having the required qualities to successfully navigate the pandemic.

A new way of thinking and leadership behaviour is required to navigate the new unknown reality post the Covid-19 virus pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic, although a catastrophic crisis of diabolical proportions, can be viewed as an opportunity to reassess our world views, our behaviours, our strengths and weaknesses and our role in society. The pandemic has provided public and private organisations with the much-needed jolt an opportunity to turn their possible desired future states into reality. This paper proposes a

leadership framework and process for leading in a VUCA environment (Sukhera et al., 2020; The Shingo Model, 1989; Dartey-Baah, 2014; Dileep, 2020; Donkor & Zhou, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper shows the result of the author's PhD research study: Leadership of State-Owned entities in a Volatile Environment: A Case study of Eskom, South Africa. The research methodology adopted for this study was mixed-methods. The exploratory research design was guided by the interpretivist, and post-positivist paradigms (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Žukauskas et al., 2018; Volini et al., 2020; Van Velsor et al., 2016) was selected for this study as it explored if the leadership qualities perceived to be important by the leaders at Eskom aligned with the leadership qualities required for a VUCA environment and assessed if the leaders possessed the required leadership traits to succeed in a VUCA environment. Also, Eskom leaders described how they had changed their leadership approach during the pandemic. Employees provided recommendations on how their managers could improve on their leadership approach post the pandemic and senior managers and executives provided views on key takeaways from the pandemic to help them better lead post the pandemic.

The target population (380) consisted of executive members, senior managers and their employees at Eskom. An online questionnaire was sent, by the Human Resources Department of Eskom, using MSForms to the participants. In total, 3 executive members, 65 senior managers and 45 employees completed the questionnaire. An online questionnaire was chosen as the most suitable instrument in terms Eskom's policy and regulation regarding research conducted by parties external to the organisation as well as the data collection was amidst the covid-19 pandemic. The data from MSForms was exported into an excel spreadsheet, cleaned, coded. The qualitative data was analysed using thematic and content analysis. The quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0. Inferential statistical analyses were performed on the data. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu Natal (HSSREC/00001143/2020) and Eskom. For purposes of this paper, a summary of the key findings based on the research objectives are discussed, presenting a base for the introduction and discussion of the proposed leadership framework and process for the VUCA environment (D'Auria & De Smet, 2020;).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership in the 'new world', created by the complexities of the Covid-19 pandemic and a changing business world context, requires leaders to ask uncomfortable questions, disrupt their thinking, attack their current mental models and reconfigure them by learning to address the ambiguous challenges with somewhat indeterminate solutions. Leaders are being challenged to reassess and reconfigure how they lead and do business to serve all stakeholders' needs. They are required now to be more of an influencer, change agent, motivator, mentor, guide and coach. There is an increasing need to constantly consider the impact of their decisions on the triple bottom line: profit, people and planet. Managing and leading through a crisis and volatile environment requires a very different and unique skill-set.

According to the Future Jobs Report 2020 (World Economic Forum, 2020), the top 10 skills in 2015 compared to 2020 changed slightly in their order of importance, with quality control and active listening being replaced by emotional intelligence and cognitive flexibility in 2020. However, in 2025, it is quite evident that majority of the skills deemed necessary in 2015 and 2020 will no longer be relevant in 2025. Critical, analytical, problem-solving

thinking skills that incorporate originality, innovation and creativity will be the critical skills required for the future. Technology development, adoption and use, and the importance of self-management skills such as flexibility, managing stress, building resilience, and ensuring active continuous learning takes place, should be prevalent among tomorrow's leaders. This study's primary findings align with these findings of Future Jobs Report, 2020, except for technology use and monitoring and control and technology design and programming. The use and adoption of technology for more effective and efficient communication did emerge from the study; however, there was no great emphasis placed on the design, development, monitoring and control of it. These are vital areas to consider by the management of Eskom as having the latest technology not only saves time and money but makes work easy and more efficient. This is key to succeeding in a globalised technology-driven market.

Robinson (2020) asserts, in the article Post-Crisis Leadership: How leaders can embrace chaos, leaders need to ensure that they exude qualities of empathy, creativity and proactiveness, with Mutch (2020) and D'Auria & De Smet (2020) postulating a unifying vision and motivating teams towards a single purpose, caring for people, building a sense of community and strong bonds, collective thinking and culture and reinstating normalcy. Leaders need to immerse themselves in the team and be actively involved as they connect with their employees and relevant stakeholders. The article further indicates the importance of using data to inform decision-making, future crisis planning, business remodelling and innovation creation (Robinson, 2020). Forster et al., (2020) stress the importance of planning and decision-making being an "iterative process with feedback loops that instruct the next steps" during the recovery phase.

The common thread running across various literature sources (Joy, 2021; BDO, 2020; Deloitte 2020; Palmer, 2020; Center for Creative Leadership, 2020 a & b; The Rebuilders, 2020; USB-ED, 2020; Beilstein et al. 2020; Daigle & Matthews, 2017) on the key qualities and traits leaders need for a VUCA environment like the Covid-19 pandemic, a leader should possess were:

- Empathy, compassion, composure & support
- Self-reflection & mindful work
- Communication, collaboration, open to new ideas & learning
- Health & positivity
- Flexibility, adaptability, agility & decisiveness
- Transparency, authenticity, trustworthiness & accountability
- Strategic, visionary & anticipatory
- Being mentally, emotionally and physically present
- Re-prioritising of targets/projects & setting achievable goals

RESULTS

The study found that Eskom leaders possess traits relevant for leading in a volatile environment, namely: the ability to see the big picture and think holistically and take into account a number of elements when thinking through problems, to help create well-informed strategies and decisions. Their worst trait was encouraging disruptive innovations that could establish completely new standards for improved efficiency and service delivery. Overall, they lacked key strategic, problem-solving, emergence and innovation/creativity traits.

The quantitative results analysis further found, the senior managers citing honesty, integrity and trustworthiness and being able to set a clear vision and direction as the two most important qualities a leader should have for a volatile environment, followed closely by being able to think clearly under pressure and communicate effectively; being able to embrace diversity and change; being able to think conceptually, holistically and strategically; being able to act in a decisive and timely manner; being able to communicate effectively and in a

transparent manner; being agile (responsive), alert and proactive to changes while being responsible, accountable and goal orientated.

The qualitative analysis found that the key qualities senior managers displayed during the Covid-19 pandemic were empathy, understanding, support, communication, adaptability, flexibility, agility, goal orientation, accountability, transparency, collaboration, reflection and self-awareness, compassion, and strategic thinking. Qualities of creativity, innovation, risk-taking, decisiveness, timeliness, resourcefulness and the ability to set a clear vision and direction were not so evident. The leadership qualities identified by Eskom leaders aligned to the qualities for a volatile environment; however, the top five qualities that managers perceived as most important do not align fully to the leadership qualities found to be successful in leading through the pandemic. Leaders at Eskom changed their leadership approach to be more empathetic, supportive, understanding, trusting, agile, flexible and adaptable. Based on the findings, a feasible leadership framework and process was developed.

The employees recommended that senior managers engage in clearer, effective, and frequent communication; be more innovative and creative; be more adaptable and agile; be strategic thinkers and focus on their problem-solving skills, while displaying understanding, honesty, and transparency is key to attaining team goals buy-in and comrade.

The study has identified the need for a feasible leadership framework that will equip leaders with essential qualities and traits for effectively and efficiently leading Eskom, and other organisations based on the practicality of the framework, and their people in a volatile environment, like the present one created by the Covid-19 pandemic. The study has highlighted that leaders cannot navigate a VUCA environment in isolation and need to adopt an inclusive, collective, reflective leadership approach while having a holistic understanding of the interdependent, interconnectedness and integrative nature of departments, processes and systems that impact service delivery. Based on the primary study findings and literature, the critical leadership qualities and traits required to succeed in a volatile and crisis environment like the Covid-19 pandemic can be grouped into six key constructs, as indicated in Figure 1:

1. Problem Solving and Strategy
2. Working with People
3. Emotional Intelligence (EQ)
4. Leadership
5. Innovation and Creativity
6. Learning and Development
7. Self-Care
8. Technology

Interpretation of the Proposed Leadership Framework

The discussion to follow will unpack each of the eight leadership attributes as per the framework.

Working with People

For employees to function at their optimum, they need to be skilled and work in an environment conducive to new ideas, where employees feel safe to share their suggestions and feelings without being discriminated against. Leaders need to create an enabling environment that encourages creativity, ideation and solution-finding. Creativity pods/hubs are encouraged to be created where employees and their leaders can take time out to put forth new ideas, brainstorm, do scenario planning and co-create. The environment should be



Source: Pramjeeth (2021)

FIGURE 1
WELSPITL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR A VUCA ENVIRONMENT

relaxed and interactive. The environment must be cooperative, collaborative and inclusive where everyone's voice matters and their suggestions are genuinely acknowledged. Leaders need to inspire their employees to believe in themselves and make them aware of the knowledge gap their contributions fulfil in the team. For workers to function optimally and build trust and resilience in the team, they need to be empowered with the right skills, resources and support. To further build trust and commitment, the sharing of responsibilities and delegation of tasks should occur, with the requirements of the task and the employees' associated roles and responsibilities being explicit, clear, and structured so that duplication of work is avoided. Employees are key influencers, and collective leadership and accountability should exist. Leaders need to ensure that the silo mentality is discouraged and promote open, collaborative discussions among employees within and across teams, departments, and various stakeholders, so a holistic understanding of the problem and the associated strategies' impact is attained. A shared vision must permeate the organisation to create synergy and a symbiotic relationship where everyone wins.

Further to this, leaders must be mindful of their employees' mindsets, behaviours and cultures when addressing difficult situations. Leaders need to create secure feedback channels where employees feel safe to air their feelings and show empathy, understanding, and care when addressing concerns. They need to be available, and feedback provision must be timeous. Focus on people is equally important as the focus on the job. The organisation's goals can only be fully achieved by people; thus, it is vital to ensure their wellbeing and a positive work environment. Leaders need to identify the employee needs, weaknesses, strengths, challenges and remove barriers that limit them. They need to re-energise the team by putting in interventions and support mechanisms to help them build their resilience and become a better version of themselves. Leaders must motivate, develop, aid and grow with their employees while showing a great deal of patience.

Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

During volatile situations or a crisis, some people can cope better than others. Due to the instability of the situation, fear and anxiety may engulf some employees as the uncertainty becomes more real and the future is unknown. Thus, this calls for leaders to be more conscious and mindful in their tone, words, actions and behaviours. They need to think with their head as well as their heart. They need to identify their inherent biases and learn to manage them. Their body language should be open, approachable, and one that invites engagement. The tone should be relaxed and exude calm, interest, and empathy, while their personality should be charismatic, confident and motivating, sending out positive composed vibrations to the team. This will create an enabling environment where employees feel safe expressing themselves, their ideas and sharing their challenges. In volatile situations, employees want a sense of protection and security and know that they can rely upon and trust their leader to get them through it. Thus, the leader needs to show composure and confidence that he/she has the situation under control and a plan going forward. Employees can easily sense if their leader is afraid and unsure of what to do. Leaders need to protect their employees by acting as a barrier to negativity or false information that may impact the team, thus creating stability within the team.

Employees like to feel acknowledged, especially during difficult times when they put in much effort despite their immense challenges; thus, leaders need to acknowledge their staff's contributions, celebrate successes and show gratitude. This builds trust and motivation in the staff.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, leaders worldwide found themselves doing more deep thinking, self-awareness and self-reflection as the pandemic unfolded and processed the challenges being experienced. Based on this, they became more self-aware of their strengths and limitations and gained a deep understanding of their employees' different realities, events and situations. They realised how critical it became for them to abandon their old mental models and create new ways of thinking, doing, and behaving. One can only fully understand the gravitas of a situation if they quieten their mind and go within and internalise what is transpiring and how it is affecting them, and the impact their thinking and behaviour has on the current situation. Leaders need to engage in enlightenment to gain a clearer perspective of the challenges by using reason, evidence and growth to help address the challenges and create a better working environment for everyone. They need to become agents of change and co-creators of future plans, vision and contingency activities (Geerlof, 2020; Geerts, 2020;). Leaders need to encourage their team to self-reflect as well. When dealing with people, leaders also need to exert self-control in how they approach and respond to situations. Things said in haste or without much thought could be very damaging for the team morale and project success. They need to listen more assiduously to their staff, delve deeper into what is trying to be conveyed, reflect on the situation and show fairness, consideration and evidence of deliberation in their actions. Open, honest, respectful communication should prevail at all times.

Leadership

Volatile environments and crises often do not allow for deep deliberation and consultation on every strategy due to the fluidity and urgency of the situation; thus, leaders need to ensure that they continuously scan the internal and external environment and have relevant real-time information that is easy to understand so they can act decisively. They need to proactively assess the probability and possible impact costs of the threat. To help aid in this decision making, regular status update meetings should be held with the team and their

team leaders. Ensure the information sharing process and communication is clear, specific, transparent and in an understandable format for all; hence, mitigating the spread of false rumours and inaccurate information. The use of visual boards is encouraged. Refrain from using jargon and complex terminology that all may not necessarily understand. The communication intent must clearly stipulate the purpose, provide context, the required tasks, the desired outcome and the due date (if required). Important messages should be repeated. However, it is also essential to highlight the positives: the good that is being done, employee achievements and the opportunities that arose out of the challenges.

The 'new world' calls for leaders to be alert and responsive to the changes. They need to constantly assess their mental models and unlearn old ways and thinking and relearn new ways of thinking and doing. They need to display agility, adaptability, and flexibility to quickly strategise and respond to the changing environment. Situations like the Covid-19 pandemic called for leaders to be highly resourceful and take risks that they ordinarily would not have taken. Having real-time relevant and accurate information and the team's commitment will help leaders be proactive and resourceful. To build this commitment and trust in the team, leaders must continuously interact with the team, get involved, and understand the challenges and bottlenecks. Create a network of teams and engage in collaborative open, constructive discussions. The team must be able to rely on the leader to action plans and fulfil promises made. They need to display integrity, responsibility, accountability in all their actions and decision-making. This culture of zero-tolerance of unethical behaviour and practices must permeate the work environment to build trust in the leader and team members. Leaders need to show humility and support their employees by being empathetic, understanding, and tolerant of their prevailing circumstances. Being predictable, honest and authentic in their responses and behaviour builds trust and comradery in the team. It is also important that leaders must understand and show tolerance that mistakes do happen, plans are imperfect, and they should approach them as lessons to be learnt and an opportunity to improve/reconfigure rather than being punitive. Leaders must not only talk the talk; they must also walk the walk; they must be role models. They must lead from the centre and have the confidence to say 'I do not have all the answers' and relinquish control at times to allow for collective ideation. A "polycentric, multilevel, participatory leadership presence in which everyone can become a leader" (Geerlof, 2020). An inclusive leadership approach should be adopted. They must be courageous, realistic, but optimistic about the future as this provides the team with the motivation they require to strive ahead and innovate. They must vividly visualise (and map it out) and translate the future path in a manner where it feels real and possible to the team.

Self-Care

VUCA environments are mentally, emotionally and physically draining. A leader must ensure that he/she is of optimal health to lead their team, especially during difficult times. Thus, leaders must take care of their health. Do not let one's emotions get the better of them. They need to remove themselves from the situation for a while and focus on their mental and emotional health. They must not attempt to solve all the problems; focus on the most important ones. They need to speak to someone they trust or seek help from a medical professional about their fears, anxiety and issues that are stressing them. This helps one to see things from a different angle hence improving the mental and emotional state. Leaders need to spend time with loved ones, socialise, exercise, get a good night's sleep and eat healthily. In addition to their own mental and emotional wellbeing, leaders should put in place facilities and resources to support their staff. Staff should be encouraged to have a work-life balance.

This will improve the leaders and employees' stress tolerance levels and build greater resilience and coping strategies.

Problem-Solving and Strategy

To successfully navigate and thrive in a VUCA environment, leaders need to be very strategic, critical and analytical in their thinking. Leaders must be able to join all the dots and the missing dots to form a complete picture of the situation to ensure that it encapsulates the impact it has on the interdependent, integrated complex networked nature of the business. A holistic view is required. To break through the storm that volatile environments create, leaders must employ and encourage disruptive thinking. Stand out, break the norms and traditions, set new standards and ways of doing. Be different, think out of the box, better yet, think without boundaries.

Leaders must set a clear vision and direction for the organisation and ensure this vision is clearly communicated to the team, so a shared vision and goal are enculturated.

Further to this, leaders must anticipate the future based on what is known and consider each long-term outcome's possibilities and probabilities while linking the past to the present, and the future, as a single continuum of dynamic interactions. To achieve this, it requires them to step back and think through plans and decisions, connecting future outcomes to today's planned actions, and develop a practical path to achieve the desired outcome. Leaders will need to consider several elements when thinking through problems as they navigate what is known while accounting for the unknown to help create well-informed strategies and decisions. The importance of constantly scanning the environment and having an effective knowledge management system providing real-time information becomes paramount. Sensing, awareness and probing are vital skills the leader must have to help them investigate the root causes of the problem. They need to constantly question what is happening, why it is happening, and the impact. A problem-solving, solution-seeking mindset is required, and this thinking should permeate the entire organisation. Leaders must have a pre-emptive mindset and constantly undertake scenario planning exercises to help better prepare for crises or unexpected challenges. The creation and reviewing of contingency activities should always form part of the planning and strategising sessions.

Innovation and Creativity

Covid-19 has taught us that tried and tested old ways of doing and thinking will not suffice in this VUCA environment. To survive and thrive in a VUCA environment, it is paramount for leaders to be disruptive in their thinking. They need to continuously evaluate their strategies and business models to see if they fit for purpose and meet the current business environment's requirements. Leaders need to think out of the box and look for creative, novel ways to re-invent the business and how they do things to sustain the business, remain competitive, and thrive. Leaders need to encourage creative thinking and allow for the unrestrained idea generation process to occur. Debrief, and brainstorming sessions should be a norm in the various departments. Time should be set aside to allow employees to explore their creative, innovative nature. This can be done by developing creativity pods/hubs that allow employees to freely express their ideas and suggested solutions. Sources of inspiration from the leader and the external environment should ignite the creative spark. Original, novel and innovative ideas that improve processes, systems and efficiency should be acknowledged and rewarded.

Technology

There will be a greater need for leaders to explore technology development to automate and streamline processes and systems for improved service delivery and production efficiency. Policies should be created that support the development and enhancement of the organisation's digital infrastructure. Employees will need to be enculturated to accept and adopt these advancements in technology, with regular training being provided. To help managers unpack and make sense of the vast amount of information presented to them daily, relevant and reliable information and knowledge management systems need to be put in place. The data obtained must be real-time and in a user-friendly manner that is easy to understand and interpret.

Leaders need to revise their business and communications models that allow for an easy, efficient and cost-effective way of communicating and engaging with a network of teams across departments and geographical regions and time zones.

Learning and Development

The world post-Covid-19 life-long learning should be part of the organisation's culture. Both leaders and their team need to ensure that they continuously reskill, upskill and cross-skill themselves while keeping abreast with the developments in their specified fields. Leaders are encouraged to develop a learning and development plan in conjunction with their employees to form part of their performance evaluation. On the job training and development, simulations and exploration sessions will help build the team's required skills to adequately prepare them for future challenges. The exploration and simulation sessions must help build independent, creative, innovative, critical thinkers that equip them with relevant skills to address the problems presented in the 'new and future' world context. Constructive expert and peer feedback must be provided to the team. Employees must be encouraged to share their learnings, new skills, or task with the other team members, fostering group learning and skill development. Leaders must also ensure employees and themselves are equipped with the relevant soft skills. Learning, unlearning, relearning, upskilling, and cross-skilling must form part of the organisational culture's DNA. Observe the patterns in which mistakes and failures occur and use them as learning, development, and improvement opportunities.

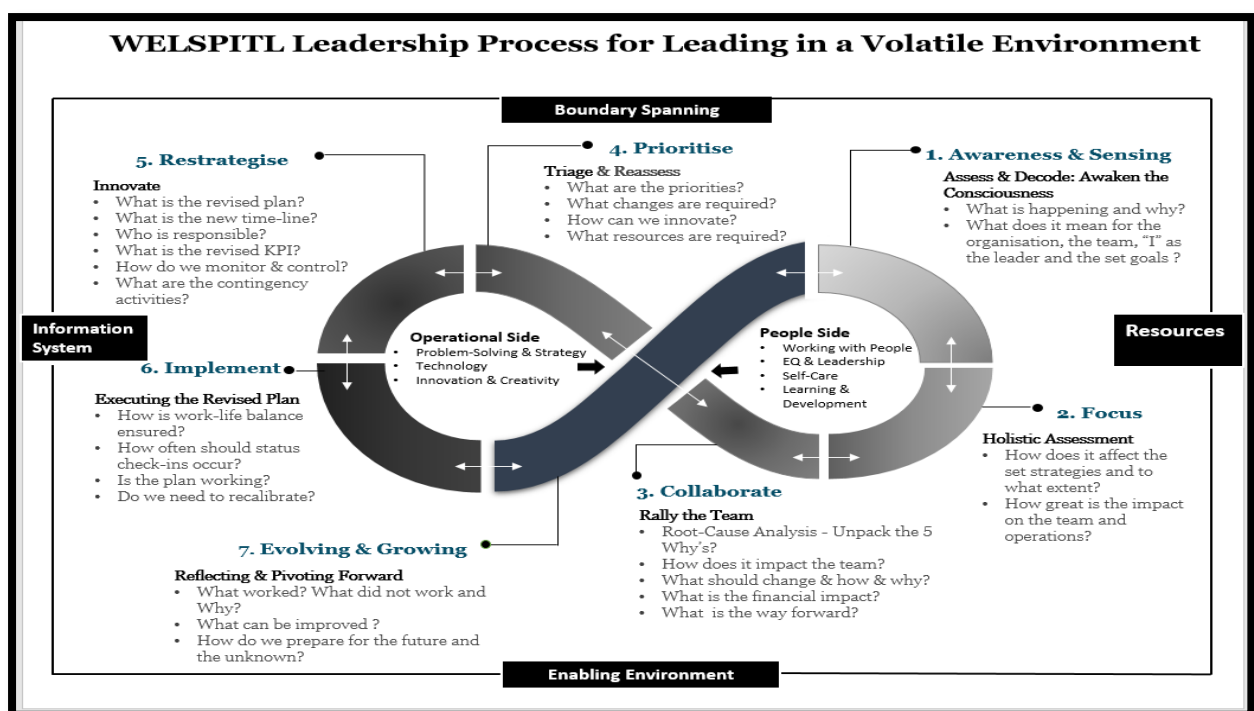
Leadership Process

Policymaking's linearity does not consider or accommodate feedback loops, time delays, cause and effect relations that are often distant in time and space, leading to policy resistance, unintended consequences, and counter-intuitive behaviour. These blind spots and gaps do affect leadership's behaviour, actions and speed of response. Covid-19 has forced leaders worldwide to "*re-create their own new normalcy*" (Robinson, 2020). The pandemic has forced leaders out of their comfort zones and complacency attitudes to become proactive in seeking out creative ways to meet their stated objectives. The pandemic has taught them that it is not business as usual, and many of the impossibles can become possible with a bit of innovation and creativity. Further to this, Lampinen & Fifield (2020) stress the importance of leaders understanding and assessing what the new normality in the new world is. This understanding is the basis for succeeding in the future and addressing future challenges.

Based on the primary study findings and literature on lessons learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic, leaders were always caught in a loop where there was a constant back and forth in decision making and collaboration, undoing and redoing of tasks, strategising and restrategising and prioritising and reprioritising. Leaders found themselves doing a lot of

deep thinking and reflection and becoming more aware of their surroundings. They had to be so fluid, flexible and adaptable like a loop as their approach changed continuously as the situation had changed. Creating a perfect strategy is nonexistent. Leaders need to work towards a practical solution that will always have room for improvement. Constant experimentation, reassessing, revising, and re-implementation of the strategies will help streamline the process in an imperfect world with imperfect people. Preparation, willingness to change and adapt is the key to future success. Scenario planning for different eventualities will help leaders be better prepared for unplanned events in a volatile environment. The provision of and access to appropriate resources needs to be factored into a basket of contingency plans.

The pandemic has caused leaders worldwide to reassess their capabilities to successfully begin to recalibrate and restore the organisation's vision to navigate the 'new world' post the pandemic. The recovery phase of a crisis requires strong leadership. In conjunction with the WELSPITL Leadership Framework, the following seven-step leadership process is recommended to help managers navigate a volatile environment successfully, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.



Source: Pramjeeth, 2021

FIGURE 2
WELSPITL 7-STEP LEADERSHIP PROCESS FOR LEADING IN A VOLATILE ENVIRONMENT

Interpretation of the Proposed Leadership Process

Leading the team in a VUCA environment is very challenging and marked with much sweeping uncertainty. If leaders act too quickly without much deliberation and thought, they can be accused of overreacting and causing undue anxiety, stress and cost. However, if they wait for the crisis to unfold to deeper depths, they can be accused of being complacent and irresponsible. When to respond to a crisis can be a double-edged sword.

Based on the primary study findings and literature, especially on responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, the following seven steps are proposed for leaders to follow when leading in a volatile environment. The first three steps speak to the people side of the business. As per WELSPITL Leadership Framework, the leadership traits: Working with people, EQ, Leadership, Self-care and Learning and Development are dominant during these three stages. Stages four to seven aligns with the operation side of the business. The key traits required to navigate these steps successfully are Problem-Solving and Strategy, Technology and Innovation and Creativity as per the WELSPITL Framework. The process is iterative, with feedback loops that include critical questions the leader and the team would need to consider for each step. For the leadership process to be effective, leaders must ensure that an enabling environment is created where consultation and collaboration occur across teams, departments, and stakeholders. Individuals feel safe and free to share their thoughts and ideas. Creating a knowledge management information system that provides relevant, real-time information in an understandable format is required. The use of visual information boards is encouraged. The required resources are available to perform the tasks. Creativity pods are created to allow for the easy immersion of ideas and solutions (Proches, 2020; Proches & Green, 2016).

The two-way arrows indicate that leaders may be required to move back and forth in each stage as the conditions change, showing a constant reflective, flexible, adaptive decision-making approach. Getting it always right in a volatile environment will be challenging to achieve as the goal post constantly changes. Thus, it is more important to be practical on the desired outcome hope to be achieved, adaptable and be able to act quickly and decisively in the changing environment. Do what is most important and as best as you can with the available resources. The pandemic has shown the need for managers to begin adopting more lean problem-solving and operational excellence skills to maximise the use of resources, efficiency and time.

Step 1: Awareness and Sensing

The first step requires the leader to step back, identify, assess the situation and decode what is happening. He needs to awaken his consciousness, make sense of the situation as it unfolds, and understand why it is happening. Leaders must refrain from trying to quickly fix the problem without assessing how big the problem is and what is causing it. This step adopts the principles of Awakened Leadership and Theory U. At this stage; the leader needs to ask himself the following questions:

- What is happening, and why?
- What does it mean for the organisation, the team, "I" as the leader and the set goals?

Step 2: Focus

Once the leader has internalised and made sense of what is happening, he/she needs to conduct a holistic assessment of the impact the situation has on the organisation and the team. At this stage, key principles of Theory U, Awakened Leadership and Strategic Leadership are adopted. Key considerations are:

- How does it affect the set strategies, and to what extent?
- How great is the impact on the team and operations?

Step 3: Collaborate

Once the leader has conducted a holistic analysis, the team should meet. The team should collaborate on understanding what is happening, why it is happening, and its impact.

Engage the team using thinking questions to encourage dialogue and help solicit practical suggestions for immediate implementation. Leaders must be divergent in their thinking and employ collective thinking, and ideation must occur. Narrow thinking and the blame game must be abandoned. At this stage, key principles of Theory U, Awakened Leadership, Lean Problem-Solving, Reflective Leadership, Complexity Adaptive Leadership Theory, Integrative Thinking, RARE Leadership, Community Leadership, Entrepreneurial Leadership, Network Governance Leadership and Strategic Leadership are adopted. The key considerations are:

- Root-Cause Analysis - Unpack the 5 Why's?
- How does it impact the team?
- What should change & how & why?
- What is the financial impact?
- What is the way forward?

Step 4: Prioritise

Upon completing the root-cause analysis and understanding the associated impact of the challenge, the leader with his team must categorise in terms of importance what the key projects are. A review of the processes and resources required to achieve the project outcomes and how best can the process be adapted to achieve the desired goal must be undertaken. Leaders should consult employees on the work process changes and brainstorm innovative ways to improve processes and systems while being mindful of the unintentional repercussions. At this stage, key principles of Reflective Leadership, Complexity Adaptive Leadership Theory, Integrative Thinking, RARE Leadership, Community Leadership, Entrepreneurial Leadership, Network Governance Leadership and Strategic Leadership are adopted. The key considerations are:

- What are the priorities?
- What changes are required?
- How can we innovate?
- What resources are required?

Step 5: Restrategise

Once the key priority areas/projects have been deliberated on and agreed to, the leader must create a revised strategic plan. Innovation and creativity in the strategic plan development are encouraged. When there is insufficient clarity and the response required is immediate, like with coronavirus, it is good to have "specific immediate actions" (Tourish, 2020), looking at what is most important, urgent and causing the most challenges. As clarity improves, short to long term plans need to be restrategised. Lampinen & Fifield (2020, p.2) stress the importance of leaders "resetting the focus" to help create some kind of stabilisation. Collaborate with the team on the way forward. At this stage, the key principles of Complexity Adaptive Leadership, Integrative Thinking, Transformative Leadership, Entrepreneurial Leadership and Strategic Leadership are adopted. The key considerations are:

- What is the revised plan?
- What is the new timeline?
- Who is responsible?
- What is the revised KPI?
- How do we monitor & control?
- What are the contingency activities?

Step 6: Implement

The revised strategic plan is now ready to be executed. Leaders must be available and visible. They need to conduct Gemba walks to observe the implementation process and better understand it and the associated challenges in real-time. Leaders must engage with the staff and listen and take note of their highlighted challenges and proposed solutions. At this stage, the key principles of Gemba Kaizen, Complexity Adaptive Leadership, Integrative Thinking, RARE Leadership, Transformative Leadership, Reflective Leadership and Strategic Leadership are adopted. The key considerations are:

- How is work-life balance ensured?
- How often should status check-ins occur?
- Is the plan working?
- Do we need to recalibrate?

Step 7: Evolving and Growing

In the final stage of the process, the leader and his team hold a debrief session. A reflection on what has been done, the positives and the negatives experienced are unpacked, and the final result/end product is discussed. Areas of improvement are brainstormed. Key aspects of Theory U, Awakened Leadership Strategic Leadership and Reflective Leadership are adopted here. The key considerations are:

- What worked? What did not work and Why?
- What can be improved?
- How do we prepare for the future and the unknown?

The WELSPTIL framework is a composite of key characteristics from leadership theories that are relevant for leading in a volatile environment, namely: Reflective Leadership, Integrative Thinking, Transformative Leadership, RARE Leadership, Strategic Leadership, Complexity Adaptive Leadership Theory, Awakened Leadership, Entrepreneurial Leadership, Network Governance Leadership, Community Leadership, Ethical Leadership, Authentic Leadership, Servant Leadership and Theory U. Integrated into this mix are key principles of LEAN problem-solving tools and the Shingo Guiding Principles.

The integrated nature of the WELSPTIL Framework allows for collective thinking, ideation and solution forming while factoring in greater reflection, accountability, monitoring and control mechanisms. Strategies are formed based on root-cause analysis and are evidence-based. The framework calls for an enabling working environment, creating an organisational culture of non-fear, teamwork, result-orientation, innovation, creativity, togetherness, compassion, support, shared vision and common goals. This framework and leadership process creates a stronger team identity, commitment, cooperation, communication, promotion of transparency, code of ethics and accountability while promoting co-leadership, copresencing and co-creation to improve and accelerate service delivery. The framework promotes life-long learning, heightened EQ levels and managing self-care, which are essential attributes for staying relevant in the knowledge economy and surviving in a VUCA environment.

It is proposed that this leadership framework and process guide management and leaders to lead effectively in a volatile environment. The key points noted were the importance of learning, symbiotic and synergistic relationships between team members and other stakeholders within the department and across departments, and creating an enabling supportive working environment. Leaders and managers can only grow, embrace change, and change their mental models if they begin adopting the principles of Theory U, Reflective Leadership, Complexity Adaptive Leadership, RARE Leadership, Transformative

Leadership, Awakened Leadership and the proposed WELSPITL leadership framework and process, thereby becoming more resilient and agile, hence responding positively to changing environment. The pandemic has highlighted the relevance and importance of adopting empathy, proactiveness, lean thinking and tools for organisational success.

CONCLUSION

Based on this framework being created during the pandemic and a prolonged crisis using the experiences of leaders that successfully managed their team during the pandemic, the framework is relevant to the current environment as it moves away from the top-down bureaucratic task-orientated approach to one of participation, inclusivity, collective and result-orientated leadership. It allows leaders to function in a complexity mindset, where they can comfortably think, act, and lead in a VUCA environment while unifying their team's experiences and knowledge towards a shared vision in a flexible, agile manner. This study's focus was limited to a single country, South Africa, and a single SoE, Eskom. Thus, similar studies must be conducted on other SoEs and private organisations in South Africa and abroad to determine if a correlation in the findings exists and increase the generalisation of the findings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the executive members, senior managers and employees at Eskom who participated in the study.

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