Crisis leadership at South African universities: An exploration of the effectiveness of the strategies and responses of university leadership teams to the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) protests at South African universities in 2015 and 2016

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Declaration

I declare that the thesis entitled 'Crisis leadership at South African universities: An exploration of the effectiveness of the strategies and responses of university leadership teams to the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) protests at South African universities in 2015 and 2016' is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used and quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Full name: Nita Lawton-Misra

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Date: March 2019

Signature:

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late sister, Anika Lalla, and my late dad.

You are always in our thoughts.

We miss you.

"Everything comes to us that belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it." – Rabindranath Tagore

Abstract

The #FeesMustFall (#FMF) movement which began in 2015 and continued in 2016 was initially a call for free tuition, but soon grew to include substantial academic demands, quickly spiralling into violence and destruction of property. This required university leaders to step into roles for which they were largely untrained and inexperienced — even for those who were once among the ranks of the protesting students. Neither the operational systems nor the personnel had ever conceived of or anticipated such an unprecedented revolt, and the leadership had to summon all their intuition and acumen to navigate, deciding whether to merely defend their institutions or to concede to students' demands. Did they manage the moment or lead it, and did they steel their institutions against similar future confrontations?

This study used an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to answer the primary research question, and to understand the lived experiences of the participants, which aligned with the interpretive paradigm. Leadership theories and chaos and complexity theories were employed and provided the lens through which the data was collected and analysed. Semi-structured interviews were used as data collection methods with 29 participants. University leaders and staff who did not belong to the leadership band of universities, from six universities participated in the study. The findings revealed that South African university leaders are not adequately trained to lead during crises, and that leadership-enhancement programmes need to be developed to include this component in the training of future leaders for the higher education sector. It further revealed that the Department of Higher Education and Training should take a proactive role in training and supporting university leaders, as well as developing a national communication strategy.

This research makes a contribution towards crisis leadership in the South African higher education sector by providing insights for both university leaders as well as the Ministry of Higher Education and Training, as well as proposing a model of crisis leadership.

Keys words:

Crisis leadership, crisis management, #FeesMustFall, higher education, university leaders, South African higher education institutions, Department of Higher Education and Training

20 February 2019

To whom it may concern,

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Editorial Certificate

This letter serves to prove that the thesis listed below was language-edited for proper English, grammar, punctuation, and spelling as well as overall layout and style by myself, a native English-speaking editor.

Thesis title

Crisis leadership at South African universities: An exploration of the effectiveness of the strategies and responses of university leadership teams to the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) protests at South African universities in 2015 and 2016

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The research content and author's intentions were not altered in any way during the editing process; however, the author has the authority to accept or reject my suggestions and changes.

Should you have any questions or concerns about this edited document, I can be contacted at the listed telephone number or email address.

Regards

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1.1   INTRODUCTION

Leadership theories have burgeoned over the years but there is limited research on educational leadership in times of crisis. This is especially true of South Africa, and of South African universities that had not experienced any significant crisis since the advent of democracy. The student protests that besieged South African universities in 2015 and 2016, popularly known as #FeesMustFall (#FMF), were the first large-scale national crises that university leaderships had to encounter, and these events tested their crisis-leadership capabilities. This study will explore those events by examining the concept of crisis leadership, and gauging the effectiveness of the strategies that university leaders used, endeavouring to understand the nature of the crisis and university leaderships' responses during such turbulent times.

According to Muffet-Willett (2010), measures of successful leadership (especially in the corporate sense) commonly include turning a profit, creating a positive image, increasing organisational efficiency, or ensuring smooth operations in times of uncertainty or organisational strife. To understand the way leaders should act during crises, leadership characteristics, frameworks, and contexts are necessary. Walker *et al.* (2016) claim that, given the critical role of leaders during an organisational crisis, and the importance of events such as natural disasters and terrorist attacks, it is important to analyse leaderships' responses.

Given the turmoil during crises, leaders must navigate through conditions of uncertainty, complexity, and volatility (Fink, 2000; Schoenberg, 2004; Van Wart & Kapucu, 2011; Walker *et al.*, 2016; Bundy *et al.*, 2017). Using a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine university leaders' lived experiences during the #FeesMustFall student crisis, this study scrutinised the concept of crisis leadership and gauged the effectiveness of the strategies university leaders used to resolve the crisis.

This chapter outlines the university-sector crisis that occurred in 2015 and 2016, and provides the context for the exploration of crisis-leadership. The background to the crisis is significant in that it unravels many of the complexities of the South African higher education environment that made this particular crisis and leaders' responses to it so unique.

1.2   BACKGROUND

This chapter presents the historical factors contributing to the context that students perceived as challenging. It provides an historical perspective, information on the current political climate of the country, as well as the funding challenges experienced by institutions of higher learning.

1.2.1   #FeesMustFall Protests

Social and structural change seldom happens without activism, advocacy, dissent, disruption and protest. According to Heleta (2016), the powerful and influential do not simply give in because it is the right thing to do; they only act when they are compelled to do so by social movements and mass action.

Ngidi *et al.* (2016) describe student protests as a global phenomenon, documented as early as the 1800s. They indicate that in the USA between 1800 and 1875, students rebelled at least once at Miami University, University of North Carolina, Harvard University, Yale University, New York University, and many others. Early protests were catalysts of change in a number of key movements, including the European revolution of 1884, the Russian revolution in 1905, the Indian Independence Movement, the Chinese revolts of the early 20th century, the Cuban revolt, the Vietnam War, and the Indonesian revolt of 1966. Scholars also point to the role of students during the colonial period in fighting for independence on the African continent, such as the 1976 Soweto Riots in South Africa, which began as a protest against the enforced teaching of the Afrikaans language and ended up changing the course of South African history.

The following tweet from a student captures this aptly:

#FeesMustFall is a GLOBAL VICTORY. Higher education remains inaccessible for the poor worldwide. Dear SA youth: you are shaping the WORLD!

Students highlighted and challenged the slow pace of transformation in South African universities in their protest actions in 2015 and 2016. Initially, spurts of activity erupted when University of Cape Town (UCT) students protested against the Cecil John Rhodes statue on their campus. They saw it and other statues as symbols of white supremacy and privilege, and as reminders of the oppression and discrimination of the apartheid government, challenged university leaders to remove these reminders of a painful past. When asked by a journalist, *"Why have you focused your attention on this statue?"*, a student explained that:

It's not just because it makes people feel uncomfortable, but because it's the biggest symbol of the institutionalization of racism. That's why we wouldn't want to pull it down ourselves. We want the university to acknowledge this. This is someone we know was involved in mass genocide, and who oppressed and enslaved black people across Southern Africa. The fact that his statue can stand there proudly, in such a prominent position, and that people can walk past it every day without questioning it, that is a problem of racism. If we can see that the statue is a problem, we can start looking more deeply at the norms and values of institutionalized racism that don't physically manifest themselves, that are harder to see (Boroughs, 2015 p1).

The name #RhodesMustFall (hashtag Rhodes Must Fall) was attached to the demand for the statue to be removed, and quickly became common currency. The use of the name #FeesMustFall was then attached to subsequent protests among students on various campuses throughout the country. Kamanzi (2015) argued that students at other universities responded to the chants echoing from UCT, while protest action at Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape invigorated conversations around the existing institutional culture in these universities, and drew connections to the symbolic continued existence of

names, statues and sculptures left over from the Colonial and Apartheid eras of South Africa. Debate then widened to how these artefacts and names reflected the continued exclusion of different races, class and epistemologies of thought, as well as ongoing gender-based oppressions.

Announced in 2015, a proposal by the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University) of a double-digit (10.5%) fee increase for 2016 provoked the response '#FeesMustFall'. This sparked unprecedented student protest action that spread within days to other universities as students nation-wide demanded no fee increase for 2016. In Cape Town, students from UCT, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), the University of the Western Cape (UWC), and Stellenbosch University (US) joined forces and marched to Parliament to demand no fee increase for 2016. The President of South Africa subsequently declared a 0% fee increase for university students for 2016. Barely appeased, the Wits SRC (2015) stated that:

> the zero percent fee increment is a short-term victory that we applied a short-term strategy to achieve. We remain steadfast in our call for free education in our lifetime and we acknowledge that this zero percent increment is not just a step in the right direction but is also a turning point to attaining free education.

On 23 October 2015, thousands of supporters marched to the Union Buildings to demand free education from President Jacob Zuma, and the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande. According to Pillay (2016), digital activism enabled the student movements to flourish. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and instant messaging services allowed supporters to swiftly communicate and organise meetings and protest marches. University leaders were caught off guard. Jansen (2017) highlighted the suddenness of the crisis by citing a vice-chancellor:

> I was profoundly shocked by what was happening. What in the world was going on?

Godsell and Chikane (2016) asserted that, while the #FeesMustFall movement highlighted the challenges facing most South African students, students had in fact been protesting against high fees and exclusion at some universities since 1994. They emphasised that students from predominantly black universities and universities of technology had been consistently waging battles against the infrastructural conditions at their universities, the effectiveness of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), and the payment of university registration fees (CSVR, 2017). However, their protest action was largely ignored and often did not make headlines beyond regional newspapers. Davids and Waghid (2016) noted that the two very different responses, namely limited media attention given to earlier protests at historically-black universities versus widespread coverage and international solidarity for protests at historically-white universities, are stark reminders of post-apartheid South Africa's embedded inequalities.

Within the Twitter feed from students, this sense of marginalisation was reflected in messages about being poor, and the humiliation and anxiety of not being able to cover the expenses of university.

> *Actually, the fact that every year I must prove to Nfsas that I'm still poor is offensive. #FeesMustFall" too rich for NSFAS, too poor for fees, and too black for a bank loan*
> *Yall don't see the bigger picture, Current Fees are too high, poor Black people still can't afford university, NSFAS is a trap#FeesMustFall"*

Ngidi *et al.* (2016), reflecting on the tweets and participation in the protest, believe that the sentiments pointed to concerns about a democracy that was expected to bring freedom, liberty and equality.

Although Godsell and Chikane (2016) maintained that the #FMF protests involved students from both historically-advantaged and historically-disadvantaged universities, Prof Jonathan Jansen, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Free State, stated that on the traditionally-black campuses the protests were routine and cyclical, revolving around bread-

and-butter concerns such as tuition fees, transport, and accommodation. He stated that the agenda on the former white campuses stretched to broader concerns about symbolic violence, cultural alienation, gender oppression, and curriculum dissonance with the black experience, concerns which would later merge with and become subsumed under the #FMF agenda (Jansen, 2017). Issues of transforming or 'decolonising' the curriculum, institutional culture, food and job security, safety, and student housing were added to the demands that followed.

Female students were also protesting for their families and future generations, as articulated by a female Wits University student on Facebook (Ngidi *et al.,* 2016):

> *Comrades we have neglected our mothers and fathers being abused at the hands of outsourced companies on our watch on our campus under our gaze. For too long young people in our country have been marginalized and abused for being born poor… It must never be forgotten that it was us as students who remained resolute and determined in our commitment to free education. It is not just for us or for next year, it is a legacy for generations to come.*

Despite campus shut-downs as a result of protests, universities worked hard to salvage the academic year and, with the assistance of additional security and the police, year-end assessments were concluded and the academic project completed. However, the last three months of 2015 challenged the *status quo* of universities, and particularly of university leaders. According to Jansen (2017), these leaders had to ensure living-wage increases for their academics and workers, and at the same time engage with students' demand to in-source contract workers. He added that they had to reassure their Senates that the academic project would not be compromised, while making adjustments to the academic calendar and examination timetable forced on them by relentless protests actions. Renewed sporadic student protests throughout 2016 gained momentum in late September 2016 and spread to almost all campuses by early October of that year.

Following a consultation in 2016 between the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Universities SA (USAf), a representative forum of South African universities, and   the

University Council Chairs Forum (UCCF), the three entities arrived at a set of common understandings on the crisis (USAf, 2016a). In September 2016, the Minister of Higher Education and Training declared an 8% cap on university fee increments for 2017. USAf responded positively, although stating that this announcement was an interim measure to facilitate, in a small way, progressive access to higher education for all (USAf, 2016b). However, the announcement was not accepted by the majority of protesting students, and a new wave of protests of varying degrees of voracity burgeoned across institutions.

According to Jansen, for the rest of 2016 university leaders were literally fighting fires. Some universities had minimal disruptions and managed to continue their academic programmes, while others had to halt activities and consider alternative plans to conclude the academic year successfully. USAf reported:

> *Each of our universities will find its own route to stability, depending on the prevalent conditions and contexts. There will have to be ongoing and open dialogues on each campus and national ones as well. The voices of parents will have to be heard and perhaps even more importantly, the voices of those students which are not being heard. Each university in our system will have to work out how to achieve this* (USAf, 2016b).

Given its national impact, a range of stakeholders, including parents, business leaders, government departments other than the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), religious organisations, national and international business communities, got involved in attempting to resolve the crisis in various ways. An example of this was the establishment of a National Education Crisis Forum (NECF) (see Appendix M) by the President in the latter part of 2016 to mediate the crisis on behalf of the government. This forum included a spectrum of stakeholders, and was chaired by retired Justice Moseneke. A two-day convention was planned early in 2017, to which all stakeholders were invited, in an attempt to allow all voices to be heard and for a resolution to the crisis to be mediated. Unfortunately, the convention did not last even a few hours, as students angrily disrupted the event on the first day.

1.2.2 Historical perspective

To understand the basis of the students' demands, it is imperative to discuss the South African higher education system in the context of the country's political history. According to Barnes (2006), the apartheid government was largely successful in achieving an institutional basis of differentiation in which some institutions were relatively advantaged by being comprehensively supported in providing a full range of educational services, thereby contributing to the systemic reproduction of privilege of white South Africa. These educational institutions, generally known as the historically-advantaged universities (HAUs), were universities such as Cape Town, Witwatersrand, Stellenbosch, Rhodes, Natal and Pretoria, and technikons such as Port Elizabeth, Witwatersrand and Pretoria. Conversely, other institutions were relatively disadvantaged through restrictions that forced them to provide 'gutter education', as the People's Education Movement scornfully dubbed it in the 1980s. These 17 institutions (universities and technikons) were restricted to the enrolment of black (African, Coloured, Indian) students, labelled as the historically-disadvantaged universities (HDUs).

Celebrating a decade of democracy in South Africa in 2004 provided an opportunity to review transformation in higher education. By 2004, the foundations had been laid for a single, coordinated, and differentiated system (Council on Higher Education (CHE), 2007). According to Hodes (2016), the main aim behind restructuring higher education into a single, nationally-coordinated system was to discontinue the previous segregated configuration, intended to increase access for previously disadvantaged persons and to facilitate transformation.

In the CHE's review of higher education (CHE, 2017b), it states that one of the recommendations of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) in 1996 was to radically grow the numbers to achieve a higher participation rate of previously disadvantaged students. It further notes that, while the South African higher education system has experienced considerable growth, this growth has not been accompanied by sufficient funding to enable the national goals of higher education to be fully met. Universities generally made up the shortfall in state funding through significantly increasing tuition fees, seeking third-stream income (e.g. alumni and donor contributions, income from

consultancies, research contracts, short courses, hiring out of facilities, etc.) and reducing costs through mechanisms such as outsourcing (Kagisano, 2016c).

Hodes (2016) also points out that, although the number of students enrolled in higher education in South Africa almost double between 1994 and 2011, increasing from 495,356 to 938,201, state funding for higher education as a component of total university income decreased from 49% in 2000 to 40% in 2012. Universities sought to make up the budget shortfall through private fundraising, a challenging task for leaders in difficult economic conditions. During this time, the contribution of student fees to total university income increased from 24% to 31%. Hodes (2016) goes on to state that, in the third decade of South African democracy and under a constitutional order that guaranteed the right to further education, which the State through reasonable measures should make progressively available and accessible, higher education became more expensive for students and their families.

1.2.3   A nascent democracy 24 years later

In the Education White Paper (White Paper 3 of 1997), the Ministry's vision was of a transformed, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist system of higher education that will, among other things, 'promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities'. The White Paper asserts that the principle of equity requires fair opportunities to both enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them. This implies firstly a critical identification of existing inequalities which are the product of policies, structures and practices based on racial, gender, disability and other forms of discrimination or disadvantage, and secondly a programme of transformation to redress these inequalities. Such transformation involves not only abolishing all existing forms of unjust differentiation, but also improving measures of empowerment, including financial support to bring about equal opportunity for individuals.

1

Many may argue that HDUs continue to lag behind, as resources are sparse and they do not possess the reserves which HAUs enjoyed from the apartheid era, nor do they have a wealthy alumni base to turn to for financial support. This is evident from Table 1.1 below, which reflects third stream income, including donor funding for different universities.

Table 1.1 Proportion of institutional funding per source and institution 2015
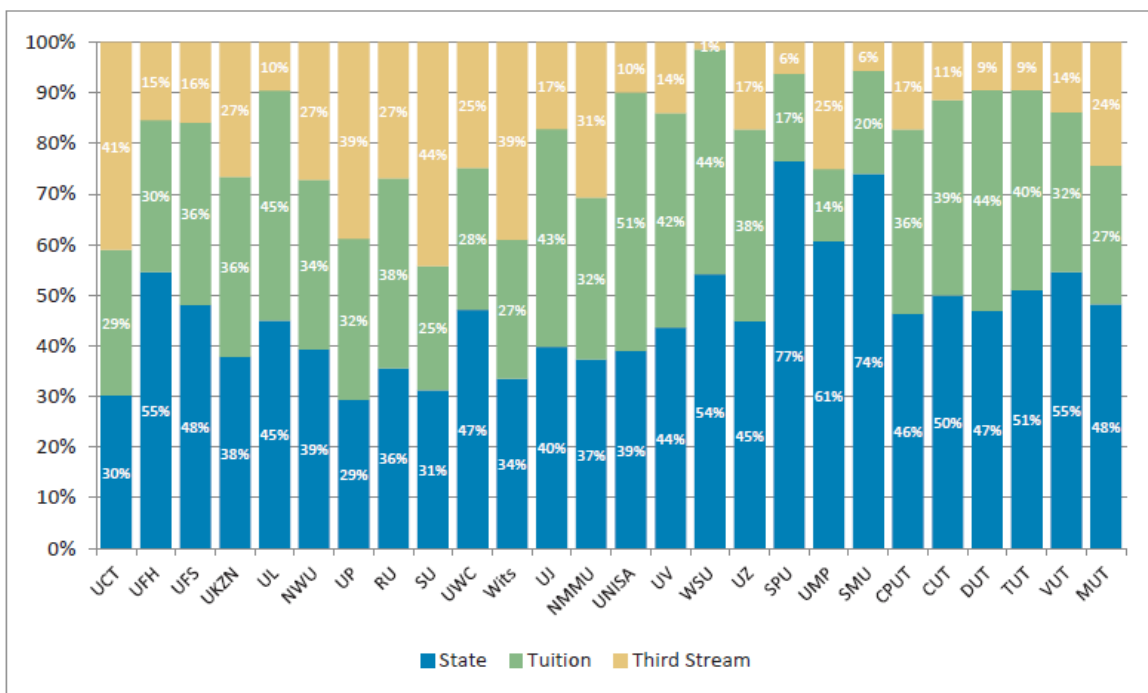
Table 1.1 clearly reflects the differences in third stream income between HAUs and HDUs, demonstrating at a glance that HAUs, such as UCT, UP, SU and Wits, receive significantly more than HDUs.

Badat and Sayed (2014) state that, despite initiatives to reshape the apartheid institutional landscape through mergers of higher educational institutions and the opening up of public schools, the historical geographical patterns of advantage and disadvantage continue to affect the capacities of historically black institutions to pursue excellence and provide high-quality learning experiences and equal opportunity and outcomes. They further posit that if

equity of opportunity and outcomes were previously strongly affected by race, they are now also conditioned by social class and geography.

The demands of protesting students often matched the socio-economic contexts of the universities, highlighting the unequal society which persists from the apartheid era. Jansen (2017, p. 2) described it as, "the many different faces of the revolt expressed in different ways on diverse campuses with varied consequences". According to him, the financial crisis turned to disaster when students and workers added in-sourcing to their demands. He illustrated this by citing UCT which, under great pressure, agreed to in-source its workers and subsequently was forced to renege on salary increases, offer early retirement to staff, and introduced the prospect of future layoffs.

Hodes (2016) asserts that universities came to exemplify the failure of "transformation", and the lasting legacy of institutional racism and Eurocentrism. Prof Adam Habib, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand, pointed out that (2016):

> *We are only at the beginning of this social movement of transformation in higher education. Student protest action throughout the world and throughout the ages has forced societies to confront its unequal and unfair treatment of different groups of its citizens. It is no different with the #FeesMustFall movement. The students, through their protests in October and November, put affordable, quality higher education and the insourcing of vulnerable workers on the national agenda in a way that has not happened before. Many of us, vice-chancellors included, have been lamenting the underfunding of higher education for over a decade with little effect. But it was the students with their marches on Parliament and the Union Buildings that shook up the state, changed the systemic parameters and began the process of fundamentally transforming higher education.*

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) embarked on an investigation into different responses to the call for free education. A commission of enquiry was set up, under the leadership of Justice Jonathan Arthur Heher, to investigate different funding

models using international and African examples, and to provide a report on the feasibility and affordability of free higher education in SA (Nicolson, 2016; Pilane, 2016). This commission was mandated to submit its report to the Ministry by the end of June 2017. Mashego (2016), however, reported that students were demanding that government find the money for free education and had rejected studies to determine whether this was feasible. Students claimed to know that government could fund free education, but did not have the political will to do so.

1.2.4   Funding crisis

The global higher education environment has not been immune to crises. Universities all over the world have had to deal with natural disasters, student revolts, financial crises, and campus tragedies. Badsha (CHE, 2016a, pIX) stated that, "in the coming years, the higher education leadership in the country will also no doubt be seized with the issues and challenges that are of concern to university leaders worldwide". The #FeesMustFall movement, through its protests across all South African universities, managed to raise public awareness about the shortage of funding for higher education, which would not have occurred without the protests.

The State was put under pressure and in response President Jacob Zuma announced a 0% fee increment for the 2016 academic year. Since the protests, the government has also committed to putting additional funding into the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to financially support university students. One could argue that some of these changes would not have happened if the students had not organised protests (CSRV, 2017).

The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is a state institution set up to provide financial support to indigent students at public institutions of higher learning and training. NSFAS provides students with loans, repayable once the student has been awarded their qualification and is employed, or bursaries to those who qualify. Further support includes food and transport stipends, a living honorarium, and the cost of tuition and accommodation. NSFAS funding is reserved for students coming from homes where the household annual income does not exceed R122 000 (Africa Check, 2017).

Students protested against this policy as there are many students who do not qualify for NSFAS loans because their families' incomes exceed the threshold of R122 000 per annum, but who do not earn enough to qualify for commercial loans. Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, introduced an additional intervention to support such students, who became known as the "missing middle" group. The provision of gap funding to universities to cover the 8% increase for students from homes where the combined household income did not exceed R600 000 was introduced in November 2016 for 2017 enrolments. Despite this, students took to the streets.

Table 1.2 below, extracted from a report from the Treasury (DHET, 2015) reflects the fee structure across South African universities in 2015 in relation to the national student financial aid scheme.

Table 1.2: Affordability and breakdown of the average 2015 full costs by university

Affordability and breakdown of the average 2015 full costs by university

	Tuition	Regis-tration	Residence	Meals	Books	FCS (A)	% registration & tuition	% above/below NSFAS cap	
UCT	52 237	-	42 398	15 667	3 300	113 602	46%	69%	If these students receive a full NSFAS loan, they will still need to find other sources of funding to cover FCS
WITS	46 802	9 340	33 360	19 008	-	108 510	52%	61%	
UP	37 900	-	33 200	28 800	-	99 900	38%	49%	
UJ	38 877	-	24 259	25 613	6 450	95 199	41%	42%	
SMU	38 945	5 000	16 052	28 000	7 000	94 997	46%	41%	
RHODES	38 950	1 650	49 300	-	5 000	94 900	43%	41%	
SU	39 235	-	32 755	15 000	-	86 990	45%	29%	
DUT	27 635	-	21 615	22 320	9 600	81 170	34%	21%	
UNIVEN	28 543	2 720	17 590	24 410	5 000	78 263	40%	16%	
UKZN	31 711	-	23 265	17 500	5 000	77 476	41%	15%	
NWU	37 810	1 560	17 500	12 000	8 000	76 870	51%	14%	
MUT	19 612	2 000	25 360	19 008	9 500	75 480	31%	12%	
UFS	21 774	950	29 045	16 000	5 000	72 769	44%	8%	
UFH	28 413	2 630	26 000	10 000	4 000	71 043	44%	6%	
NMMU	25 710	950	23 740	17 610	3 000	71 010	38%	6%	
UL	24 431	5 000	14 500	21 622	4 000	69 553	42%	4%	
VUT	20 238	870	20 611	22 300	4 000	68 019	35%	1%	Average NSFAS loan award was R32 017
UWC	22 400	1 210	17 710	20 000	6 000	67 320	35%	0%	
NSFAS cap						67 200			
CUT	19 503	858	18 020	18 000	5 000	61 381	33%	-9%	
TUT	18 357	1 500	13 331	20 564	4 600	58 352	36%	-13%	
WSU	20 220	-	23 498	10 000	2 000	55 718	36%	-17%	
UZULU	17 648	2 837	14 851	13 200	2 000	50 536	41%	-25%	
CPUT	19 177	745	23 409	2 000	3 000	48 331	41%	-28%	
UNISA	13 350	-	-	-	5 000	18 350		-73%	

Presented by Treasury. Source: DHET – data collected from universities July 2015.

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The above table presents a breakdown of the costs of study for students at different universities in SA. It also shows the NSFAS cap for funding (R67 200) and how universities' fees compare with what NSFAS-eligible students could receive. Students from the top seven universities would have to significantly supplement the funding they receive from NSFAS, once more revealing the challenges that students face in accessing higher education. While students from universities such as NWU and UFS would need to personally pay between

14% to 8% towards the full cost of study, students from universities of the lower tier, such as CUT and CPUT do not need to contribute any additional funds towards their full cost of study.

1.3 DEFINING A CRISIS

When describing the term "crisis", the literature offers the following definitions/descriptions:

- The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines a *crisis* as "an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending, especially one with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome", while the Oxford Dictionary defines it as "a time when a difficult or important decision must be made" (Crisis, *n.d.*).

- Seeger *et al*. (2003) and Spoelstra *et al* (2016) define a crisis as a specific, unexpected and non-routine, organisationally-based event or series of events which creates high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organisation's high-priority goals. They go further to state that a crisis can pose a threat to system stability, a questioning of core assumptions and beliefs, and threats to high-priority goals, including image, legitimacy, profitability, and even survival.

- Stern (2013) posits that crises represent both the fragility and resilience of societies and organisations.

- Boin and Hart (2003) describe crises as both dynamic and chaotic; they represent a disruption of the organisation in several ways.

- Jacobsen (2010) says that crises are sources of profound human loss, tragedy, and agony and are also the precipitating factors in radical, and often positive, social change.

- Mitroff (2005) states that it is important to remember that a crisis threatens an organisation's existence and causes catastrophic damage, such as, death, injuries, or damage to an organisation's reputation.

In summary, a crisis is characterised by uncertainty and chaos, can affect and/or alter the core or the very existence of the organisation, and threatens the well-being of those associated with, as well as the reputation of, the organisation. It further tests the strength and resilience of the organisation, requiring immediate responses from its leadership.

1.4   LEADING IN A CRISIS

Research into crisis management can be traced back to the 1960s, with Herman (1963, 1972) being considered as the founding researcher in this field. In his first book, "*International Crisis*", Herman found that crisis research had no particular relevance, and as he continued with his second book in 1972, he acknowledged significant limitations to the study of crises, such as single case studies and the notion that, because each crisis was unique, research be limited to each case.

While lack of relevance as postulated by Herman is no longer true, especially with the frequency of crisis situations at international universities where acts of terrorism, campus shootings, or natural disasters have increased in the recent past, one limitation that he had identified does still exist: the uniqueness of each crisis. With crisis situations being unique within themselves, a one-size-fits-all solution cannot apply. For example, how leaders respond to natural disasters will be different from their response to a possible terrorist attack, or to a flood situation. Effective crisis leadership is consequently largely determined by the situation and the context (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969, 1988, 1996; Xavier, 2005).

Although important and relevant to the field, the available literature contains more subjective incident reports than empirical research on the topic (Walker *et al.*, 2016; Schoenberg, 2004; Solty, 2012). The literature demonstrates that added to the complexity of the research area is the fact that different contexts contribute different factors that impact on the crisis and its resolution.

It has been suggested that organisational leaders tend to look externally for support and expertise in handling crises when the moment arrives. Yet, according to Muffet-Willett

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(2010), in times of organisational hardship, disaster, and emergency, people look to their leadership to take action and "do something" to remedy the situation. She goes on to state that how the organisational leadership reacts to certain situations and organisational crises could make or break their professional careers and the future of the entire organisation, alluding to the claim that crisis leadership is a high-stakes situation. Bundy & Pfarrer (2015) believe that crises are sources of uncertainty, disruption, and change. This requires crisis leaders to take actions to bring about immediate change in, according to Keller (2000), the behaviour, beliefs, and outcomes of individuals. Crisis situations truly test leaders, as others in the organisation look to them for guidance, protection, support, direction and solutions (Boin & Renaud, 2013; Kielkowski, 2013; Kotter, 2014, Bundy *et al.* 2017; Boin & Hart, 2003; Ivanescu, 2011).

Laye (2002) identifies three areas that leaders should pay attention to regarding a crisis. The first is awareness of potential threats, and forethought or planning on how to handle each threat to avoid a situation spiralling out of control. The second area is decision-making, which ultimately rests with leaders. The final area of concern has to do with policy development and implementation. Laye maintains that only leaders have the broad understanding of the organisation and sense of timing that permits thoughtful policy composition.

In understanding the manner in which a leader must guide the team, an understanding of crisis leadership is important, as well as the traits and skills a leader should exhibit. Winston and Patterson (2006) maintain that a leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills. Leaders focus followers on the organisation's mission and objectives, causing followers to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organisational mission and objectives. While leadership has traditionally focused on individuals and their particular traits and styles within a hierarchical structure, recent shifts in how leadership is viewed have changed that phenomenon.

According to Dennis *et al.* (2012), leadership is no longer viewed as a property of individuals and their behaviours, but as a collective phenomenon that is distributed or shared among different people, potentially fluid, and constructed in interaction. This implies that distributed leadership can be understood as a distinct form of leadership that can and should be implemented in organisations, and may require changing leaders' behaviour, attitudes, or organisational structures. Yukl (1994) states that considerable research exists indicating that followers expect their leaders to be more assertive during crisis situations, to show initiative in solving problems, and to follow a more directive approach to leadership, which may not be the president's (Vice-Chancellor) or the institution's usual style.

1.5   THE PROBLEM

A crisis is a moment of truth for a university: it tests the depth and breadth of its leadership capabilities. Jacobsen (2010) believes that leadership responses to intense dilemmas during a crisis will impact the future of an institution as few other events can, while Seeger *et al.* (2003) argue that crises can pose a threat to system stability, a questioning of core assumptions and beliefs, and threats to high-priority goals, including image, legitimacy, profitability, and even survival. However, Garcia (2015) asserts that, though research in this field is extensive, it is all highly observational, idiosyncratic and situational. He maintains that there is no research that is directed at higher education to help understand why leaders (i.e. university presidents) are so critical in managing crises.

Over the years, there has been sporadic research on crisis leadership within the higher education environment. However, this has mainly been in the United States of America, with Mills (2004), Jacobsen (2010), Muffet-Willett (2010), Parks (2013), and Garcia (2015) as examples of research conducted on the role of university leaders in crisis environments. These studies are related to short-term definitive event crises, such as mass shootings, acts of terrorism, or natural disasters, such as hurricanes, fires, or floods.

What distinguishes the current study from previous studies is that it is within the South African higher education environment, and is based on large-scale national student protests

that continued over weeks, and were repeated a year later. In 2015, it occurred without warning, taking university leaders by surprise, and surfaced again the following year in 2016. It began sporadically and later spread across the country.

1.6   AIM OF THE STUDY

The student uprisings of 2015 and 2016 constituted a crisis according to the definition offered by Zdziarski (2006), who believed that a crisis is an event, which can be sudden or unexpected. It usually disrupts the normal operations of the institution or its educational mission and threatens the wellbeing of personnel, property, financial resources, and/or reputation of the institution. The purpose of this research was to understand how university leaders responded to the crisis (student unrest) which affected the entire higher education sector in South Africa; what strategies they used; the effectiveness of such strategies; and if any particular training is required to equip them with the tools, skills, competencies and knowledge to lead in a crisis environment.

Do university leaders look outside or inside their organisations for expertise in dealing with crises? Is there a set of skills and competencies unique to crises in the higher education environment, or can crisis-resolution skills be generically acquired? These questions will be explored during the course of the study.

Therefore, the aim of the study is primarily:

- an examination of how university leaders led during crises;
- to determine if the strategies that were used were effective in resolving the crisis; and
- to understand what factors influenced the strategies that leaders used.

Along with this, the study explored leaders' degree of preparedness when faced with a crisis. Preparedness is the development of plans and procedures necessary to enable effective and efficient use of resources in the event of a crisis (Mills, 2004). This level of preparedness was compared between 2015 and 2016 to see if any change had occurred.

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While the study will contribute new knowledge to the research domain of crisis leadership, it will also contribute to policy development within the crises leadership arena in an educational environment, as well as at a national level, considering that the #FMF student crisis was the first national crisis experienced by the higher education system in post-apartheid South Africa.

1.7   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following three research questions formed the core of the study:

- What strategies were employed by university leaders during the #FMF crisis?
- What factors influenced the responses of leaders to the crisis?
- What were the challenges and dilemmas experienced by university leaders, and why were these experienced as such?

1.8   ASSUMPTIONS

The following assumptions existed in undertaking this study:

- The first assumption is that leading in a crisis is different from leading in normal conditions.
- The second assumption is that crisis management is different to crisis leadership. Unlike crisis management, which according to Mitroff and Pearson (1993) is concerned with how the crisis can be treated in a logical and orderly manner, crisis leadership entails a broad range of concerns.
- The third assumption is that, while certain principles of leading in a crisis can be commonly applied to all situations, such as communication and planning, effective crisis leadership is unique to and impacted by each context.

1.9   RATIONALE OR IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Yukl's (1994) research indicates that the realities associated with an important role, such as the president (vice-chancellor) or leader in a crisis scenario may call for alternative approaches to leadership. Mills (2004) has pointed out that the literature has ignored a critically important scenario that is a vital and fundamental part of a president's responsibilities, and for which a different approach to leadership may be necessary. According to Mills (2004), one of the many contexts in which a college or university president leads is a crisis or emergency situation, such as an accident, natural disaster, or act of violence.

However, crisis contexts have been widely ignored by studies conducted on leadership, and particularly in South Africa where there is a dearth of research on crisis leadership within higher education. Mills (2004) goes on to argue that studies tend to focus on the functions, missions, and roles of the institution and its leadership that fit the norm of a college or university's operation, and do not tend to discuss the demands upon leadership during the most disruptive times that inevitably occur, when members of the institutional family are suddenly and violently threatened or taken away. How leaders lead during a crisis and which strategies are considered effective in resolving the crisis depends on a number of factors (Weisaeth, Knudsen, & Tonnessen, 2002; Boin & t' Hart, 2003; Yukl, 2006; Bundy *et al.* 2017). These strategies would further determine whether leaders lead from a crisis-management or a crisis-leadership perspective.

It is fundamental to understand the difference between crisis managers and crisis leaders. Mitroff (2004) regarded the main difference between crisis management and crisis leadership as the former being reactive and the latter proactive. Pauchant (1992, p.10) further explains that crisis management can be called "crash management – what to do when everything falls apart", while crisis leadership takes a more holistic, strategic approach. This would imply that a crisis leader is different from a crisis manager. According to Daniels and Daniels (2007), if a leader offers direction, vision, and inspiration, then a manager is a technician who helps people, processes, and systems function together efficiently. While there may be commonalities that exist between the two, the factors that

distinguish them are greater, and will be explored further in the literature review. Crisis leaders, particularly in the modern era, have many difficult decisions to make, since numerous factors exacerbate difficult situations, including media pressure, organisational chaos, and inaccurate information. Although a team of individuals working together is needed to overcome a crisis, the leader must guide the team and the organisation through it, which is a difficult task (Ivanescu, 2011; Walker *et al.*, 2016).

1.10 THE RESEARCH METHOD

To answer the research questions, this investigation used a qualitative phenomenological study of semi-structured interviews to understand the lived experiences of the participants. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012), semi-structured interviews enable the researcher and the participant to engage in a real-time dialogue that allows for both anticipated and unexpected issues to arise, and these are then available for deeper inquiry.

Qualitative research is most appropriate to provide depth of scholarship through immersion into leaders' lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). Mills (2004) maintains that qualitative design provides a researcher the opportunity to engage in an in-depth, holistic, and contextual examination of the people involved in the complexities of the leadership process within the time- and activity-bound scenario of crisis situations.

As Moustakas (1994) suggests, interviews provide a holistic approach to the phenomena being scrutinised, where the interview process uncovers multiple subjective experiences, while Cohen and his co-authors (2007) maintain that interviewing is a valuable method for exploring the construction and negotiation of meanings in a natural setting. Dörnyei (2007) asserts that qualitative data are 'most often' collected by researchers through interviews and questionnaires. However, when compared to questionnaires, interviews are more powerful in eliciting narrative data that allows researchers to investigate people's views in greater depth (Kvale, 1996).

This study interviewed leaders and other employees from each institution to get a holistic perspective of how leaders perceived their own responses, and how their actions were perceived by others. This triangulation of perceptions points to the complex environment within which different realities and subjectivities operate. Given this rationale, the research was conducted within an interpretivist paradigm. In line with the theoretical underpinnings of interpretivist phenomenological analysis (IPA), a purposive sampling method was used for this research. This allows one to find a defined group for whom the research problem has relevance and personal significance (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2012).

The study required a very specific kind of participant, namely leaders, and a suitable mix of academic and professional/support staff from universities for triangulation purposes. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 13 leaders and 16 employees (taken from a mix of academic and support staff) from six universities, and were audio-recorded and transcribed. The number of participating universities was limited to six, with a view to containing costs in the absence of a research grant. One interview with a university leader was held telephonically and audio-recorded because of distance, and there were no employee participants from that institution.

1.10.1. Reflexivity

As a member of a leadership team at a university, this researcher is aware of how her own perceptions of the nature of the university crisis, or that the way she sees the world, may have had an influence on the study. A reflexive approach was required because of her involvement in the higher education sector, and more especially because she is a member of a leadership team. A reflexive research approach engages with one's ontological position, values, and choices (Haynes, 2014). This may be influenced by certain assumptions, interpretations, values and personal experiences, which will assist in constructing emerging practical theories rather than engaging in objective truths.

While it may be argued that research should be conducted objectively, Calás and Smircich (1999, p. 664), believe that,

whether we are involved in ethnography, or heavy statistics research, whether we are writing about institutional theory, population ecology, organisational justice, corporate mergers – no matter what topic or area or what methods we use – we are all…picking and choosing to pay attention and ignore…excluding, including, concealing, favouring some people, some topics, some questions, some forms of representation, some values.

According to Berger (2015), reflexivity turns the researcher's lens back onto themselves to recognise and take responsibility for their own situatedness within the research and for the effect that it may have on the setting, participants, questions asked, data collected, and data interpretations. Finefter-Rosenbluh (2017) and Leigh (2014) also believe that the researcher's role may affect the study in numerous ways. They maintain that the researcher can influence individuals' actions or responses in an interview.

1.11 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Leadership theories provided the natural theoretical framework for this study, as it aimed to explore leadership strategies within crises. Leadership theories as they relate to higher education would be relevant as institutions of higher education have a particular character and uniqueness that distinguish them from other organisations, such as businesses or political agencies.

The second theory framing this study was chaos and complexity theory, which applies in situations of high unpredictability. Researchers in chaos theory describe chaos as a complex, unpredictable, and orderly disorder in which patterns of behaviour unfold in *irregular but similar* forms (Tetenbaum, 1998; Seeger, 2001; Ascough, 2002).

Levy (1994) maintains that chaos theory, the study of non-linear dynamic systems, is a useful conceptual framework that reconciles the essential unpredictability of industries with the emergence of distinctive patterns. Chaos theory cultivates a holistic and organic view of organisations (Bloch, 2013). One of the most important discoveries in chaos theory is that a

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relatively small but well-timed or well-placed jolt to a system can upset the equilibrium and throw the entire system into a state of chaos. Small changes in one variable can cause huge changes in another, and large changes in a variable might have only a nominal effect on another (Walonick, 1993; Bollt, 2003; Kiel & Elliot, 2004). Chaos theory, according to Seeger (2002), suggests that organisations with higher levels of complexity and environmental interdependence are more likely to experience crisis events. In the #FMF crisis, the response to the announcement of a fee increase at one institution destabilised the entire higher education sector and led to widespread change in the system.

1.12 SUMMARY

While there have been many studies on leadership, a focus on crisis leadership within the South African university environment is rare. The purpose of this study, therefore, is primarily to examine and better understand how and why university leaders responded in the manner that they did; what needs to be included in the development programmes of future leaders; and how the level of preparedness in all future educational leaders can be improved to appropriately meet what some argue may be the greatest leadership challenge – dealing with crises.

1.13 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The preliminary section provides the cover page, declaration, abstract, acknowledgements, and table of contents, key words, lists of tables, and list of abbreviations.

Chapter One introduces the study by making explicit the problem statement and purpose of the study, as well as stating the core research questions that frame the study. A detailed outline of the university-sector crisis that occurred in 2015 and 2016 provided the context within which crisis-leadership was examined, followed by an exploration of the funding crisis in SA, and what leading in a crisis entails. The chapter further clarifies the aim and importance of the study, the research methods, and the study's theoretical framework.

Chapter Two comprehensively reviews the literature relevant to the study, as well as the theoretical framework within which the study is undertaken. It provides a review of literature pertaining to leadership, focusing on crisis leadership within an educational environment. It further explores the main theories within which crisis leadership is being framed, which are leadership theories and chaos theory.

Chapter Three describes the research methodology employed, including descriptions of the population, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four then presents the findings from the interviews with participants. It provides an overview of the study's findings, describing the four themes that emanated from the responses from the participants.

Chapter Five analyses the themes from the previous chapter to elucidate the gaps that exist in crisis leadership at South African universities, as suggested by participants. It then comprehensively discusses the themes and their interpretations. The final chapter presents a summary of the entire study. It draws conclusions from the findings and ends by providing recommendations for practice, and directions for future research.
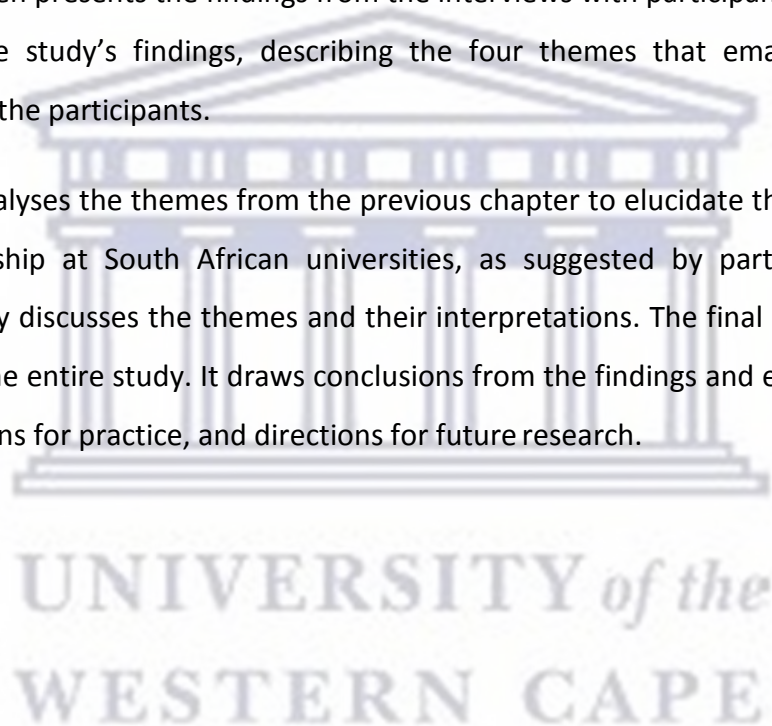
THEORIES AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS IN CRISIS LEADERSHIP

2.1   INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter outlined the background and context of the crisis in the South African higher education sector in 2015 and 2016. This chapter is a review of the literature in three areas that are fundamental to this study. The initial section clarifies particular terms and concepts that are frequently used interchangeably but are distinctively different. The second discusses basic leadership theories and their evolution to gain an understanding of crisis leadership. Finally, it reviews chaos and complexity theory as it relates to crisis leadership. These theories and conceptual frameworks will not be used to guide the study, but rather to highlight the body of work and the lenses through which research has viewed crisis leadership in the higher educational environment.

2.2   Definitions of concepts

Yuki and Van Fleet (1992) argue that, although management and leadership are often used interchangeably, they are not necessarily the same. Selladurai (2006) states that among other differences, a major one may be that the leader tries to get voluntary cooperation from the followers, whereas a manager may sometimes use coercion to influence employee behaviour. It is apparent that crisis, crisis management, and crisis leadership, mean different things to different organisations. Corporate, governmental and educational literature each has its own understanding of each concept. For instance, in the context of higher education, crisis is best defined by Zdziarski *et al*. (2007) as an intentional or unintentional, human, environmental or facility incident, emergency, or disaster. Similarly, Cowan (2014) speaks of two distinct kinds of leadership, direct and indirect. Those in positions of authority (i.e. university leaders) use direct leadership, while crisis managers use indirect leadership by taking charge of the immediate challenges.

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Crisis management is therefore subtly distinct from crisis leadership. Crisis leadership includes crisis management, but extends beyond it to cultivate the followers' desire to achieve a vision and a mission in a time of crisis (Kapucu & Ustun, 2018; Porche, 2009; Weiss, 2002). According to Porche (2009), crisis leadership and crisis management are seen as two related aspects of dealing with a crisis that affects an organisation.

2.2.1 Crisis

Crises are generally unexpected and unpredicted events, and can be regarded as a disruption that physically affects a system and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, and its existential core (Khan, *et al.*, 2013; Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992.

Through a comprehensive literature review, Elliott, Harris, and Baron (2005) identify five features that appear common to most crises, irrespective of the nature and purpose of the organisation in which they occur. These include:

- involving a wide range of stakeholders;
- time pressures requiring an urgent response;
- usually little if any warning to the organisation;
- a high degree of ambiguity in which causes and effects are unclear; and
- they pose a significant threat to an organisation's strategic goals

Applying the above five principles to the #FMF protests, it is clear that universities were in the throes of a crisis.

Inevitably, crises do not always present in the same way. According to Smith and Riley (2010), there are five typical scenarios that may be presented:

(1) Short-term crises: these are sudden in arrival and swift in conclusion.

(2) Cathartic crises: situations that slowly build-up to a critical point, then can be swiftly resolved.

(3) Long-term crises: these develop slowly, then bubble along for a very long time without any clear resolution.

(4) Once-off crises: these are typically unique and would not be expected to recur.

(5) Infectious crises: these occur and are seemingly resolved quickly, but leave behind significant issues to still be addressed, some of which may subsequently develop into their own crises.

From the above, the crisis experienced in the South African higher education system in 2015/2016 could be characterised as a long-term crisis, as it continued over two years with no clear resolution.

According to Muffet-Willett (2010), crisis situations differ from normal organisational operation in several ways, including that crisis events threaten the viability of the organisation (Pearson & Clair, 1998), are rare in nature (Cornell & Sheras, 1998), have the potential to dismantle an organisation (King, 2002; Bundy *et al.*, 2017), and fall under close media scrutiny (Fink, 1986). Yukl (2006) states that these types of situations place added stress and strain on organisations and their people, and on a leader's ability to consult with others in determining well-conceived, thoughtful decisions. The situation at South African universities in 2015 and 2016 could therefore unequivocally be defined as a crisis, as it contained all the elements listed above.

2.2.2 Crisis management

In determining whether university leaders responded to the crisis in a crisis-management or crisis-leadership mode, it is important to understand the difference between the two concepts. Kahn *et al.* (2013) note that traditional models of crisis management are rooted in a classic engineering mandate, with the aim of identifying and fixing the problems in inputs and operations that lead to ineffective outputs. Pride, Hughes, and Kapoor (2002) maintain that crisis management primarily involves the four functions of planning, organising, leading/motivating, and controlling the organisation prior to, during, or after a crisis. Porche (2009) confirms this by stating that crisis management is more operational, citing those activities that occur during and after a crisis, such as developing disaster plans, conducting disaster drills, and identifying roles and responsibilities during a crisis situation.

According to Pearson (2000), the main purpose of a crisis management plan is to make appropriate decisions based on facts and clear thinking when operating under unexpected conditions. Parks (2013), however, describes crisis management as the prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and reconstruction of an organisation following an unforeseen event, while Kozlowski (2010) added that crisis management aims to protect employees, consumers and customers, as well as company assets, brands, and corporate image. Crisis management systems consist of those mechanisms and structures that can either cause or prevent crises, and typically consist of an institution's plan, procedures, and organisational structure.

2.2.3 Crisis leadership

Crisis leadership is a new and rapidly developing field. In a review, Pauchant and Douville (1993) found that 80% of existing literature on the subject was published since 1985, highlighting that crisis leadership is a relatively new area of inquiry.

According to Klann (2003), the definition of *crisis leadership* identifies three essential components: communication, clarity of vision and values, and caring relationships. Klann goes on to say that leaders who develop, pay attention to, and practise these qualities are better able to handle the important human dimension of a crisis. With crisis leadership, the leader provides vision and influence non-coercively to provide strategic decision-making and guidance across the phases of the crisis. Porche (2009) believes that crisis leadership is more than operational responses, as it includes maintaining a vision of what was, and what could be. According to Boin *et al*. (2010), effective crisis leadership entails recognising emerging threats, initiating efforts to mitigate them and deal with their consequences and, once the acute crisis period has passed, re-establishing a sense of normalcy. Keller (2000) states that crisis leadership is the actions taken by a leader to bring immediate change in the behaviour, beliefs, and outcomes of individuals, and crisis leaders use integrative leadership and adapt the style of leadership to the given situation to ensure success (Spoelstra, 2016; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988, 1996; Xavier, 2005).

While responding to emergencies, leaders are judged by their actions and inactions. Aluoch (2015) maintains that leaders are expected to take charge of the situation, and mitigate the effects of the disaster while being decisive in the midst of anxiety, confusion and chaos. Others in the organisation look to their leaders to be visionary and guide them to safety, while reducing the risks and returning to a position of normalcy. This demands a set of skills and competencies that others expect leaders to possess. In a crisis, the crisis leader will be judged by the content of official messages, the speed of communication, and perceptions of his/her credibility (Peters, Covello, & McCallum, 1997; Seeger *et al.*, 2003; Bundy *et al.* 2017).

According to Mitroff (2004), leaders strongly influence the ability of individuals, organisations, communities, and nations to cope with and recover from crises, while Klann (2003) believes that effective crisis leadership boils down to responding to the human needs, emotions, and behaviours caused by the crisis. This is supported by Reynolds (2009), who holds that people are more apt to follow a leader who is reassuring and who can meet their primary needs.

Knebel *et al*. (2012) maintain that a central tenet of disaster (crisis) leadership is that no single leadership theory will allow leaders to be effective in all situations, and they must be able to adjust their leadership style to the situation. In accepting the components have interdependent relations, crisis leadership is dependent on other factors, such as teams, nature of the crisis, resources, followers' expectations, external influences, and effective resolution. This implies that what could have been effective under normal circumstances may not be what is needed in a crisis.

Muffet-Willett (2010) states that, despite the critical importance of leading organisations through crisis events, many leaders have never formally studied how their roles and leadership styles may change between leading under normal conditions and leading during times of crisis. This implies that not all leadership styles are suited to leading in crisis situations. Sternberg and Vroom (2002) support this sentiment, claiming that not all forms of leadership styles will successfully transcend to different situations and contexts.

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According to Muffet-Willett (2010) and Yukl and Mahsud (2010), the ability of a leader to adapt to a changing and complex environment is a key foundation of crisis leadership.

2.3   Crisis situations

A crisis situation tests leaders and forces them to salvage situations through an effective response that protects others and minimises consequences (Boin & Renaud, 2013). Kielkowski (2013) highlights the crucial role of leadership in a crisis, as even though a team of individuals working together is needed to overcome a crisis, the leader must guide the team and the organisation through it, which is a difficult task (Ivanescu, 2011). Boin and Hart (2003) assert that an organisational crisis tremendously increases the pressure placed on leaders, resulting in heroes or even scapegoats. Yukl (2002) believes that a leader's response to a crisis sends a clear message to stakeholders about the organisation's vision and values, and while it may seem natural to withdraw during a crisis, it is critical for leaders to continue to model the behaviours and expectations they have for their followers (Ulmer *et al*., 2011). Thus, in understanding how a leader should guide the team, an understanding of crisis leadership is important, as well as the traits and skills a leader should display.

Crisis management teams, the culture of the institution, and the character of the people working to counter crises all impact on the manner in which the crisis should be managed. While one could argue that leadership in times of crisis is simply good leadership put under pressure, the unfamiliar context, the fast-changing nature of the environment, the multiplicity of actions and interactions, the speed at which decisions need to be made, and the possibly life-saving implications of these, add new layers of complexity.

Aluoch (2015) asserts that a leader's response to a disaster can either be the much-needed help and rescue that reduces the effects of the disaster for the victims and the affected populations and sets them on the path to recovery, or it can be the catalyst that escalates and makes the conditions worse, making them even more vulnerable.

According to Smith and Riley (2010) the critical attributes of effective leadership in times of crisis include:

- the ability to cope with, and indeed thrive on, ambiguity;

- a strong capacity to think laterally;

- a willingness to question events in new and insightful ways;

- a preparedness to respond flexibly and quickly, and to change direction rapidly if required;

- an ability to work with and through people to achieve critical outcomes;

- the tenacity to persevere when all seems to be lost;

- a willingness to take necessary risks and to break 'the rules' when necessary; and

- working as a cohesive team if resolutions are to be owned by all.

Leaders who can manage crisis events successfully can create opportunities for organisational renewal while developing their own skills (Ulmer *et al.*, 2011). According to Boin *et al*. (2005), the illusion of control (top-down, linear, straightforward) may be irrelevant within the context of contemporary crises, and the question 'Who is the leader?' is of less value in the face of a major crisis than the question, 'How is leadership best distributed and coordinated to deal with this crisis?' In other words, crises require democratic structures, not bureaucratic ones, so that responsibility for effort can appropriately reside with those best-placed to effect rapid resolution of the crisis.

Smith and Riley (2012) believe that this demands a change in organisational culture, from linear thinking to systems thinking, and from conventional wisdom to flexible decision-making. They went on to identify the following nine key attributes for effective crisis leadership (see diagram below):

- decisive decision-making ability in the face of limited and unreliable information;

- powerful two-way interpersonal communication skills;

- procedural intelligence – knowledge and skill gained and honed through experience;

- highly developed synthesising skills – the ability to identify key issues and messages from highly confused and contradictory information sources;

- the capacity to empathise with the feelings of others and to respect the legitimacy of their perspectives;

- a capacity to continually remain optimistic in the face of adversity, and to battle on tenaciously;

- flexibility – the ability to make quick and decisive changes in behaviour and thinking in response to a rapidly changing environment;

- strong intuitive thinking capacity, and the preparedness to use it; and

- the ability to quickly develop new ideas and solutions, and to turn problems into opportunities.
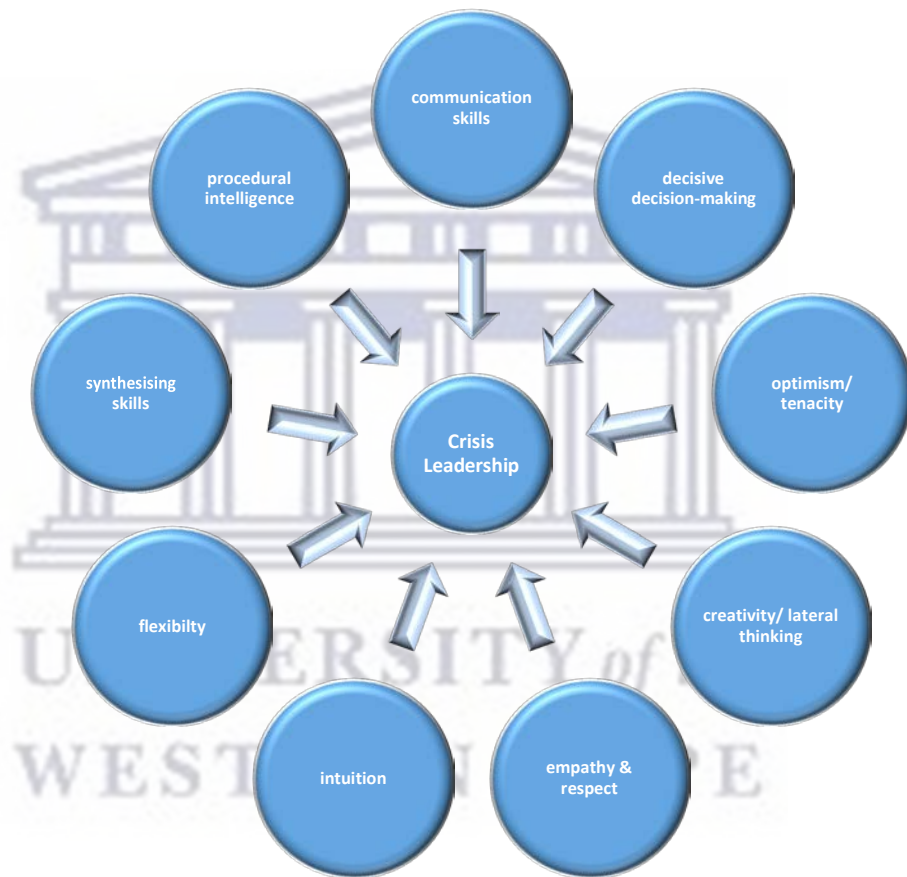
Figure 2.1: Key attributes for crisis leadership (Smith & Riley, 2012, p. 68)

While research in educational leadership abounds (for example, Duke, 1987; Leithwood 1995, 2003, 2006; Fullan, 2001, 2003; Marzano *et al.*, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2007, 2008; Leithwood *et al.*, 2008), the majority is focused on the developmental role leaders play in organisations in preparing for the future of the organisation. However, there is a dearth of

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literature and research that addresses the important role that educational leaders must play when confronted by a crisis. Smith and Riley (2012) believe that the focus in these situations tends to be firmly on minimising harm to individuals and ensuring the survival and recovery of the organisation.

Devitt and Borodzicz (2008) argue that the major reason for this imbalance is that the changing contexts and causes of crises make it difficult to elicit a consistent theory of effective crisis leadership. Each crisis is unique and generally requires significant flexibility, adaptability, resilience and creativity in response from the leader. Effective educational leadership in times of crisis, therefore, is more about the attributes that the leader can bring to bear on the situation than it is about theoretical models to guide leadership responses (Smith & Riley, 2012). Leadership must also be about providing certainty, engendering hope, engaging a rallying point for effective and efficient effort (both during and after the crisis), and ensuring open and credible communication to and for all affected members of the school community (Smith & Riley, 2012).

2.4   Evolution of leadership theory and its major categories

Definitions of leadership vary, but there are certain components that are central to the concept. Northhouse (2007) explains that leadership is a process where an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. More than anything else, this implies that leadership involves a *process* that occurs between the leader and his or her followers. The second component of leadership involves *influence*, which is concerned with how a leader affects his or her followers. The third component is that it occurs in *groups,* made up of individuals that have a common purpose. The fourth and final component of leadership is concerned with accomplishing *goals*. This is supported by Cotton (2009) and Stogdil (1974), who purport that it is the leader that is responsible for directing a group of individuals toward accomplishing some task or outcome.

The study of leadership has straddled cultures, decades, and theoretical beliefs (Maslanka, 2004; Yukl, 2013). Leadership theories have evolved from a focus on traits, to behaviours, to

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contingency theories, to more contemporary approaches including servant leadership theory. In reality as well as in practice, many have tried to define what allows leaders to stand apart from the masses. Stone and Patterson (2005) place the roots of studying leadership at the beginning of civilisation, maintaining that Egyptian rulers, Greek heroes, and biblical patriarchs all have one thing in common – leadership. As the focus of leaders has changed over time, it has influenced and shaped the development and progression of leadership theory. Henman (2017) questions whether leaders are born with talents and traits that allow and even cause them to be successful leaders, or whether effective leadership behaviours can be learned through experience. The evolution of leadership theory, from early trait-based studies, through situational, transactional and transformational leadership, to more current theories such as integrative leadership theory, has been the centre of discussion, research and debate for centuries.

El Namaki (2017) asserts that most contemporary concepts of leadership are based on the premise that a leader is an individual who is able to convince others to follow towards an identified goal, and he argues that it is a process where an individual induces followers to work towards an individual or a group end result. Kotter (2014), in distinguishing leadership from management, explains that leadership is about setting a direction, about creating a vision, empowering and inspiring people to want to achieve the vision, and enabling them to do so with energy and speed through an effective strategy. Creating conviction and fellowship could be explained in terms of leadership theories and approaches, namely contingency theory (Fiedler, 1958), situational approach (Blanchard *et al.*, 1993), transformational leadership (Avolio *et al.*, 2009), and trait, style, and skills approaches (Northouse, 2013).

2.4.1   Great Man Leadership Theory

The earliest research about leadership was based on the study of men who were considered great leaders and who arose from aristocracy. According to Yukl (1981), the term 'leader' connotes images of powerful, dynamic persons who command victorious armies, direct corporate empires from atop gleaming skyscrapers, or shape the course of nations. The Great Man theory evolved around the mid-19th century, but no one was able to identify with

any scientific certainty which human characteristic, or combinations thereof, were responsible for identifying great leaders. The Great Man theory assumes that the traits of leadership are intrinsic, meaning that great leaders are born, not made. This theory sees great leaders as those who are destined by birth to become a leader, and the belief was that great leaders will rise when confronted with the appropriate situation. The theory was popularised as early as 1840 by Thomas Carlyle, a writer and teacher, when he described 'leader' as a hero. This theory argues that a few people are born with the necessary characteristics to be great, and they can be effective leaders in any situation (Marriner-Tomey, 2009).

2.4.2   Trait Leadership Theory

The Great Man theory was followed by Trait Leadership theory, which claimed that people are either born or are made with certain qualities that would make them excel in leadership roles. Thus, certain qualities, such as intelligence, sense of responsibility, creativity and other values, can make anyone into a good leader. Marquis and Huston (2015) claimed that the Trait theory of leadership became popular in the mid-1940s and that while it was based primarily on the Great Man theory, it differed by taking the position that leadership qualities can be identified and taught. The Trait theory of leadership focused on analysing mental, physical and social characteristics to gain a better understanding of what the common characteristic is, or what combination of characteristics are, common among leaders. However, after 25 years of research, Stogdill (1948, 1974) concludes that a person does not become a leader simply by possessing a select combination of traits. Consequently, leadership research shifted away from traits (the internal factor) and towards behaviours, the external expression of leadership.

2.4.3   Contingency Leadership Theory

The 60s saw the advent of the Contingency Leadership theory, which argued that there is no single way of leading and that every leadership style should be based on   respective

situations. This line of thought suggested that there are certain people who perform at the maximum level in certain places, but at minimal performance when taken out of their more familiar circumstances. Vroom and Jago (2007) maintain that turning the focus to the situation versus the leaders themselves became the antithesis of the heroic or 'great man' theory.

According to Stone and Patterson (2005), researchers defining the Situational/Contingency theory of leadership acknowledged that leaders did more than simply "act", as they often had to "react" to specific situations. Maslanka (2004) contends that Contingency theories differ from and build on the trait and behaviour theories, as the philosophy that there is one best way to lead evolved into a complex analysis of the leader and the situation.

Fielder's Contingency theory posited that leader effectiveness is determined not by the leader's ability to adapt to the situation, but by the ability to choose the right leader for the situation. It is surmised that some leaders are simply better for specific situations than others and the situation determines the identified leader's success.

2.4.4   Situational Leadership Theory

Hersey and Blanchard (1977) proposed a Situational theory of leadership, seen as the opposite of Fielder's Contingency theory, maintaining that leaders are less flexible in their ability to change their behaviour based on followers' maturity, the basic tenet of Situational theory (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1993).

Hersey and Blanchard (1988) modelled the two leadership dimensions in such a way that different combinations of task and relationship behaviour might be more effective in some situations than in others. Situational theory attempts to match a leadership style to a specific external situation or circumstance (Sims, Faraj, & Yun, 2009), and according to Hersey and Blanchard (1977), the leadership behaviour would be determined by subordinate maturity in relation to the work (Yukl, 2006). If the worker was very immature in relationship to the task, the leader would use task-oriented behaviour and be very directive. In turn, if the worker exhibited a high maturity level in relationship to work, the

leader would become more relationship and praise-oriented (Yukl, 2006). To a certain extent, contingency leadership theories are extensions of the trait theory in that human traits relate to the situation in which the leaders exercise their leadership.

2.4.5 Cognitive Resources Leadership Theory

Looking for a different approach, Fiedler and Garcia (1986) developed a model dealing with the cognitive ability of leaders. The Cognitive Resources theory (CRT) examined the issues of intelligence and experience in group performance (Yukl, 2006), and attempts to identify the conditions under which cognitive resources such as technical knowledge, intellectual ability, and expertise, contribute to group performance, and these resources are measured within both the leader and group members (Fiedler, Murphy, & Gibson, 1992). The idea of CRT assumes that more-intelligent leaders develop better plans, decisions, and actions than their less-intelligent counterparts, and that these decisions and actions are communicated more effectively through structured and detailed communication strategies (Fiedler *et al*., 1992). Fiedler and Garcia (1986) maintain that, while many researchers acknowledge the importance of leader cognition and experience, many models fail to relate these variables into group performance.

2.4.6 Leader-Follower Leadership Theory

The role of followers (a contextual variable) was a natural extension of contingency theory, and a significant departure from the Great Man Theory and its concept of heroic individuals leading from the front. One lasting influence prior to this era is Robert Greenleaf's work on Servant Leadership (1970), which emphasised the choice of certain leaders to "serve" their followers, empowering them to live and work to their full potential. Kreitner and Kinicki (2013) agree with Greenleaf (1977) that servant-leaders are driven to serve first, rather than to lead first, always striving to meet the highest priority needs of others. Greenleaf identified the principal motive of the traditional leader as being the desire to lead followers to achieve organisational objectives (1977), while Walker (2003) believes that while most

traditional leadership theories are behaviourally based, servant leadership emanates from a leader's principles, values, and beliefs.

2.4.7 Transactional Leadership Theory

Transactional theories, which gained momentum in the 70s, were characterised by transactions made between the leader and followers, and the theory values a positive and mutually-beneficial relationship. For the transactional theories to be effective, and as a result have motivational value, the leader must find a means to align and to adequately reward (or punish) his/her follower for performing a leader-assigned task. In other words, transactional leaders are most efficient when they develop a mutually-reinforcing environment in which the individual and the organisational goals are aligned. Bass (1994) and Salter *et al.* (2014), claim that transactional leaders concentrate on rewarding effort appropriately and ensuring that behaviour conforms to expectations. In the process, they concentrate on compromise and control.

According to Odumeru and Ifeanyi (2013), transactional leadership is when the leader promotes his followers' compliance through both rewards and punishments. Unlike Transformational leadership, leaders using the transactional approach are not looking to change the future, but rather to keep things the same. These leaders pay attention to followers' work to find faults and deviations, and are concerned with processes rather than ideas. This type of leadership is effective in crisis and emergency situations, and when projects need to be carried out in a specific fashion.

2.4.8 Transformational Leadership Theory

The Transformational Leadership theory outlines the process in which a person interacts with others and is able to create a solid relationship that results in a high level of trust, which then leads to an increase in motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, in both leaders

and followers. The concept of transforming leadership was introduced by James MacGregor Burns' classic work, *Leadership* (1978). The essence of transformational theories is that leaders transform their followers through their inspirational nature and charismatic personalities, and these attributes provide a sense of belonging for the followers as they can easily identify with the leader and its purpose. Rules and regulations are flexible and are guided by group norms.

Grohar-Murray and DiCroce (2003) state that transformational leadership theory recognises that the organisational culture needs to change for leaders to be effective. With this leadership style, both the leader and the followers have the same purpose, and they raise one another to higher levels of performance. The influence of transformational leaders on organisational cultures can be seen in the employees who work in the organisation (Tucker & Russell, 2004). Transformational leaders help subordinates discover who they are and what part they play in helping the organisation achieve its mission.

Luthans and Avolio (2003) noted that transformational leadership must be authentic to ensure sustainable organisational performance. They suggested that leaders create an aura of confidence and optimism in their collectives, unleashing the positive psychological forces in individuals to ensure organisational performance.

One of the greatest criticisms of transformational leadership is that followers respond to their leaders in an almost hero-worship manner. However, there appears to be an absence of strategies and actions from such leaders. This is conveyed by Yukl (2008) when he says that much research currently focuses on rather narrow sets of leadership styles (i.e. primarily transformational leadership) and ignores the task and strategy-oriented behaviours of leaders. Fleishman *et al*. (1991, p. 258) support this sentiment, stating that from a functional point of view, leadership is all about 'organisationally-based problem solving', because without the requisite problem-solving skills and expert knowledge, leaders simply cannot be effective.

2.4.9   Instrumental Leadership Theory

Leaders must identify strategic and tactical goals while monitoring team outcomes and the environment (Morgeson, DeRue & Karam, 2010). Being true to the etymology of the word, this implies that leaders are instrumental for organisational effectiveness, and Antonakis and House (2002) called this instrumental leadership, a form of expert-based power. They defined two main categories of instrumental leadership, namely, strategic leadership and follower work-facilitation. Strategic leadership consists of two dimensions, which are environmental monitoring (scanning internal and external environments), and strategy formulation and implementation (consisting of designing policies and detailing sub-strategies). Follower work-facilitation is designed to influence follower performance directly (Antonakis & House, 2014).

An instrumental leader is one who leads in strategy and functionality and uses all resources available to achieve very particular goals. This leader helps organise processes, set projects into motion, and coordinates work with other employees. According to Antonakis and House (2014), strategic leadership is conceptually distinct from transformational leadership because the leader neither engages followers' ideals; nor inspires, intellectually stimulates or pays attention to individual needs. They maintain that it is a highly proactive strategy-focused style and is not about having a transactional relation. It is therefore believed that effective leaders, apart from being authentic transformational leaders, must also exhibit instrumental leadership.

2.4.10   Integrative Leadership Theory

According to Alban-Metcalfe and Alimo-Metcalfe (2010), integrative leadership requires adopting a different kind of mindset in which the effective functioning of a team, acting as a whole, is the goal. Practical implications of this include that the leadership of the team involves shared responsibility of team members, and that leadership in different contexts requires different sets of skills or competencies.

Integrative leadership theory concludes that the leader, the follower, and the situation all influence leadership effectiveness (Marriner-Tomey, 2009). Leaders need to be aware of their own behaviour and its influence on others, recognise the individual differences of their followers (characteristics and motivations), understand the structures available to perform specific tasks, and analyse the situational variables that impact the ability of followers to complete tasks, including environmental factors. According to Selladurai (2006), effective leadership may be influenced by the leadership traits of the leader (person), situational context (organisation), and the strategies (practice) employed by the leader. With integrative leadership, the leader considers all of these factors using a holistic approach to self and others, and adjusts his or her leadership style through adaptive behaviour (Marriner-Tomey, 2009).

The field of leadership has since evolved into what Avolio *et al.* (2009) suggest is no longer simply described as an individual characteristic or difference, but rather is depicted in various models as dyadic, shared, relational, strategic, global, and a complex social dynamic. The leadership theories that were most relevant to each crisis may have been determined by various factors as these emerged on different campuses. Together with these theories, individual leadership styles may also have played a role.

Finally, leadership is not only about visions, missions and cutting deals (Antonakis & House, 2014); is it also about knowing which vision to project because of domain-relevant knowledge on the organisation and its environment, how to implement the vision, and how to show followers the path to the goal by providing resources and monitoring outcomes constructively.

With the focus of this study being on leadership during crises understanding the various leadership theories and their evolution over decades will assist in assessing how leaders approached the crisis they experienced. Of interest to the author is whether leaders selected, either consciously or sub-consciously, an approach or a combination of approaches that they were comfortable in adopting because of individual preference, and/or personality-type or one/s that suited the situation.

2.5   Chaos theory and complexity theory

This study uses chaos theory and complexity theory as a single integrated theory for addressing educational crisis leadership. Chaos theory as a theoretical framework for research has been promoted by several researchers (Cziko, 1992; Newman & Wessinger, 1993; LeCompte, 1994; Polite, 1994). Chaos and complexity theories provide specific concepts for applying complexity thinking to the understanding of dynamic organisational behaviours that are nonlinear and unpredicted (Gharajedaghi, 2006). Thus, chaos and complexity theories are best regarded as complementary concepts; through complexity thinking, they provide compatible views of the ways in which organisations and systems operate (Smith & Humphries, 2004).

Chaos theory is frequently conflated with complexity theory. However, despite their similarities, the two theories approach complexity from different directions:

- Chaos theory identifies complex patterns of organisational behaviours, viewing them as chronologically nonlinear (Baker, 1995);
- Complexity theory simplifies complex organisational behaviours by recognising the self-renewal mechanism (Goldberg & Markóczy, 2000);
- Historically, complexity theory was rooted in chaos theory (Fitzgerald, 2001);
- To build on chaos theory, complexity theory extended the concepts of chaotic order— *chaordic* (Fitzgerald & van Eijnatten, 2002)—to and beyond organisational systems; That is, organisational behaviours that are seemingly nonlinear and unexpected act chaotically, but are also orderly, based on the underlying patterns of chaos (Kauffman, 2000) that facilitate the renewal of an organisational system (MacIntosh & MacLean, 2001; Holbrook, 2003) into a new chaotic order;
- Seeger (2002) asserts that, through this process of self-organisation, new forms, structures, procedures, hierarchies, relationships, and understandings emerge giving a new, sometimes rejuvenated and more successful form to the system. Greenwood, Bartusiak, Burke, and Edleson (1992) contended that chaos is apparently random behaviour with an underlying order;
- Chaos theory is built on the idea that systems, no matter how complex, rely on an

underlying order and that within such systems, very small changes or events can cause very complex behaviours or outcomes (Jaques, 2007);

- Chaos theory explains organisational behaviours embedded in the systems to which complexity theory endeavours to apply. It is an interdisciplinary concept which describes dynamic complex systems, such as an educational system.

Devaney (1990) defined chaos as the mathematical term for an inherently unpredictable system. One of the most important discoveries from chaos theory is that a relatively small but well-timed or well-placed jolt to a system can throw the entire system into a state of chaos. Small changes in one variable can cause huge changes in another, and large changes in a variable might have only a nominal effect on another (Walonick, 1993).

Chaos theory, which is the study of non-linear dynamic systems, promises to be a useful conceptual framework that reconciles the essential unpredictability of industries with the emergence of distinctive patterns (Levy, 1994). According to Newman and Wessinger (1993), chaos theory provides a method for describing and explaining the behaviour of nonlinear systems. It tends to be different to traditional scientific theory in that it focuses on interrelationships rather than individual elements, viewing interactions in their entirety, thereby using a systems approach rather than a reductionist approach.

Liou (2015) maintains that, unlike the classical scientific view of crisis management, which assumes linear causality and applies reductionist approaches, chaos theory addresses both the volatility of crises and the nonlinear and changeable nature of an organisational system. Chaos theory cultivates a holistic and organic view of organisations (Bloch, 2013). Chaos theory is appropriate to this study considering its relevance to situations of high unpredictability and complexity.

Ascough (2002, p. 22) maintains that chaos theory has transformed our world view from the Newtonian paradigm that "the world is separated into parts – if one manages all the parts, and their interaction, then the whole thing will run smoothly and predictably"- to accepting that a distributed leadership paradigm now exists. Tetenbaum (1998) goes further, stating that chaos describes a complex, unpredictable, and orderly disorder in which patterns of

behaviour unfold in irregular but similar forms.

According to Seeger (2002), chaos theory has emerged as a useful framework for understanding organisational crisis. It applies a broad set of loosely-related theoretical and meta-theoretical orientations to the behaviour of complex non-linear systems. He emphasises the lack of predictability in system behaviour, unexpected and non-linear interactions between components, radical departures from established normal system operations, and, ultimately, the re-emergence of order through natural self-organising processes. He further maintains that chaos theory suggests that organisations with higher levels of complexity and environmental interdependence are more likely to experience crisis events. Probably the best-known and most fundamental concept of chaos theory is sensitive dependence on initial conditions, described in popular literature as 'the butterfly effect' (Seeger, 2002), explained as the flapping of a single butterfly's wings being able to produce a tiny change in the state of the atmosphere. Over time, this small variance can create a divergence in the atmosphere such that a tornado that would have devastated the Indonesian coast does not happen, or one that was not going to happen, does. Seeger further asserts that organisational crises have been described as specific, unexpected and non-routine events or series of events which create high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organisation's high priority goals (Seeger, 2002, p. 332).

Chaos theory identifies organisational crises as points of system bifurcation or radical change where a system's direction, character, and/or structure are fundamentally disrupted and veer from the previous path. Drawing on literature on chaos theory (Griffiths *et al.*, 1991; Blair, 1993; Murphy, 1996; Seeger, 2002; Gilpin & Murphy, 2006, Liou 2015) the relevance to crisis management and response indicate five important elements of chaos theory: nonlinearity, sensitivity to initial conditions, strange attractors, bifurcation point, and the feedback mechanism.

- *Non-linearity* characterises the nature of a dynamic organisational system that is neither predictable nor can it be described with causal, deterministic patterns (Seeger, 2002). Educational contexts are considered complex systems in which events and organisational behaviours do not occur in a linear causal fashion; rather, the

interactions among different local agencies operate in nonlinear ways and create unpredictable changes (Liou, 2015).

- *Sensitivity to initial conditions*, or the so-called butterfly effect, refers to the potentially vast influence of any minute action. Any minor change in initial conditions can lead an entire system into a chaotic state (Larsen-Freeman, 1997). Waldrop (1992, p. 145) explains the concept in this way: "Tiny perturbations won't always remain tiny. Under the right circumstances, the slightest uncertainty can grow until the system's future becomes utterly unpredictable—or, in a word, chaotic".

- *Strange attractors* constitute an underlying order, and according to Murphy (1996), a deep structure that constrains erratic organisational behaviours. In other words, attractors are latent regulators, inherent principles to which unpredicted behaviours of a chaotic state will always tend to return. These principles may lead to organisational change but may also pull erratic organisational behaviours back to an equilibrium point.

- The *bifurcation point*, or so-called edge of chaos, is a point at which movement in the organisational system can either break down the system toward chaos or stabilise it in a new state of order (Murphy, 1996; Seeger, 2002). At this stage, the system behaves in a relatively stable manner until turbulence enables it to reach its threshold, become unstable, and fall out of equilibrium; in turn, loss of equilibrium helps the system gain input or energy from the environment and produce unexpected results. This stage is a critical point in the development of an organisation in that it generates new energy for the organisation either to be innovative or to stabilise, becoming resistant to further stimulation.

- The *feedback mechanism* provides an opportunity for an organisation to reorganise itself into a unique system, because a chaotic and complex system will never find itself in the same situation twice (Thietart & Forgues, 1995). Different inputs into the organisation will generate various distinct outputs that become the next input status. For instance, negative feedback can lead the system into stability because it dampens changes and pushes the system back toward its original state (Thietart & Forgues, 1995; Glass, 1996). Conversely, positive feedback exposes the system to chaos by amplifying changes, thus leading the system far from its original state (Oliver & Roos, 2000). Negative and positive feedback mechanisms act simultaneously as

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countervailing forces on the system.

For this study, chaos theory will be defined as a description of a turbulent, unpredictable, positive feedback system with sensitive dependence on initial conditions. Liou (2015) argues that while a number of studies focus on crisis management/leadership in more conventional ways, there is very little, if any, empirical research on the topic that is grounded in chaos and complexity theories. This study proposes a shift in perspective from linearity to a more organic approach to understanding crisis leadership in the educational system, given its complexity.

Chaos theory provides a lens for understanding how leaders responded to the #FMF crisis. Ascough (2002) purports that chaos theory demonstrates to us that simple systems can exhibit complex behavior; while complexity theory demonstrates that complex systems can exhibit simple, "emergent" behavior. It allows us to move away from the traditional notion that the world operates in a linear fashion. Arising out of studies in quantum physics which focuses on relationships instead of things chaos and complexity theories can be applied to leadership during crises.

In applying these theories to leadership the researcher demonstrates how the traditional models of leadership which previously advocated for a top-down approach, with a leader and many followers, has shifted to a more organic approach with many leaders residing at various points of the organisation possessing different types of expertise needed for its successful functioning. The traditional notion of leadership encouraged a 'follower' mentality focused on a rules-based methodology. This implied that following particular rules would result in particular outcomes – a model based on predictable outcomes. As the world became more complex, organisations have re-constituted themselves by distributing decision-making more broadly, recognising that expertise can be located at various points in the organisation. Wheatley (2002, p22) describes this as "informal leadership – the capacity for an organisation to create the leadership that best suits its needs at the time". Leadership in this instance arises from within the group because of the acknowledgement that expertise in all things may not reside within one individual. This may be especially true during crises when a supportive paradigm may be more effective than a linear, controlled

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one.

2.6   The South African crisis

Every university is different, with different missions, student populations, locations, research foci, and campus cultures. As such, the role of every vice-chancellor is different, each with their own goals for their tenure. The onset of a crisis situation would therefore also elicit a different response from each individual. As stated previously, the response may be dependent on a number of factors, such as leadership style, the situation, the type of crisis, the culture of the organisation, the followers and their expectations, etc.

According to Mutch (2015), three sets of factors influence leaders in crisis contexts. They are:

- Dispositional factors, i.e. what leaders bring to the event from their background, personal qualities, experiences, values, beliefs, personality traits, skills, areas of expertise, and conceptions of leadership;
- Relational factors, i.e. the ways in which leaders offer a unifying vision and develop a sense of community within the organisation, engendering loyalty, enabling empowerment, building strong and trusting relationships and fostering collaboration; and
- Situational factors, i.e. assessing the situation as it unfolds, understanding the context, being aware of different responses (including cultural sensitivities), making timely decisions, adapting to changing needs, making use of resources (both material and personnel), providing direction, responding flexibly, thinking creatively, and constantly re-appraising options.

Conceptualising leadership in times of crisis, through dispositional, relational and situational factors, was vital in synthesising key ideas from the literature and applying to the data gathered in this study.

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2.7   Chapter summary

This chapter focused on the theoretical background as a framework for the study. It explored the main leadership theories as these have evolved over the years, as leadership is integral to this study. It further identified and contemplated chaos theory as the foundation upon which the crisis was examined. The chapter also defined some key terms to avoid confusion and misinterpretation.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with the research aims and questions. It then discusses the study's research approach, design and methodology, followed by descriptions of the research context and the research participants. It also details the data collection process, together with the instruments employed, to justify their appropriateness to this study. The data analysis and the role of the researcher are outlined, before the chapter concludes with a description of the ethical considerations that ensure compliance for a study of this nature.

3.2   Research aims and questions

This research was undertaken to understand how university leaders lead during crises, and whether crisis management is different from crisis leadership. It also examined whether university leaders looked outside or inside their organisations for expertise in dealing with crises, and whether there was a set of skills and competencies needed that were unique to crises in the higher education environment, or whether generic crises-resolution skills could be acquired.

The aim of the study was primarily:
- an examination of how university leaders led during crises;
- to determine if the strategies that were used were effective in resolving the crisis; and
- to understand what factors influenced the strategies that leaders used.

The study also explored leaders' level of preparedness when faced with a crisis. According to Mills (2004), preparedness is the development of plans and procedures necessary to enable effective and efficient use of resources in the event of a crisis. The level of preparedness during the 2015 crises was also compared to that of 2016, to see if any change had occurred

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in leaders' approach to crisis leadership.

In order to better understand crisis leadership in higher education, the following three research questions formed the core of this study:

1. What strategies were employed by university leaders during the #FMF crisis?
2. What factors influenced the responses of leaders during the crisis?
3. What were the challenges and dilemmas experienced by the university leaders, and why did they experience them as such?

3.3 Research paradigm

According to Ritchie *et al*. (2013), research paradigms assist researchers to organise their observations throughout the research process, guide the research questions asked, and help researchers to decide where and how to look for answers. Paradigms shape the ways in which researchers gather information about what is being studied, based on their beliefs and assumptions about life and its realities, researchers' values, the relationship between the researchers and what is being studied, and the research process as it unfolds.

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to answer the primary research question, and to understand the lived experiences of the participants, which aligned with the interpretive paradigm. According to Taylor (2015), in qualitative methodology the researcher looks at settings and people holistically, such that people, settings or groups are not reduced to variables but are instead viewed as a whole.

Research can serve different functions. It can be basic or pure, to advance knowledge, or applied to solve a problem (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The research technique is chosen based on the questions the researcher is asking. Davies (2007) believes that qualitative methodology revolves around asking questions, such as:

1) how do we know what we know, and

2) is what people say different from what they actually do.

Since the focus of the research was on the leadership process and its implementation in a specific scenario, it required in-depth information about the leadership phenomenon. Leadership is based on humanistic values that require personal contact, and studying it requires an understanding of the culture in which it occurred (Mertens, 1998). Consequently, the focus of the inquiry was on participants' perceptions and experiences and the way they made sense of their lives in a particular scenario, requiring an appreciation and understanding of multiple realities (Creswell, 2003).

Much of the literature on leadership theory indicates that cultures, perceptions, and experiences are integral to leadership and that qualitative methods are most appropriate to understand these (Schein, 1985; Bass, 1990; Bensimon, 1991; Yukl, 1994). Qualitative methods are particularly effective in uncovering the subtleties of how leaders think and frame their experiences (Bolman & Deal, 1991).

According to Muffet-Willett (2010), qualitative researchers study a determined phenomenon, often one that is of particular interest to the researcher. Having experienced the #FMF protests first-hand, my own interest and involvement in the handling of the crisis led to this research.

3.3.1 Limitation of the study

While the study could theoretically lend itself to a quantitative design by creating an artificial crisis scenario with the important elements of unpredictability and complexity, the timing of the research on the heels of an actual event made the qualitative approach more appropriate. Additionally, qualitative methodology captures contextual richness that quantitative research cannot provide. Unlike quantitative research, which is characterised by a positivist philosophical ontology, qualitative research is post-positivistic in orientation, challenging the traditional view of an absolute truth (Creswell, 2003).

Gall *et al.* (2007) view this orientation as constructivist or naturalistic in approach, where aspects of the human environment are created by the individuals who participate in the environment, and this participation and interpretation is extended to the researcher as the

interpretive tool. Creswell (2003) states that the focus of the inquiry is on participants' perceptions and experiences and the way they make sense of their lives in a specific scenario, requiring an appreciation and understanding of multiple realities.

The premise of qualitative research therefore lies in constructing truth through interpretation (Muffet-Willett, 2010). It relies on more open-ended data-collection methods such as case studies, interviews, observations, self-reflection, documentation, and others. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that qualitative research is not statistical or mathematical in nature, but that it aims to capture the shared experiences of individuals, and a socially-constructed versus an objective reality.

Similarly, Fitzpatrick *et al.* (1998) maintain that qualitative research is a way of describing and understanding observed realities. The researcher looks for patterns, commonalities, and/or themes in what people do, say, and report as their experience. Thus, qualitative research is a systematic, empirical strategy for answering questions about people in a bounded social context (Fitzpatrick *et al*., 1998). According to Taylor (2015), the phrase 'qualitative methodology' refers in the broadest sense to research that produces descriptive data, that is, people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour.

In their handbook of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world, which means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings and attempt to make sense of or interpret phenomena through the meanings that people attach to them. They maintain that qualitative research stresses the socially-constructed nature of reality, relationships, and situations. Qualitative research methods therefore allow for a deeper exploration of theoretical issues and matters of practice in relation to what is being studied. Along with this, qualitative research allows for collecting rich data to explore the 'why' and 'how' of the problem, and not just the 'what' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Flick (2014) agrees and outlines some essentials for qualitative research:

• recognition of research as a powerful tool for shaping social change;

• research as an interpretive act is a journey of learning;

• respect for all participants; and

• simplicity in presenting the findings.

Accordingly, Mills (2004) posits that the word 'qualitative' implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities, processes, and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in quantifiable terms, such as amount, intensity, or frequency.

3.4   Research design

According to Burns and Grove (2001) and De Vos (1998), research design is associated with the structural framework of the study and concerns the planning and the implementation of the study to reach the goals set out, while Mouton (2001) describes the research design as an architectural design or blueprint of a research project and its execution, and the research process or methodology as the construction process using methods and tools. According to Lincoln *et al*. (2011), a sound research design integrates the research question and the purpose and significance of the study, and identifies what information is necessary to answer the research questions and what methods will be employed to collect this information.

Lincoln *et al*. (2011) state that the research design first directs and then locates the researcher in a position to access the specific places, people, institutions and interpretive documentation relevant to the focus of study. Burns and Grove (2003) further state that a research design is a blueprint for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings, while Durrheim (2004) maintains that the research design is a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research strategy.

Two different designs, viz. exploratory and contextual designs, were applied in this study. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), an exploratory design helps to provide a basic familiarity with a specific topic. Exploratory research has been found to be a useful research design for projects that are addressing a subject about which there are high levels of uncertainty and ignorance, and when there is little existing research on the subject matter.

Since the topic in this instance was crisis leadership, a phenomenon which has been under-researched in the South African higher education context, it was necessary to adopt an exploratory research design to obtain a deeper understanding of the topic. According to Singh (2007), exploratory research design does not aim to provide final and conclusive answers to the research questions, but merely explores the research topic with varying levels of depth.

Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber (2009) state that the field of leadership focuses not only on the leader but also on the context, work setting, followers, peers, and culture. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), understanding the events against the background of the broader context is essential to better understanding the events. It was therefore imperative to investigate the context within which university leaders were being examined.

This study was context-bound as it focused on a crisis which occurred within the post-apartheid South African higher education environment and, more especially, within the #FMF student protests at South African universities during 2015/2016. The South African historical, political, social, economic, and cultural realities contributed to the uniqueness of the context of this study, making it different from other similar studies conducted internationally. In Montreal in 2012, student protests called the Maple Spring (Solty 2012), motivated by a fee increase, saw thousands of students take to the streets, and cause a shut-down of all campuses. While there were many similarities to how the protests unfolded in Canada, the historical legacy of South Africa, its politics, economy, and cultural diversity were strong differentiators, and made #FMF unique.

This research effort also centred on crisis-leadership and was based on the view that leadership results from the subjective perceptions of leaders and followers, and is dependent on leaders' and followers' interpretations of reality through their own cultural lenses. Birnbaum (1992) maintains that leadership actions do not speak for themselves, as they must be interpreted, and further asserts that leadership is a wholly human invention without substance in the physical world. Therefore, our understanding of leadership is dependent on our understanding of the perceptions of people and the cultural environment in which they operate.

Drawing from the above, this study facilitated a general understanding of how university leaders across the country made meaning of crisis leadership in an environment that was not only contextually bound, but whose context was further defined by a particular history which contributed to the crisis.

3.5   Methodology

This study used an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, as it is based on the theoretical foundations of phenomenology. The interpretive paradigm highlights the interactive process in which the researcher and the participants are engaged, and acknowledges that the researcher and research participants influence each other in making sense of what is being studied. Phenomenology examines perceptions and engages with the way individuals reflect on the experiences that they deem significant in their lives.

According to Smith *et al.* (2009), IPA is an approach to qualitative analysis with a particularly psychological interest in how people make sense of their experience. Researchers who engage in IPA, such as Bryman (1988), acknowledge how experience is subjective and is therefore only accessible through interpretation. Larkin (2012), too, maintains that an IPA interview is not about collecting facts, it is about exploring meanings.

An interpretive approach aims to discover the meaning of the world and its realities as it is experienced by the individuals participating in the research process, as well   as

understanding the thinking that influences the behaviour of these individuals, with all its complexities (Mertens, 2009). Thanh and Thanh (2015) assert that it is theoretically understood that the interpretive paradigm allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and subjective experiences of the participants.

IPA has an ideographic approach which allows the researcher to rigorously explore how these experiences may affect a person, requiring the researcher to collect detailed, reflective, first-person accounts from research participants. Larkin and Thompson (2012) maintain that it provides an established, phenomenologically-focused approach to the interpretation of these accounts. Interpretivists study phenomena in their natural settings and strive to make sense of or interpret phenomena with respect to the meanings people bring (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Within the interpretive paradigm, multiple realities are assumed and acknowledged, along with the subjectivity of the knowledge being constructed by both the researcher and research participants. Realities are understood and constructed through interpretation and influenced by all interactions within the particular social context of the research. An interpretive paradigm was therefore appropriate for this study because it acknowledges that multiple subjective realities of knowledge and understanding will be observed, interpreted and constructed throughout the research process.

The main method of analysis for the study was modified analytic induction. Since a goal of this study was to uncover similarities among leaders' thoughts on crisis leadership, while also keeping in mind that there could be vast differences, this procedure allowed for in-depth data collection and analysis. This resulted in the decision to use purposeful sampling, as it is the sampling method used in analytic induction (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Recordings from the interviews were transcribed into MS Word documents and these produced a rich set of text data required for analysis. To assure accuracy the transcriptions

were checked multiple times against the recordings. The text data was then read several times as a means of preliminary exploratory analysis.

Data capturing was facilitated through the use of ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis programme, which has coding as a central activity (Woolf, 2012). Using ATLAS.ti, the transcripts were coded into segments of text, organised through the creation of a coding table, and refined until a small number of themes emerged for reporting. Polit *et al.* (2001) assert that analysis of qualitative data is an active and interactive process, such that data analysis means to organise, provide structure and elicit meaning.

A line-by-line in-vivo coding was completed, followed by auto-coding through ATLAS.ti to ensure that no codes were omitted. Woolf (2012) describes this initial coding process as content analysis, which involved counting the number of times various topics were mentioned. Later, a more interpretive approach was used, which involved creating codes to subtly conceptualise the meaning of a participant's experience.

Thematic analysis was used as a research technique by following these steps:
- the data that was collected was analysed by reading and re-reading the transcripts to become familiar with the information shared;
- interview transcripts were segmented into units for analysis;
- these units were then coded, categorised, and named as themes;
- the emergent themes were listed and relationships between them explored;
- an analytical or theoretical ordering was done, as the researcher tried to make sense of the connections between the themes that emerged;
- some of the themes formed clusters, and some emerged as superordinate concepts;
- as the clusters emerged, the researcher checked the transcripts to make sure the connections worked for the primary source material, i.e. the actual words of the participant;
- a table of coherently-ordered themes was then produced;

- once each transcript was analysed by the interpretative process, a final table of superordinate themes was constructed;

- the researcher had to then prioritise the data and reduce them to determine which themes to focus on;

- the themes were not selected purely on the basis of their prevalence within the data. Other factors, including the richness of particular sections that highlight themes and how the theme helps shed light on other aspects of the information, were also considered;

- this analysis was followed by a consolidating final statement outlining the meanings inherent in the participants' experiences;

- the analysis was expanded during the writing phase. This stage was concerned with translating the themes into a narrative account;

- the findings were based on the overarching themes that were identified within the study.

This step-by-step approach ensured that the researcher had engaged thoroughly with the data to corroborate the findings across data sets. It also assisted in dealing with any potential bias of the researcher.

3.6   Context and participants

The context of the crisis made it different to similar crises in other countries, and played an important role in understanding the reasons behind the crisis, how it unfolded, and how leaders responded to it. These will be discussed in detail.

3.6.1   Context

The post-apartheid South African university sector provided the context for this study, and is different from other sectors of society, having undergone significant changes since 1994. Viewing crisis-leadership within this context is unique concept as the sector had not previously experienced any national crises.

What follows is a comprehensive description of this sector to describe the particular context of the study.

The university sector in South Africa constitutes the following types of universities:

(a) Traditional Universities – offering basic formative and professional undergraduate degrees, and honours degrees, masters and doctoral degrees at the postgraduate level. These universities were originally established to offer degrees to students who met the admission requirements, allowing them to register for a professional qualification. Examples of such qualifications include degrees in engineering, medicine, accounting, and science.

(b) Universities of Technology (UoT) – offering mainly vocational or career-focused undergraduate diplomas, and Bachelor of Technology degrees, which serve as a capping qualification for diploma graduates. Examples of qualifications offered by UoTs include diplomas and/or bachelor degrees in information technology, nutrition, somatology, and tourism. They offer limited masters and doctoral programmes. These institutions were originally established as Technikons, offering technical qualifications in the form of diplomas and certificates. They were changed to universities of technologies under the new government after the demise of apartheid.

(c) Comprehensive Universities – these institutions offer programmes typical of traditional universities, as well as programmes typical of universities of technology. These include degrees and diplomas in professional programmes, such as law, nursing, pharmacy, hospitality and hotel management, and tourism. Historically, South Africa had only one such university. However, this has expanded in the new democracy, with more universities offering a full suite of qualifications.

Within the categories outlined above, South Africa has 26 public universities located across the country, including historically-advantaged universities (HAUs) and historically-disadvantaged universities (HDUs).

South Arica's population is classified into four main race groups: White, Black, Coloured and Indian. HAUs are universities that, prior to 1994, were reserved for people who during the apartheid era were classified as White. These institutions were provided with resources and funding, and offered qualifications in almost all professional programmes, such as engineering, medicine, accounting, science, law, etc. People from other race groups were not permitted to study there. In exceptional circumstances, where students belonging to other race groups wished to pursue a qualification not being offered at institutions reserved for their race group, they were required to apply for a special permit to be allowed to study there.

Prior to 1994, HDUs were universities reserved for people who belonged to the remaining three racial categories, viz. Black, Coloured, and Indian, thus entrenching the apartheid government's divide and rule policy. Each racial category had its own university/universities since racial integration was not permitted. These universities were further segregated according to the types of qualifications they offered and the level of resources that were provided to them by the government. Each category had a specific and limited number of programmes it offered in accordance to what the government perceived to be necessary and relevant to each racial group.

The Minister of Higher Education and Training established a task team in 2000 to conduct a review of the relevance of the higher education system for the 21st century, and it recommended that the system be reconfigured as a differentiated and diverse system so that there could be effective responses from institutions to the varied social needs of the country (CHE, 2000).

It is evident that the South African higher education landscape is varied and diverse in its history, language, population, and location. Despite this, the student protests affected the entire sector and almost all institutions experienced unrest to some degree. This is aptly captured in the words of the chairperson of the CHE, Prof Mosia, when he states,

> *The South African higher education landscape experienced seismic shifts*
> *during the 2015/16 year and was a testing time for all. Towards the end*
> *of the 2015 academic year the #FeesMustFall movement rocked   the*

university sector in unprecedented ways. Sustained student protests, violence, destruction of property and postponement of examinations changed the character of the higher education system as we knew it (CHE Annual Report, 2015/2016, p.9).

3.6.2 Participants

Six institutions, representing the different categories of universities and four different provinces (see map below), were selected to participate in the study. The institutions are listed in Table 3.1 below.

University Type	Number of institutions	Province
Historically-Advantaged University (HAU)	3	Western Cape and Gauteng
Historically-Disadvantaged University (HDU)	1	Western Cape
University of Technology (UoT)	1	KwaZulu Natal
Traditional University (new university)	1	Northern Cape

Table 3.1: Sample selection of universities

Figure 3.1: Provinces of South Africa since 1994 (www.southafrica.to)

Figure 3.1 above illustrates the configuration of South Africa's nine provinces since democracy in 1994. The four provinces where the universities used in this study are located are Western Cape, Gauteng, Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

The university types also represent the broad categories of HAUs, HDUs, and universities of technology. The reason for choosing six universities from different provinces was partly to gain a broad perspective that could be indicative of trends applicable at other universities across South Africa. More importantly, the institutions that were selected had significantly contributed to or were intricately affected by the crisis in various ways.

Perceptions of effective leadership depend on the perceptions and support of many constituents of the institution. Leadership is often conceptualised as resulting from a social-perceptual process, implying that the essence of leadership is being seen as a leader by others (Barbuto, 2005; Lord & Maher, 2005; Bacha & Walker, 2013). The population selected for this study comprised leaders and staff from these six universities. The leader group of participants (PL) consisted of vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors, executive directors, registrars, and deans; while the academic staff, and professional, support and administrative staff,

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randomly selected, made up the employee group of participants (PE).

The breakdown of participants is presented in Table 3.2.

Participant Title	PL	PE	Number of Participants
Vice-chancellor	PL		3
Deputy Vice-Chancellor	PL		3
Registrars	PL		4
Executive Director	PL		1
Academic Dean	PL		1
Director: Legal Services		PE	2
Academic staff		PE	6
Professional/Support/Administrative staff		PE	9
Total	**12**	**17**	**29**

Table 3.2: Research participants in the selected sample

3.7 Questionnaire design

The semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix F) comprised a list of questions aimed at eliciting information about experiences and perceptions on university leaders' strategies in responding to the crisis. The researcher developed an initial question bank which was discussed, checked, and subsequently refined by the supervisor. The final set was piloted with the supervisor to check for relevance and to remove any ambiguity. Once the supervisor had examined and modified the questions, the researcher was permitted to conduct the interviews.

3.8   Sampling

Gentles *et al.* (2015) claim that sampling can been defined as the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives. In this study, non-probability purposive sampling was used to select the research participants. Purposive sampling strategies are non-random ways of ensuring that particular categories of cases within a sampling universe are represented in the final sample of a project. The rationale for employing a purposive strategy is that the researcher assumes, based on their theoretical understanding of the topic being studied, that certain categories of individuals may have a unique, different or important perspective on the phenomenon in question and their presence in the sample should be ensured (Trost, 1986; Mason, 2002).

According to Marlow (2011), the non-probability approach allows the researcher to handpick the sample according to the nature of the research problem and the phenomenon under study, and using this method allowed the researcher to intentionally select those institutions that provided rich information. As stated previously in 3.6.2, the institutions selected for this study were either catalysts of the crisis or played a significant role in advancing it. Similarly, Patton (2015) believes that the logic and power of purposive sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases which yield insights and understanding for in-depth study. This is reinforced by Isaac and Michael (1995) who claim that the goal of purposive sampling is to understand certain select cases in their own right.

Purposive sampling increases the scope or range of data that can be gathered and allows multiple realities to be investigated. Using IPA demands small sample sizes, so purposive sampling was applied to identify the universities and participants, ensuring that different categories of institutions, leaders and employees were suitably represented in the study. Vice-chancellors or members of the executive staff who were decision-makers at their institutions, and employees (a mix of both academic and support/professional staff) were selected as participants for the study.

The researcher purposively selected research participants for inclusion in the study, knowing that the participants have information the researcher needs. Jupp (2006) endorses

this strategy by stating that the researcher needs to select the research participants carefully to ensure that they have information relevant to the study in order to improve its contribution to new knowledge.

Within this sampling rationale, the universities that were selected to participate in the study were selected for the following very specific reasons:

- being the initial points of the eruption of the protests, and therefore being at the forefront of the unrest;
- having particular legacies that called for transformation;
- being centrally located in urban areas which provided the platform for broader participation from other sectors of society; and
- optimal travelling distances (for an unfunded study).

The newly-established institution was included as an outlier to understand how similar or different the situation at an institution with no historical baggage could be, and how their crisis leadership strategies may have differed from other established universities.

3.9 Data collection and procedure

Research interviews explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, are believed to provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires. Interviews are most appropriate where little is known about the study phenomenon, or where detailed insights are required from individual participants. According to Cohen *et al.* (2007), interviewing is a valuable method for exploring the construction and negotiation of meanings in a natural setting. The latter implies that the value of interviewing is not only in building a holistic snapshot, analysing words, or reporting detailed views of informants, but in enabling interviewees to "speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings" (Berg, 2007, p. 96).

Accepting that IPA research involves analysing in detail how participants perceive and make sense of their reality, it was imperative to design a flexible data collection instrument. As an open process that provides flexibility needed to gain insights, and which assists with improved understanding about personal experiences of interviewees, the semi-structured interview was considered to be most appropriate for this study. From the literature, several experts (Bryman, 1988; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Larkin & Thompson, 2012) maintain that the best way to obtain data for an IPA study is through semi-structured interviews, as it allows for the researcher and the participant to engage in a dialogue where initial questions are modified according to the participant's responses, and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise.

According to Given (2008), the semi-structured interview is a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions. Given goes on to add that the researcher has more control over the topics of the interview than in unstructured interviews, but in contrast to structured interviews or questionnaires that use closed questions, there is no fixed range of responses to each question (2008). Smith and Osborn (2008) state that the semi-structured interview facilitates rapport/empathy, allows a greater flexibility of coverage, and allows the interview to go into novel areas, thereby producing richer data, while Rubin and Rubin (2005) maintain that the semi-structured interview is a more flexible version of the structured interview, which allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity to probe and expand on the interviewee's responses.

A semi-structured interview schedule maintains a clear list of questions to be answered but remains flexible enough to alter the sequence in which the questions will be asked, and this flexibility enables the participants to engage openly, honestly and in-depth. Semi-structured interview schedules are used as a guide by the interviewer to move back and forth between questions while still keeping the focus on engaging with all topics. The advantage of employing a semi-structured interview schedule is that it allows the research participants to engage openly and frankly, in their own words, and to share their opinions, feelings and experiences. Creswell (2014) therefore believes that semi-structured interview schedules

aim to discover rather than to check.

The researcher designed an interview schedule (see Appendix E) taking into account travel time and participants' busy work schedules. Four of the six participating universities are located in provinces outside of the researcher's residential base. The university in the Northern Cape Province is a new university without a full leadership team, meaning that only the vice-chancellor participated in the study, and the interview was conducted telephonically.

The main purpose of the individual interview is to engage the interviewee to elicit information that can be utilised as data for the research study. To engage the participants, the following procedure was followed:

- The researcher personally sent emails to the registrars of the selected institutions introducing the research study and encouraging participation from each institution.
- Requests were made for interviews with members of the leadership, and with academic and professional/support staff.
- Once ethics clearance and permission to conduct interviews were obtained from the host university (Appendices A & E), and permission granted from participating universities (Appendices B, C & D), information sheets were sent to initiate contact with the participants. These are contained in Appendices F and G.
- Letters of introduction served to initiate contact with the participants. The letter to each participant advised that he or she would be contacted to schedule a face-to-face, audio-recorded interview.
- Interview locations were at the discretion of the participants, and with only two exceptions, all agreed to meet on their campuses.
- Contact information was shared to enable the interviewee to make contact if they wished to withdraw or if they were not available on the negotiated interview date.
- The researcher liaised with personal/executive assistants to schedule interviews with the members of each university's leadership.

Except for one interview, which was conducted telephonically because of distance, all interviews were conducted face-to-face.

During the preparation phase, the interviewer made certain that there were no distractions. Participants were required to sign a consent form and read an information sheet prior to the interview, which re-stated their confidentiality and anonymity, and clarified any questions. The purpose of the interview was then discussed to make sure interviewees fully understood what was expected of them, followed by an explanation of the format and duration of the interview. Participants were also informed that they could stop the interview at any time if they felt the line of questions made them feel uncomfortable and/or they needed to address a pressing matter for work. However, all participants committed to the full allotted time, and in some instances were willing to go beyond the time initially granted.

The researcher began each individual interview by sharing a brief overview of the #FMF crisis, as well as the aim of the research. Starting with a broad overview was a strategy to remind each participant of the crisis and, more importantly, to enable the interviewees to feel more at ease. The researcher then continued with specific research questions to gain their personal perspectives on the experience. The participants were encouraged to raise issues and ask questions or points of clarity that they believed were pertinent to the research topic, and the researcher also probed for clarification. According to Silverman (2005), probing is a means of encouraging participants to give, clarify or expand on an answer. Participants were also encouraged to respond to all questions in terms of what they thought was significant.

The goal of data collection was not limited to eliciting the facts and background of the crisis, but also aimed to descriptions of leadership style, consequences of leadership actions, and opinions and perceptions of leaders' crisis leadership strategies by subordinates.

Each interview lasted from 60 to 90 minutes, was audio-recorded, and later transcribed. After each visit, the signed consent form and field notes were securely stored in a locked

http://etd.uwc.ac.za/

filing cabinet. All corresponding voice recordings and other relevant electronic files were saved to a password-protected computer and backed up on an external hard-drive that was stored safely in the researcher's office.

During informal discussions after the individual interviews, most participants remarked on the value of the interview process for them. They shared their appreciation for being given the opportunity to share personal experiences, perceptions and feelings in a non-judgemental manner, and commented on how they now saw the value of engaging in more group sessions with each other as they felt that there were very few, if any, opportunities to debrief after the trauma many of them had experienced.

3.10 Researcher as instrument

Marshall and Rossman (2011) maintain that the presence of the researcher in the lives of the participants is vital to the research paradigm, making the researcher the instrument in qualitative studies. Whatever the research design, the researcher has closeness to the participants, which is necessary to gain access to their personal reflections and phenomenological descriptions. What the researcher records and captures is vital to the research, and both verbal and nonverbal interactions become important elements of analytical data (Esterberg, 2002). According to Gall *et al.* (2007), qualitative researchers make holistic observations of the total context observed, study meanings and human interactions, become personally involved with research participants, and assume that reality is constructed by the participants.

Notwithstanding the above, the researcher's personal interest in this topic stemmed from her own experience of the #FMF crisis, having worked in the South African higher education sector for 20 years, and with extensive, first-hand knowledge and understanding of the environment, its challenges and its dynamics. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge the values, beliefs, assumptions, opinions and experiences that the researcher brought to this study.

Being a member of the leadership team of a South African university, the researcher personally experienced the crisis in 2015 and 2016. Working closely with some leaders from other universities during this time, and experiencing the diverse range of responses to the crisis, piqued her interest in examining the effectiveness of the strategies used by university leaders from across the higher education system. These perspectives influenced the researcher's research interest, choice of research topic and research questions. This approach also influenced her preference for engaging in an interpretive research paradigm (Mertens, 2009) and the associated qualitative approach used in this research study.

Given her professional background, it is obvious that the researcher cannot be an objective observer and would likely engage with the process as an equal participant. This reinforces the observation by Merriam (2009) that qualitative research must acknowledge that the researcher and research participants influence each other in making sense of what is being studied. Researchers' beliefs and assumptions guide their thinking throughout the research process to answer the research question (Lincoln *et al.*, 2011).

The researcher disclosed her position to each participant and worked consciously at not allowing her own personal bias or experiences influence her interactions with participants. She audio-recorded the interviews and worked from the transcripts, ensuring to maintain objectivity at all times and to limit the impact of her own personal perspectives on the research design, methodology, data collection, analysis and findings of this study. The reflective process with her supervisors also enabled her to ensure credibility, confirmability, dependability and transformability for the trustworthiness of this study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

3.11 Data integrity and trustworthiness of the study

For a study of this nature to have value and impact, it needs to comply with the requirements for data integrity and ethics. Verifying the data is vital for qualitative research,

as researchers must have a manner of demonstrating that their findings are 'trustworthy'. Without verification, the research will lack credibility.

Member checks are an opportunity for the constructions developed by the researcher to be verified by the respondent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and these were conducted with participants during each interview. Participants were asked to confirm, expand on or clarify what was being said for the researcher to correctly capture their responses. In addition to informal (in-process) member checks conducted at the conclusion of each interview, terminal member checks were conducted with some participants once all of the data had been analysed and organised by themes. Selected participants were given an outline of the major categories of findings, and a copy of the transcript of their interview, along with a verbal review of the categories and themes assigned by the researcher for their interview. Participants were asked to confirm, clarify, and offer amendments to what the researcher had developed.

The researcher also used triangulation when collecting data to ensure that different perspectives on the effectiveness of crisis leadership strategies used by university leaders were obtained. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) defined triangulation as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour, while Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that triangulation is the verification, emendation, and extension of information obtained from other sources, human and nonhuman. The ultimate goal of triangulation, according to these authors, is convergence. The greater the convergence achieved, the greater confidence one can have in the findings.

Triangulation occurred through interviews being conducted with university leaders on their own perceptions of the effectiveness of their crisis-leadership strategies, as well as with other employees who shared their personal perceptions of the effectiveness of their leaders' strategies. In other words, leaders' perceptions of the effectiveness of their responses and strategies to the crisis were tested against the perceptions of staff.

Credibility of research is conventionally assessed on validity, reliability, generalisability and objectivity; however, the credibility of qualitative research is assessed using more suitable

criteria, which include transferability, dependability, and confirmability or validity, to not only assess but also demonstrate the trustworthiness or integrity of the research study (Guba & Lincoln 1985; Denscombe, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). These aspects are expanded on briefly below.

3.11.1 Credibility

According to Polit and Beck (2012), credibility deals with the focus of the research and refers to the confidence in how well the data address the intended focus, and in the 'truth' of the findings. To ensure credibility, the researcher decided before the research process to audio-record, transcribe and then use the transcriptions from the 29 individual interviews as the raw data. This meant that the researcher used the exact words from the research participants throughout all the phases of data analysis.

3.11.2 Transferability

The in-depth nature of the insights gained through qualitative research is what makes it particularly valuable and transferable (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Transferability refers to the potential for extrapolation, and relies on the reasoning that findings can be generalised or transferred to other settings or groups. Most qualitative research is based on small-scale research studies making it important to highlight transferability, the representativeness of the research, and how likely it is that the findings could occur in other places. Qualitative researchers can argue that their findings are worthwhile as they are context-specific. Small-scale research that is based on a particular context and population group can possibly represent a similar larger context and population group. If qualitative research findings are viewed in this light, transferability is possible.

The researcher provided sufficient descriptive data in the research report so that the reader could evaluate the applicability of the data to other contexts. This, according to Polit and Beck (2008), enhances the transferability of the collected data.

3.11.3 Dependability

Dependability is defined by Charitidis *et al.* (2009) as the data stability over time and condition. Polit and Beck (2008) suggested that this be applied to check if the findings of an enquiry would yield the same results if replicated at a later date with the same participants in the same context. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) highlight the need to demonstrate that rigorous and reputable research procedures and decisions have been taken. This means having a full reflexive account of research procedures and methods, detailing all processes that led to the research findings, and having an audit trail. An audit trail involves mapping out the research process, giving insights steps, from data collection to data analysis to research findings. This means having all raw data carefully stored, as indicated earlier. The main reason for an audit trail, according to Denscombe (2007), is to ensure all research procedures and decisions can be validated.

In terms of the dependability criteria, the researcher ensured that she shared samples of raw data, broad categories, themes and sub-themes with her supervisors during the entire data analysis process.

3.10.4 Confirmability

According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), confirmability refers to a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest. In other words, it refers to objectivity, which is the potential for congruence between two or more independent people about the data's accuracy, relevance, or meaning.

In qualitative studies, the interpretation of data and presentation of research findings are inevitably influenced by the researcher's bias and values, and there is therefore a strong reliance on the researcher's personal integrity, skill, competence and rigour throughout the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The issue of trustworthiness could be as simple as asking how researchers can persuade their audience (including themselves) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to or taking into account (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

To answer the seemingly simple yet complex question, the researcher applied triangulation, and supervisor- and member-checks during this study to minimise the impact of the researcher's bias, personal values, beliefs and experiences on this study. Triangulation was employed by obtaining employees' and leaders' perceptions of the strategies leaders used in dealing with the crisis.

3.12   Ethical considerations

It is imperative that ethical issues be considered at all stages of the interview process. According to Cohen *et al.* (2007), as interviews are considered an intrusion into respondents' private lives with regards to time allotted and level of sensitivity of questions asked, a high standard of ethical considerations should be maintained. Given the confidential nature of the information obtained in this research, and the possible legal and moral consequences of any breach of confidentiality, the researcher was bound to maintain stringent professional standards regarding all issues of confidentiality. Three key areas of ethics became pivotal: informed consent, confidentiality, and the consequences of the interviews (Brink 1996; Kvale 1996; Wilkinson & McNeil 1996; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000, Burns & Grove 2001).

To align with the prescripts of ethical compliance, the researcher applied for and received formal ethics clearance from the university at which she was registered (see Appendix A). This was valid for a year from the date of issue.

Additionally the researcher conducted the research in a safe environment, considerately and compassionately. Questions were carefully framed so that they would not trigger any kind of uncomfortable flashback, discomfort or conflict of interest. Participants were given the strongest assurance that their participation and/or the information that they might give would not be used against them in any manner whatsoever. They were also informed of their voluntary participation in the research and the right to refuse to disclose information of any kind at any stage. They could also at any stage ask for clarification about the purpose

of the research or any matter concerning the research. Participants were reassured that all agreements between the researcher and the participants would be honoured, and were at all times treated with respect and courtesy. The researcher ensured that the final report of the research findings was clear, objective and accurate. The respondents would be informed of the findings, without compromising any principle of confidentiality, as a means to express gratitude and recognition for their participation.

3.13   Chapter summary

The study's theoretical framework was based on a basic interpretive approach, uncovering how the participants made meaning of the crisis leadership phenomenon in higher education. A qualitative phenomenological study using semi-structured interviews was employed to understand the lived experiences of the participants. As Bolman and Deal (1991) state, qualitative methods are particularly effective in understanding the subtleties of how leaders think and how they frame their experiences. This study sought to learn how university leaders responded to the student crisis on their campuses, how staff perceived the actions or strategies of their campus leaders, and how those actions and perceptions contributed to university leaders' development in crisis leadership to better support or respond to future campus crises. The nature of the research goal also made a qualitative approach appropriate. The focus of the research was on the leadership process and its implementation in a particular crisis scenario, and in-depth information was therefore needed about the leadership phenomenon. Because of the sector's diverse character and the scarcity of research available on crisis leadership in the South African higher education sector, it was important to use purposive sampling in selecting universities and university leaders/staff as participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF KEY FINDINGS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the research methodology, while this chapter presents the themes and key findings that emerged from the interviews with the 29 participants. To provide a comprehensive and coherent description, these key findings are framed by the aim of the study, which was to examine the crisis leadership strategies that university leaders employed during the #FMF student protests, the effectiveness of the strategies used, and the factors that influenced these strategies.

The findings were predominantly drawn from data gathered from semi-structured interviews conducted with 13 leaders (PLs) and 16 employees[1] (PEs) from the academic and the professional and support staff segments of six universities. These findings are examined in accordance with the four themes emerging from the data analysis. It is worth reiterating that one of the six universities is a newly-established university and only had one PL and no PEs as participants.

The following three research questions formed the basis of the research:
1. What strategies were employed by university leaders during the #FMF crisis?
2. What factors influenced university leaders' responses to the #FMF crisis?
3. What were the challenges and dilemmas experienced by university leaders, and why were they experienced as such?

Only sections of the narratives that were most appropriate and pertinent to the aims of this study were included, and direct quotes from the transcription are presented to substantiate the general findings. In keeping with ethical guidelines of anonymity and confidentiality, the research participants are identified only by generic abbreviations, and universities are

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[1] The use of the word 'employees' is in keeping with international conventions, and in this context refers to employees from academic as well as the professional and support staff segments.

anonymised by having random letters assigned to them, such as University A, University B, etc.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the following abbreviations have been applied:

- PL = Participants from the leadership category, comprising vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors, and registrars. This group normally constitutes the executive leadership team at South African universities
- PE = Participants from the employee category, comprising both academic and professional/support staff who were randomly selected, and who do not represent any particular rank or position.

The analysis and discussion of the findings will be interrogated in Chapter Five.

4.2 THEMES

For the purposes of providing a comprehensive summary, four themes are reported and synthesised in this chapter. These four themes are:

- Crisis management vs Crisis leadership;
- Past protest experience, leadership training and style, and organisational culture;
- Communication; and
- The macro external environment vs the micro (institutional) environment.

These overarching thematic categories are presented in Diagram 4.1, together with the sub-themes that emerged from the data, illustrating:

- the aim of the study;
- the qualitative research questions;
- the emergent themes; and
- sub-themes.

It should be noted that each theme and sub-theme is ultimately interrelated.
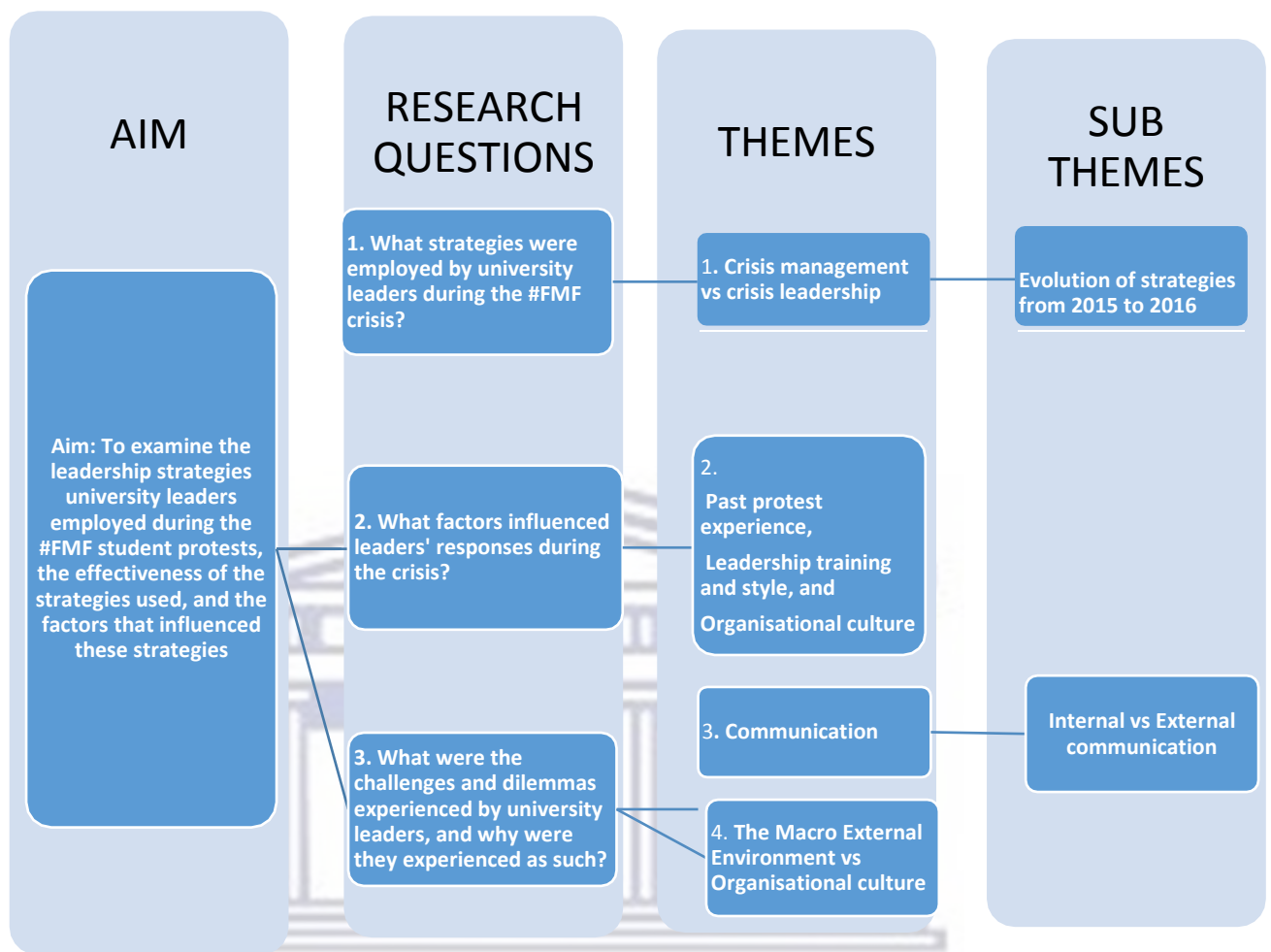
Figure 4.1 Aim, research questions, themes and sub-themes

4.3 Reporting method of qualitative data

The reporting of the data extracted from participants is presented in the format of the research question (RQ), followed by the theme (T), and the appropriate sub-theme (ST).

4.3.1 (RQ #1) Strategies employed by university leaders during the #FMF crisis

Research question	Theme	Sub-theme
What strategies were employed by university leaders during the #FMF crisis?	Crisis management vs crisis leadership	Evolution of strategies from 2015 to 2016

The question, *"How did you / leaders respond to the #FMF crisis in 2015 and in 2016?"* was posed to PLs and PEs from the six universities to gain insight into the strategies that leaders used during the crisis in 2015, and again in 2016.

In examining the PLs responses to the 2015 events, it was clear that the protest was unanticipated and the newness of the experience evoked reactive responses from many. For instance, approaching the protestors personally, requesting police assistance, securing buildings to prevent damage, and focusing on their own institutions, were a few of the immediate reactions, which pointed to almost an *ad hoc* approach. This could well be interpreted as a crisis-management approach where attention was focussed on managing the operations of the institution. The underlying significance or theme that emerged was *crisis management vs crisis leadership*, while the sub-theme from the data pointed to *the evolution of strategies from 2015 to 2016*.

The difference between crisis management and crisis leadership was drawn out of the discussion from one PL, where the respondent aptly distinguishes between the two:

> *The difference between crisis management and crisis leadership is that with the former it's about how do you make decisions required to ensure that the institutional operations continue under crisis conditions. With crisis leadership I would imagine it's about how do you think through resolving these issues beyond the day–to-day operations but to ensure that you begin to address the core causal factors that underlie the crisis.*
> *(PL 16)*

4.3.1.1 PLs' views: 2015 strategies

Responses by participants from four of the six universities revealed a crisis-management mode of operating by PLs, which could be attributed to the suddenness and unpredictability of the crisis. Evidence of this is captured in the excerpts below, articulated in the goals of a few PLs. These PLs' actions seemed to primarily revolve around protecting the academic

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project, limiting damage to university property, and keeping people safe, with each demanding immediate operational attention.

> *In 2015 it was our first experience of really large scale protests and I think we did not respond well. We expected dialogue in a small group format which the students refused. They demanded that senior people be present at mass meetings and make spot decisions. We went to some of those mass meetings, it was a total disaster. After a while we just refused to go and that gave the impression that management didn't care. We were then met by really violent protests so we attended one meeting, and we had to implement extremely tricky things like signing off on demands and moving exams. It was a disaster, we didn't do well. In 2016 we did much better. (PL 9)*

> *At the end of 2015 we did a post-mortem of our crisis management and agreed we had to change that in the organisation. I was completely sucked into every decision, every engagement and every negotiation and that wasn't helpful. We had set up a leadership team of 23 people and we ended up convening meetings frequently over and over and having very long meetings because of the difficult decisions that had to be made. That was very unproductive. We had no systems in place; and no ground rules for private security. (PL 12)*

> *Just to hold things together – from an operational point of view it was certainly to make sure that we could do exams. We made that almost our overriding question. Every time we had a question we would say 'what do we need to do to ensure that we finish the exams' so that became the refrain; it became the kind of chorus from an operational point of view. (PL 17)*

> *In 2015 I saw it as an individual response. So I was there; I would fly in; I would do all of these things. We suspended some students, partly because they had been violent. In November when the violence erupted, we rolled in the police; in January when students tried to prevent the registration*

we called in private security. We gave a week to engagement and mediators to enable engagement before we called the police. (PL 16)

We called the police out. One of the characteristics of our campus is that we are interwoven into the city. Protesting happened on the sidewalks, which are public spaces. When there was a standoff between the police and students I intervened and tried to maintain order. I also made sure that I was continuously available when the students needed to talk to me.

I was the only one who interacted with the protestors. I would occasionally consult with my team but generally it was me and nobody else. I had to keep the academics and administrators out of it because the anger can't be directed at them, because when the protest settled the last thing you want is for students to be angry with their lecturers or administrators. (PL 29)

From these recorded responses, the strategies that these PLs employed were not very effective in ending the crisis. By their own admission, they were reacting to the immediate situation without considering the larger systemic issues that played out. While many of the PLs indicated that they were taken by surprise in 2015, they admitted to being more aware of the possibility of a recurrence of the crisis in 2016. Therefore, many PLs realised the need to change their strategies to be better prepared.

One PL reported that the experience of 2015 also taught his team to be more reflective of their strategies and practices, in understanding the strengths and weaknesses within their teams and in themselves. They reviewed their past actions and explored alternative approaches, such as not engaging directly with protestors or consulting with leaders from other universities, and also with the higher education ministry. They realised that the crisis demanded responses that were non-linear and systemically coordinated.

4.3.1.2   PEs' views on strategies employed by PLs in 2015:

PEs were also questioned on the strategies that PLs implemented, and the findings suggest that they also believed their leaders had not effectively handled the crisis. They also point to the surprise element of the crisis, as expressed by PLs, as well as the lack of consultation and planning, which resulted in many PLs being reactive and not strategic about their responses. According to the Pes, the strategies used included militarised responses, ostracising protesters, meetings and dialogue with protesters, ignoring protesters, engaging student leadership, addressing students' demands, bureaucratic responses, student expulsions, etc. These are the comments of PEs on their perceptions of the strategies employed by leaders:

Management tried to protect staff and students who were not part of the protestors; I heard that the leaders of the protestors were followed, ostracised, security was asked to keep an eye on them. There was a militarised response from management in 2015. (PE 5)

Initially they (management) tried to have proactive conversations with students, but that failed. The university then became militaristic in terms of security being sharpened up – they were everywhere on campus, hundreds of them, and protecting buildings, and staff; there were lots of clashes between students and security, and that was the approach of the university to basically lock down essential points like the library, administration buildings, to just lock it down. (PE 6)

I was of the view that the executive could have done well to redirect who was supposed to receive the memorandum. I sympathise with the vice-chancellor – in a way they were ill prepared to the realities of protests and the dynamics, and what they did was to deal with what meets the eye, which was unrest and then bring private security and police, which then militarised the university. Another thing is that the campus controls (security) were ill prepared to deal with crowd management, so the eye-for-an-eye was a factor in dealing with the situation. (PE 2)

Management made a series of errors. They expelled 13 students, rusticated some of them, and had all those disciplinary processes of

hearing, so they had a bureaucratic response to what was a political moment. Within the management team the more progressive voices tried to reach out behind the scenes, phone people, see what was going on. The more conservative voices held the line. They responded largely in a law and order manner; collusion with the police. (PE 11)

In 2015 they were taken by surprise. They did not anticipate the number of people participating in the protests, nor how long the protests would last. They could have done things differently. (PE 14)

In 2015 nothing happened; management was working and the rest were on holiday. You had certain people working until 4am and the rest of the university staff just didn't work and effectively there was a shutdown. In 2015 there were generic responses to all about what was theoretically happening. Preparation for 2015 was insufficient. What was totally lacking in 2015 was leadership with ground support from staff. Staff was left in the dark to some extent. (PE 26)

While the above comments from PEs of four institutions were mostly critical of how PLs managed the crisis, there were PEs from one institution who were more positive in their judgement of what transpired at their institution. They maintain that their leaders were empathetic, engaging with students, and proactive, conveyed in the following excerpts:

We were all forced to learn to lean back on our chairs and let students talk and let students vent. That was one of our tactics. In 2015 the vice-chancellor joined students on the protest in an attempt to understand what the students were demanding. There was leading from the front. There were genuine attempts to engage students. (PE 25)

The vice-chancellor was very proactive and he always liaised with the SRC and he was very good in terms of giving students in the most part what they wanted, and if he promised X, Y and Z then for the most part he delivered. (PE 21)

They (management) were empathetic; they were prepared to engage with students at all times. They met with the students, responded to their demands, they were very clear about presenting financial statements to them, invited students to make comments. They called the police in as a last resort. **(PE 24)**

The PEs across the five universities expressed diverse views about the strategies employed by their PLs in 2015, and their effectiveness. The diversity in leadership styles and engagement with the crisis ranged from taking individual actions such as attending mass meetings called by students, engagements with students, charging students or serving students with interdicts, to working pragmatically either alone or as a team in managing the crisis as it unfolded.

While some PLs were perceived to be engaging and accommodative, others immediately tried to increase security on campuses and were consequently perceived as 'militaristic' or succumbing to demands. The common refrain among the majority of PEs suggest that PLs reacted in an *ad hoc* manner without any clear signs of planning or preparedness for a crisis. This correlates with the views expressed by PLs, who also believed that they changed their strategies from 2015 to 2016 as their experience grew. This correlation confirms the notion that the lack of experience of a crisis situation was primarily responsible for the absence of an integrated plan of action and crisis-leadership strategies. This will be analysed further in the next chapter.

4.3.1.3   PLs' views: 2016 strategies

Responses from most PLs suggest that their strategies changed in 2016, as they shifted towards crisis-leadership and strategising. In 2016, there was evidence of PLs proactively creating crisis management teams, improving their communication strategies, delegating certain responsibilities to different offices, and working systemically with other university leaders, as well as the Ministry of Higher Education and Training.

This is evidenced by the excerpts below:

We learned from 2015 and developed parameters for dialogue with students, dialogue of management with students, and allowed the Dean of Students to engage with students. The parameters entailed, for instance, that we as management don't want to be in the forefront immediately in meeting with students, especially going to mass meetings, and engaging with them. We found that from 2015 that it was not constructive. **(PL 3)**

We had a lot of dialogue with students in the quieter times and informed them of having specialists in the university, and discussed how we are already supporting many of the causes of students. Then when the protests started we did not appear as management at mass meetings. We sent the specialists in who acted as intermediaries. We also realised in 2016 that we would implement a three-step process when addressing issues – dialogue, discipline and time. We agreed to attend meetings with small groups of students (around 60), to listen, to partake if we were asked to. In terms of discipline we were clear as to what was not acceptable. We reiterated that we would take action if necessary, e.g. if students disrupt academic processes or occupy the library, and we did take action. We had disciplinary hearings, we suspended students, we had interdicts against students, we laid criminal charges – not as management but we encouraged to people to lay criminal charges if they were affected. At other times we just waited until things played themselves out. We gave certain issues that could not be solved at one meeting some time and we just weathered it. **(PL 17)**

We were criticised in 2015 about our communication not being appropriate – that staff and students did not know what was going on. So we developed a strategy early in 2016 that we would communicate twice a day. We did this via our Communications Office. We also introduced morning meetings daily with the senior management, and other   relevant

offices such as Security, Communications, Legal. This was a security briefing. Another change was that in 2015 I saw it as an individual response – I would fly in and I would do everything. In 2016 it became a collective response, an executive response. In part because I think we began to learn in 2015 as the protest evolved how to deal with this, how to engage. **(PL 16)**

We created a task team which was meant to manage incidents and crisis and relationships, and importantly, I was not on the team because we realised that I had been completely sucked into every decision, every engagement, and every negotiation before, and that was not very helpful. In fact everyone was sucked into it because there were such big decisions to be made...and that was very unproductive, too inefficient. So from 2016 we had a task team of six people, with two vice-rectors, and that worked much better. We also had more systems, for example, we established a joint operations centre which acted as a control centre. We had a relationship with the police and with the public order policing; we had slightly better ground rules with private security; there would be a briefing meeting each morning reminding them of how to engage with students. **(PL 12)**

2016 was about engagement; about trying to form compacts and to get a better understanding of what was happening. It was also informed by the fact that this was a sector-wide issue, and not only about our institution. In 2016 there was an increasing realisation that of what our actions meant for the sector, what does the university need to know to proactively prepare for what may come later in the year, about online teaching, and exams at different venues, and that we could not do it alone – we had to find out what was happening at other universities and how they were dealing with matters. So the level of understanding, thinking and engagement was deepening and more sophisticated than in 2015. **(PL 13)**

These PLs realised the need to apply a more distributive and collaborative type of leadership, by joining other university leaders and the DHET in focusing on the larger issues that were being highlighted by students nationally. The transition towards crisis-leadership is highlighted by their understanding that, as leaders, they should not be involved fully in the operational management of issues on campus.

In most instances, there was greater team work within universities, and leaders decided to step back and have crisis management teams or specialists, such as the Dean of Students, to act as the frontline. Additionally, there was greater consultation across the sector, and vice-chancellors realised that their approach to the crisis should be a collective one. The use of private security and the police was also more carefully managed. These responses indicate a conscious shift in the strategies employed from 2015 to 2016. However, PLs from universities C and F employed different strategies where they met and engaged with the protestors in both years, and saw no benefit in changing their strategies.

4.3.1.4 PEs' views of leaders' 2016 strategies

The leaders were more proactive in 2016, according to some of the PEs who were interviewed. One PE indicated that disciplinary codes were changed and students were proactively engaged and updated on pending issues. Another PE reported that communication strategies were also sharpened. Generally, PEs reported that the level of preparedness in 2016 had improved and that strategies were more effective in 2016.

These are telling excerpts from PEs around the levels of engagement and preparedness:

> *We formed a contingency committee so it wasn't only one person making decisions. There were representatives from facilities management, security, media, legal, crime intelligence, and student affairs. It was chaired by a deputy vice-chancellor. It was good to get other people's perspectives before making a decision. We also had live feeds from the CCTV cameras in the Ops Room and they (staff and students) could see what was happening on the ground. (PE 7)*

In 2016 we were better prepared. From a communications perspective we had a plan, we knew what worked the previous year, and what hadn't. Management did what they could under the very trying circumstances. We used people better. We drew from beyond the pool of just the senior management team; management reached out to people at lower levels, lower grades, people who are managers on the ground rather than executives. They reached out to alumni, council members and senate members – you need other people to mediate certain spaces. There was also strong decision-making in 2016. There was consensus among the leadership team – that is very important to collectively support decisions. Management also learnt from 2015 to step back, and allow different people to say and do different things, according to their strengths. (PE 14)

2016 was much more effective. It was not a laager mentality where management moved off-site and security dealt with the protests. There was blended learning; students were advised that they could do lots of stuff online; management had little pockets of employees at various places actually doing real work; there was direct engagement with the protestors. In 2016 there was a continuation of the academic project and we did not bring in as many security. Security was on campus only for security purposes and not for engagement. Management was available and there were offline meetings with the protestors in a much more visible way. The communication in 2016 was more direct and not simply theoretical. The communication dealt with operations and was about what was happening and what was going to happen. Also, in 2016 staff from across the university was aware of what the leadership was doing or planning to do so there was support. (PE 26)

Most of the PE respondents felt that their leaders were better prepared to deal with the crisis in 2016 than in 2015, and there was evidence of stronger decision-making. The strategies included establishing operations teams, improving communication, consulting

more widely with different stakeholders, and engaging with protestors. Except for University D, there was a decrease in the dependency on the police and private security services, and greater reliance on campus security personnel.

While these excerpts reveal more confidence in PLs' shifts in responding to the crisis, the following PE comments suggest they were not very supportive of how their leaders dealt with the crisis:

What they did was to deal with what meets the eye, which was unrest and then bring private security, and police, which then militarised the university. There was an excessive use of police. **(PE 2)**

The use of private security was a major cause for the escalation of the conflict. There were times where it looked like a military zone with the campus completely shut down and just people with riot gear. There were good decisions like closing the university voluntarily for a period of time to engage in negotiations. We had live streaming of some of those sessions. Then they (management) unilaterally decided to open the university and it like a full-scale battle. Then there was this blended learning, online reading thing. **(PE 11)**

There were two sides to their response – there was the militarised response, and there was an engagement response. Management became more strategic about who they spoke to, who they opened doors for; they really pushed the idea of let's be more open, let's talk about things, the deliberative approach. **(PE 5)**

Based on the responses above, there were mixed feelings from PEs about how their leaders responded to the crisis. While some felt that their PLs showed no empathy and simply reacted by increasing security or calling the police and militarising their campuses, others

believed that their leaders were better prepared to deal with the crisis in 2016 than in 2015, and there was evidence of stronger decision-making.

The strategies included establishing operations teams, improving communication, consulting more widely with different stakeholders, and engaging with protestors. Except for University D, there was a decrease in the dependency on the police and private security services, and greater reliance on campus security personnel. From these actions, it is evident that there was a shift towards a crisis-leadership mode in PLs' approach to the crisis in 2016.

In comparing the responses from PLs and Pes, one can surmise that PLs were uncertain on how to lead in a crisis situation in 2015. The reasons for this uncertainty are briefly alluded to above, but will be analysed in greater detail in the following chapter. The shift or evolution of strategies in 2016 clearly demonstrates the value of collaborative and distributive leadership styles, as well as the benefits of working within and as a system during crises. This change was more aligned to a crisis-leadership mode of operating.

4.3.2   (RQ #2) What factors influenced leaders' responses during the crisis?

Research question	Theme
What factors influenced leaders' responses during the crisis?	Past protest experience Leadership training Organisational culture

When leaders were asked, *"What factors had an influence on the strategies they employed during the crisis?"* their responses revealed a diverse range of factors, with past protest experience, leadership training, and organisational culture emerging as significant themes.

Since past protest experience and leadership training related only to leaders, this was explored further with PLs only, whereas the issue of organisational culture was probed with both groups of participants. The responses from the participants of the six institutions revealed that the strategies that were applied during the crisis varied across institutions, and were influenced by many factors, some internal and others external.

While experiencing the general widespread protests for fee-free education, institutions also had to contend with issues that were unique to each and which created or shaped particular realities. These specific realities led to responses and strategies which could not be generalised to all institutions. Notwithstanding the uniqueness of each institution, there were certain crisis leadership strategies that were perceived to be effective while others were perceived as ineffective by both PLs and PEs.

4.3.2.1 Previous protest experience

As they contemplated their responses to the crisis, many PLs pointed to their own personal experiences either as student activists or as students who had experienced student protests themselves. When asked how this had influenced their strategies, they maintained that having experienced protest action as young students made them more empathetic, tolerant, and understanding of the students' plight, and it enabled them to have insights into group behaviour.

This is reflected in the following excerpts, taken from PLs at five universities:

> *I think it helps a lot to empathise with students. You can understand. But there is also a danger, which I saw at times; there is a risk that the previous experience can lead to perhaps too uncritical solidarity with protesting students. I sensed that amongst some colleagues. (PL 3)*

I constantly reflect on my past experience as a student activist, and then as a Union activist, and the failures of that movement. The fact that we called in the police, the fact that I said we are going to finish the academic programme, the fact that we said that we are going to protect the academy – all flowed out of past experiences, both in broader political struggles and in struggles around student protests, and my own experiences at other universities. (PL 16)

I think I can identify with the idea of young people and students being activists and pushing the boundaries, and being idealistic. I do identify with that and it certainly affected my response to them. I am much more tolerant of protests I think than some of my colleagues. (PL 12)

A lot of it has to do with my own experiences as a student, not just as a student activist. I can identify with a lot of the issues that students bring to the table. Some of them seem to be the same issues we dealt with as students so I cannot believe they still exist. So I have sympathy for the students. Just understanding their issues informs a lot of what I do. (PL 7)

The one thing I am acutely aware of and that arose out of the apartheid activity and student activity is that one has to understand the nature of the mob, and that the mob has a mind of the collective, and not of an individual. (PL 29)

The comments above reveal that PLs' strategies were not devoid of individual and personal emotions, and highlight that strategies may not be something easily learnt from textbooks since a wide array of factors play a role in individual responses. Bearing in mind what was discussed in Chapter One about the history and background of the educational landscape in South Africa, it is important to bear in mind that the events at universities were reminiscent of a divided past, that affected many of the current PLs.

4.3.2.2   Leadership training

In response to the RQ above, a few PLs indicated that they had received some training in leadership, both formal and informal, which had an impact on their responses to the crisis. However, the responses revealed mixed views on the impact that formal leadership training had on their ability to respond to the crisis. The type of training different leaders had received ranged from formal training, such as higher education leadership, conflict and diversity management, group dynamics, facilitation and mediation; to informal training, such as mentorship, and PLs' own lived experiences. Upon probing further to ascertain how beneficial the formal leadership training was in the crisis situation, the PLs had this to say:

> *I definitely think the whole thing of facilitation and mediation training I received at university B when I worked there helped me. I also did a formal leadership course offered locally and at an international (American) institution. I was able to draw on that as well as my experience.* ***(PL 3)***

> *I formally studied management where you study group dynamics, leadership, human resources, a bit of industrial psychology. Sure, I had a lot of formal training in systems thinking, understanding the bigger picture, problem solving – it was all relevant. The formal training came in very useful.* ***(PL 9)***

> *I had specific training that had to do with managing within a higher education context. I also received some training overseas which was quite relevant in terms of preparation for dealing with anything within higher education. It taught me that higher education is a dynamic environment, what happens in one area can impact the whole area – and how to provide leadership in such situations.* ***(PL 27)***

However, these PLs found that the training they received was not pertinent to leading in crisis situations:

*I don't think anything could have prepared us for it. I think just living through it probably gave me all the experience I needed. With due respect to all the books I have read, and all the courses I have attended, they were not helpful. **(PL 17)***

*I attended a leadership programme overseas and it did prepare me somewhat to see and perceive better as to what was really going on in terms of dynamics in the room, around the boardroom, when it is appropriate to speak or not to speak, and to understand complex leadership styles. So my leadership competencies were sharpened. **(PL 28)***

PLs from two different institutions stated that they had never received any formal training:

*I can't recall ever having been through formal leadership training. However, if you look at leadership training as a part of mentorship over multiple years – yes absolutely. The fact that I was immersed in those experiences was why I could see how different Vice Chancellors dealt with issues; I sat on Councils, and I learnt from those experiences. **(PL 16)***

*I have not had any formal training. My experiences of having worked within the system have helped me sharpen my skills. I don't think we reflect on our practices which is normal habits of the disciplined academic. So if I was asked to give a lecture on higher education leadership I wouldn't be able to because I don't reflect on my practice. It seems we do what is right, without knowing the background. There isn't an evidence base for why we do what we do. We have some foundation principles on governance and engagement, but beyond that there is no real researched-based evidence that says this strategy is better than that one. **(PL 29)***

The excerpts above show that, while in certain instances leadership training may have played a role in preparing leaders to perform their daily responsibilities, the training received by a few PLs was not specific to leading during crises.

While the first few comments provide some insight into group dynamics and building leaders' strengths and resilience, the subsequent excerpts demonstrated that many PLs had learnt behaviours from their lived experiences, and from their peers or mentors. The response from PL 37 indicates that there may be a need for evidence-based training for leaders in higher education instead of generic training. Notwithstanding the different experiences in training, it is clear that leadership training did have some impact on how these PLs responded to the crisis. This will be discussed in the following chapters.

4.3.2.3 Organisational culture

While each organisation's culture influenced how the crisis unfolded on different campuses, it also had an impact on the strategies that leaders implemented in responding to the crisis. This could be gauged from the responses from both PLs and PEs.

The community that the university served, together with the university's history, location, size, values, and reputation, all contributed to its particular ethos. This ethos could not be separated from the strategies that PLs used in diffusing the crisis, since every response was dictated by the uniqueness of each institution. The extracts below, taken from the PE group, reveal how organisational culture determined the actions of leaders.

> *When they brought in security, you could say it was like old South Africa style – where protestors get met with force. So given the history and context of our university the protestors most probably thought that nothing has changed. (PE 4)*

> *The security thing is that we will shut you down if you run against our rules; it is about respect for authority. So that part of the institutional culture came through quite strongly – that we don't accept rule breakers here; it is what kept our university stable. It is that part of the culture – respect for authority. (PE 5)*

> *The responses highlighted the lack of tolerance. And people don't want to give up privilege. We had a leadership that took a decision since they*

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understood the legitimacy of the issues students were raising, yet the governance structures such as Senate called for hard-line actions to be taken. So governance structures and leadership clashed on how to respond, and there were then calls made for motions of no confidence, because leadership wanted to negotiate and engage with protestors. (PE 1)

There was a culture of conversation, of dialogue, of persuasion instead of a culture of clamping down. Bringing in the police was a last resort. So we have a culture of negotiation here. (PE 2)

It is impossible to ignore the impact of organisational culture on how leaders responded to the crisis at different universities. From the excerpts above, it is clear that past experiences, staff dynamics, issues with race, age, gender and class all played out in the responses to the protests, and influenced leaders' decisions. Opposing views resulted in debates at governance structures and gave rise to additional tensions.

Some PLs identified organisational culture as being integral to how they responded to the crisis. The historical background and location of the university, coupled with the social class of students, all played significant roles in the strategies they employed.

PLs from three different universities had this to say:

Organisational culture played an enormous role in my response. It established the parameters of what is possible. I say that with a bit of caution because culture itself had to evolve in this period. Engagement with students is peculiar to certain universities because of their culture. The culture of a specific university could also be gauged in the public discourse that happened during and after the protests. I also think our culture forced us to respond more politically than others. Institutional culture in many cases, very significantly impacted on the evolution of the protest, its form, the tactics, and strategies we used, and the very form of our communication and management. (PL 16)

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It had been about 25 years since the police had last been on our campus, and there has been a very strong culture of not wanting police on campus, so when we did bring the police on for the first time, there was an outcry from many faculty members. There was a march by hundreds of academics who criticised us for obtaining interdicts and for having brought the police onto campus. (PL 12)

Culture had a significant impact. The idea of diversity and respect for everyone is something we push very hard, and that had an impact. For example, in diffusing the protest action in 2015 the SRC called a mass meeting. I asked them to check with the student body whether they wanted to go back to class or not. At the meeting one of the students spoke in Afrikaans and she was shouted down for speaking in 'the oppressor's language'. That resulted in a nice interaction around diversity and the meaning of language. So even out of that protest came a manifestation of the need for conversation around institutional culture. (PL 29)

These PLs' assertions of the role that organisational culture played in their decisions and strategies once again reflect the complexity of the crisis situation. Clearly a one-size-fits-all solution was not pragmatic or possible. The above extracts confirmed the assumption that the impact of organisational culture not only influenced how leaders responded to the crisis, but also how the crisis played itself out on each campus. Evidently, different institutions demanded different approaches in dealing with the crisis, depending on the institutional culture, the nature of the protest, its location, and a range of other factors.

While some leaders responded by putting together teams (committees or contingency committees) to respond to the crisis and to take the weight of decision-making from the shoulders of the Vice-Chancellor (or most senior leader in the leadership team), others seemed to have evolved from 2015 to 2016, making it necessary for leadership to work as a cohesive team. Other marked changes in the teams from 2015 to 2016 were increased and constant communication within the leadership team, and the broader community.

4.3.3 (RQ #3) What were the challenges and dilemmas experienced by leaders during the #FMF crisis, and why were they experienced as such?

Research question	Themes	Sub-theme
What were the challenges and dilemmas experienced by leaders during the #FMF crisis, and why were they experienced as such?	1. Communication	Internal communication vs External communication
	2. The macro (external) environment vs the micro (institutional) environment	

PLs were asked what their particular challenges and dilemmas were during the #FMF crisis and two distinct themes surfaced: communication, both internally among all stakeholders, and externally, with different role-players; and the tension that needed to be managed between the internal, micro environment and the external, macro environment. These will be discussed individually below.

4.3.3.1 Communication

Communication is often cited as one of the most important factors during a crisis, yet it was the one skill most lacking among leaders and institutions during the #FMF crisis. It emerged as an important theme, as it was an essential component of building cohesion among stakeholders. It played a significant role internally within institutions, as well as externally among institutions, the DHET, other relevant stakeholders, and the public. Most PEs criticised the poor communication skills and strategies available within and among institutions, especially in 2015. The lack of a communication strategy, and the failure to communicate effectively or timeously with internal stakeholders was cited by many PEs as a matter of concern. Information on the status of the crisis, of progress being made, what

leaders were doing to resolve matters, the reasons for certain actions, what the students were demanding, and how the government was responding was reported to be lacking.

It is important to recognise the impact of communication in its various guises:

- Communication within the institution – from the leadership to all stakeholder groups;
- Communication between and among universities – regionally and nationally;
- Communication from government to university leaders and to students, and *vice versa*; and
- External communication via various media platforms, e.g. television, print and social media.

These are some of the excerpts from PEs who believed that communication plays a significant role in any crisis situation, but was lacking at their institutions:

Communication to staff and to all students was lacking. Most students felt that management was only listening to the protestors and started questioning management's position on their rights. Information was not flowing enough. **(PE 6)**

We had developed a crisis communication plan early in 2015 but when the crisis hit nobody had even read the plan. We had it on paper, it was workshopped, but it wasn't distributed to the university and there was no buy-in so no one knew how to do anything. We had no way of communicating with people who were still left on campus, except via email. We didn't have a system in place to send SMSs to staff. **(PE 14)**

For me communication was lacking a lot. The university is on so many social media platforms but none gets updated, not even a tweet or even a Facebook page – we would only hear late in the afternoon what had happened. **(PE 22)**

One of the things lacking was communication, getting the narrative. There was quite a lot of one-sided communication, but not allowing other voices to come through independently as their own voice. The vice-

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chancellors should have been sitting with the Minister of Higher Education from the minute this thing erupted. Why they wanted to keep it at institution level and allow the universities to be torn apart when the problem was really at that level, I don't know. …students were highly frustrated with the lack of communication from the Minister of Education together with the President who did not take their concerns seriously. (PE 11)

Communication! Communication! Communication! That should be the golden rule, and communication at different levels. The communication of leadership with its staff, so that we can stand together and understand where we are going; the communication within the universities of South Africa in terms of what is happening at a political level; the communication to the masses telling them that we do not have the ability to give free education – that they should approach the Minister of Higher Education and Training who has that power. (PL 26)

Some PLs also recognised that communication during the crisis was of paramount importance, but noted that there was no effective communication strategy at their institutions, or if these existed, they were unable to compete with students' use of social media platforms, and they expressed this gap quite candidly. Traditional communication media, such as television and print media, as well as all social media platforms made it difficult for university communication experts to own the discourse of the student protests. However, the deficiencies in this area were identified in 2015 and much work was done to improve communication strategies in 2016:

We were quite focused on communicating better in 2016 than in 2015. We really tried to get out messages to campus and to the public via the web and social media quickly. There was someone from Communications on the contingency committee. There was WhatsApp groups with staff, and with deans. From a communications perspective they did well. (PL 8)

Another thing we had quite strongly is our communication, our ability to engage the broader public, our ability to have a discourse. The students were brilliant in 2015 around the use of social media, but we quickly began to start holding our own in public discourse. In 2015 our communication wasn't that good, but by 2016 we had improved. (PL 16)

I would say the mark of our failure was that most people go to student websites to find out what was happening because the student reps were giving information in real time whereas our communication was just not good or fast enough. Communication was very weak in 2015, and improved a lot in 2016, but still not good enough. Not enough communication, not often enough, and especially not good enough usage of social media. I just think we did not really have crisis communication. (PL 12)

We knew each other better as an executive and we probably thought we would respond better, but what was different was that the students were a bit more sophisticated. One more thing which is an incompetence of leadership is communication…we can never win the social media communication processes. So from a competency perspective we really need to get that better. (PL 28)

The comments from the PLs above reveal that communication was weak at most of the universities involved in this study. These PLs acknowledged that their institutions needed to focus on developing or improving their crisis-communication strategies, something PEs also highlighted. It can also safely be accepted that a gap existed in communication within and among institutions, both regionally and nationally, especially in 2015, which may have contributed to the disjuncture in how universities responded to a common issue.

Furthermore, the silence in 2015 from the Ministry of Higher Education and Training when the protests began may also have encouraged students to target universities on funding issues over which universities had little or no control. Effective communication strategies within universities, especially during a crisis, are seen to be critical. This will be elaborated further in the next chapter.

4.3.3.2 The macro external environment vs the micro (institutional) environment

Leaders experienced various dilemmas and challenges during the crisis. In some instances, the dilemmas were experienced at personal levels, such as understanding and supporting the cause for the protests, yet having a responsibility to protect property and therefore calling in the police and having students arrested, or trying to achieve consensus among colleagues on the leadership team.

Other dilemmas revolved around macro issues and involved the external environment, such as the status of higher education in the country, and universities' relationships with DHET, or other civic organisations. While leaders at individual institutions had to deal with dilemmas on how to respond in ways that were empathetic and supportive given the social justice issues that were being raised, one of the greatest dilemmas was balancing the internal (micro) environment of each university with the demands of the larger, external (macro) environment, such as DHET, donors, business, civic society, political parties/groupings, etc.

PLs were asked about the challenges and dilemmas they faced:

> *Another dilemma was having additional security on campus, while not wanting the campus to be militarised. Yet the academic project had to be protected. We had to allow for protests, ensuring the democratic right to protest is exercised, but not at the expense of buildings, of those who wanted to write their exams, etc.* **(PL 3)**

> *In 2015 the dilemma was – how to allow a social movement oriented to fundamental issues of social justice to operate while ensuring that its tactics and strategies by factions that are extreme, do not completely undermine the movement itself? How do I as vice-chancellor recognise the right of students and staff to protest, but at the same time don't allow the extreme actors within their midst to define the narrative and to begin to create a set of actions that fundamentally impair the university for all time?*

Immediately after this in 2015 the dilemma was, 'do you bring in the police and the private security, especially when things became violent? Throughout this period we had to grapple with how political parties were using a moment at legitimate social struggle to score political cache points, to advance their own political agendas – sometimes related to what the students wanted and often having nothing to do with the students and having their political goals outlined, using the student movement as an excuse to advance those other agendas. **(PL 16)**

Another immediate challenge was to think about how 'do you keep this place viable and sustainable when you are spending so much money on security? …you place twelve senior people at a university around a table and they are not necessarily going to have a consensus view on very difficult issues. **(PL 13)**

How do I protect the academic project, while trying to understand and meet the demands of the students and put an end to protests that are unpredictable? …one of the problems I didn't anticipate that manifested itself was of students who wanted to go to lectures and started arriving armed. I had to get them off the boil as well because they were willing to hurt other students in order to continue going to class. **(PL 29)**

Many of the dilemmas reported by PLs show the uneasy marriage between leaders' goals the decisions made in line with the weighting given to each of the goals. Additionally, the dilemmas cannot be divorced from the strategies that leaders adopted and how the protestors did or were likely to respond to those strategies.

The introduction of security on campuses (security companies or police) produced its own set of dilemmas for a few PLs, while a further challenge was that non-protesting students wanted protection from protesting students. A few PLs realised that some political parties were using protests to further their own agendas. This opened the protests to non-students

and introduced the dilemma of how to protect the protesting students and their right to protest while protecting the university – property, staff, protesting, and non-protesting students, as well as the academic project.

Clearly, PLs experienced challenges at both external (macro) and the internal (micro) levels; the challenges were varied and complex. At a macro level, leaders felt helpless as the financial issues around access to higher education, fees and free education were national governmental issues and beyond their control, yet the protestors targeted individual universities. Additionally, the protest was often quoted as being the first, largest national uprising among higher education institutions since the new democracy, which helped explain the lack of preparedness among leaders.

At a micro level, institutional challenges included getting all members of the leadership team to support decisions taken by the majority of its members, having the levels of skills and/or training necessary to deal with violent protests, and responding to stakeholder groups, such as parents, alumni, donors, students and staff. Additionally, ensuring collective agreement and support from a leadership team can raise its own set of challenges.

A closer look at the challenges and dilemmas shows that while some them were around issues over which leaders had little or no control, such as the politics of the land or the funding issues, some challenges were as a result of issues within the control of the leadership, such as lack of preparedness in dealing with a crisis, poor communication strategies, or cohesion in the leadership team. How these issues may be resolved will be considered in the recommendations chapter.

4.4 Synthesis of findings

For ease of reference, the consolidated findings are presented in table 4.1 below.

SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

CRISIS MANAGEMENT vs CRISIS LEADERSHIP

The development of this theme over the two years demonstrated the changes in leaders' behaviour from 2015 to 2016. It further exposed the gaps that exist in the training and development of leaders in the higher education sector.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

The organisational culture of each institution indicated that while crises should be dealt with systemically, there is no doubt that each institution is unique and its varied nuances make crisis leadership strategies different for different institutions.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING AND STYLE

The findings revealed the strengths and weaknesses of formal leadership programmes which some PLs had participated in, and the opportunities the crisis has presented for future programme development.
Leaders' individual leadership styles were also highlighted as being essential components of crisis leadership.

PAST PROTEST EXPERIENCE

This refers to the personal experiences of PLs when they were students and how this influenced their responses to the crisis.

COMMUNICATION

The findings reinforced the firm belief that sound communication strategies are core to resolving crises.

THE (EXTERNAL) MACRO ENVIRONMENT vs THE (INTERNAL) INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

7.1 The impact of the external environment on the institutional operations was evidenced in the tensions PLs experienced in responding to the crisis.

4.5 Crisis management model

The proposed crisis-management model below may provide some assistance in planning for a crisis, and reviewing responses after the crisis has passed.
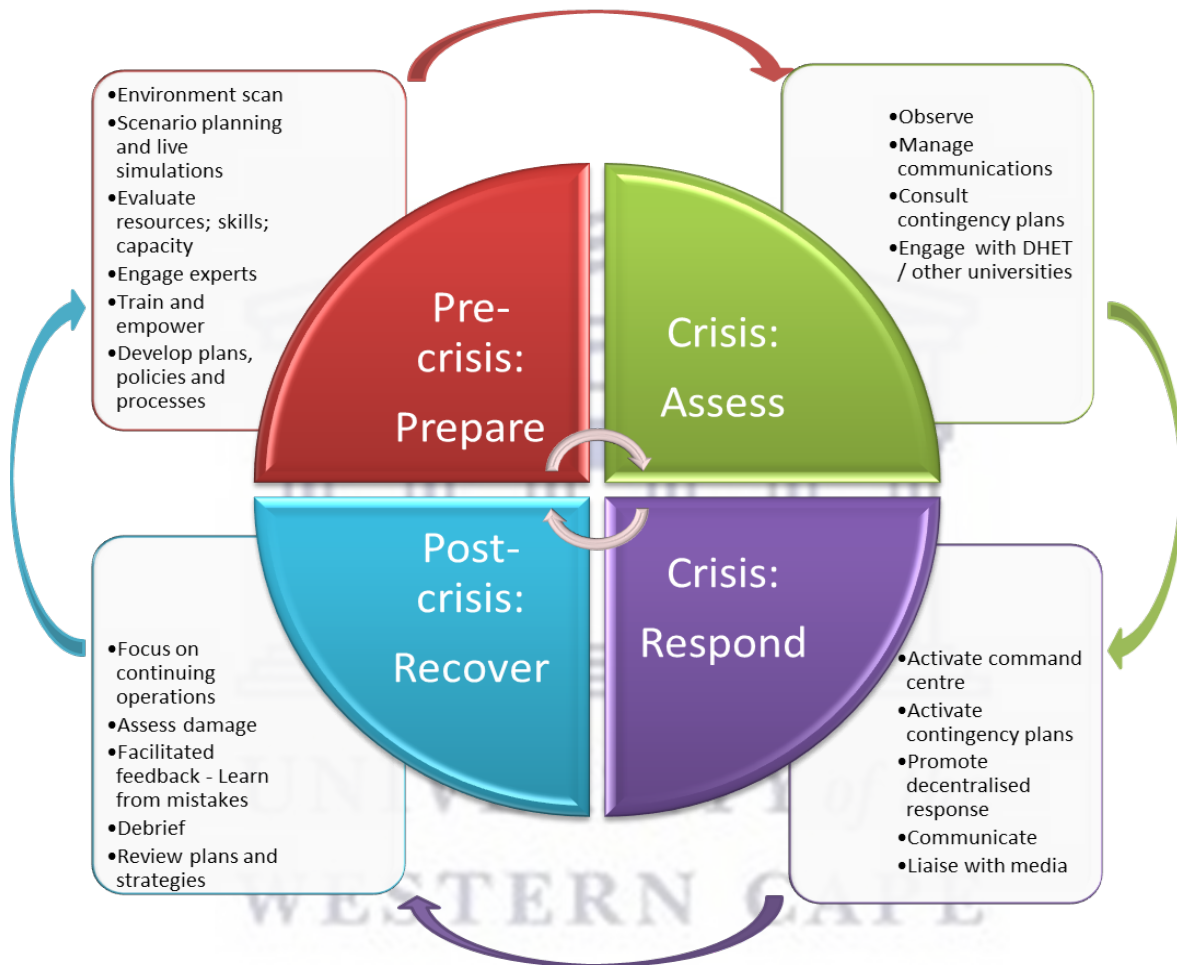

Figure 5.1 Crisis management model for universities in South Africa

The model depicts the four stages of crisis-planning.

Pre-crisis phase (the preparatory phase):
- the crisis management/operations team should conduct regular internal and external environmental scans to identify imminent threats;

http://etd.uwc.ac.za/

- the team should assess and test the available resources, skills and capacity required for different crisis scenarios. All deficiencies should be identified and addressed;

- expertise from across the institution should be identified and prepared/trained;

- staff should receive appropriate training to empower them to take suitable action during any crisis;

- this should be followed by live simulations for all types of crisis scenarios;

- there should also be an evaluation of existing policies, and where deficiencies exist, new policies should be developed and communicated across the institution;

- strategies and business continuity plans should be developed and communicated to all staff;

- communication for various constituencies to be drafted and ready to be adapted and dispatched once a crisis occurs; and

- staff must be made aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Crisis phase (assessment stage):

- as soon as a crisis occurs, the team should make an assessment of the extent and breadth of the crisis;

- the communications team goes into action to inform all constituencies of what is happening, and how it is being managed;

- contingency plans must be consulted to identify a suitable response; and

- depending on the nature of the crisis, relevant individuals to consult with the DHET and other universities to coordinate efforts.

Crisis phase (response stage):

- the command centre must be activated for strategic decisions and instructions to be conveyed to the operations team;

- contingency plans to be activated;

- activate expertise from across the institution;

- regularly communicate with all stakeholders, as well as with the media; and

- participate in, monitor and respond to social media platforms.

Post-crisis phase:

- continue operations while the institution normalises;
- operations team to assess damages and advise the executive/senior management team;
- focus groups across the institution should engage in feedback sessions to assess strengths and weaknesses in planning and processes;
- facilitated trauma debriefing, where necessary, to allow for emotional healing; and
- all plans and strategies to be reviewed and amended, as necessary.

It is important to note that crises are unpredictable, fluid and unique. There should be continuous discussion, evaluation, review and improvement of plans after each crisis. Planning for crises should become an integral part of annual planning for every institution.

4.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the main research findings were presented. The study findings suggest that the main goal for leadership teams across the six institutions was to protect the academic project. To achieve this and other goals, leadership teams adopted a number of strategies that were either action-oriented (such as disciplinary action), or student-engagement oriented (e.g. platforms for dialogue and continuous communication). They also adopted strategies around the teams responsible for leading the response to the crisis, such as putting together diverse contingency committees, having an expert communications team, and holding daily/regular meetings. Management teams encountered dilemmas and challenges that were both within and beyond their control. These included the scale of the protests, the diversity of protestors, the rigidity of the bureaucracy of the institution, as well as external political forces.

The 29 participants in this study offered deep insight into how their universities experienced crisis leadership during the 2015 crisis, and how it differed in 2016. They felt that the roles

played by the government, vice-chancellors, leadership teams, and employees; the use of various communication and media platforms; the university's culture; the inevitable variability of crises; and the newness of a national crisis all played a critical role in how university leaders responded to the crisis, both in 2015 and then again in 2016. Their perspectives helped to answer the three research questions, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This study intended to help understand crisis leadership in the South African higher education environment. It set out to scrutinise the perceptions of a sample of 16 employees (PE) from six universities, selected from both the academic and support sectors, and 13 university leaders (PL). Each participated in a 90 minute qualitative interview aimed at answering three research questions, and respondent data was considered within the chaos and complexity theory framework. The preceding chapters carried detailed accounts of the background of higher education in post-apartheid South Africa, of the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) crisis, of leadership theories, and of crisis leadership. Chapter Four offered an overview of the study's findings through the four themes and their sub-themes that arose from the interviews.

The themes were:

- Crisis management vs crisis leadership;
- past protest experience, leadership training and style, and organisational culture;
- communication; and
- the macro environment vs the micro (institutional) environment.

This chapter analyses these themes to highlight the gaps that exist in crisis leadership at South African universities. Although the responses to the crisis by the participants are context-specific each institution, the broader implications for the South African higher education landscape were comprehensively considered within the overall analytical frame.

5.2 Theme #1: Crisis Management vs Crisis Leadership

Sub-theme: The evolution of strategies from 2015 to 2016

In response to the research question, *"What strategies were employed by university leaders during the #FMF crisis?",* the researcher traced the development of leaders' strategies from 2015 through to 2016, and investigated the crisis management vs crisis leadership theme. To track any change in strategies that may have occurred and understand whether the approach to the crisis was from a crisis-management or crisis-leadership dimension, this chapter will examine the responses of participants within the 2015-2016 timeframe.

Bundy *et al.* (2017) maintain that an organisational crisis—an event perceived by managers and stakeholders as highly salient, unexpected, and potentially disruptive—can threaten an organisation's goals and have profound implications for its relationships with stakeholders. They further contend that the three main principles inherent in defining a crisis are its 'unexpected', 'disruptive', and 'threatening' nature (Bundy *et al.*, 2017: page number). In accepting the above assertions, it follows that the #FMF protests presented a crisis in the South African higher education sector in 2015 and in 2016. How university leaders responded to the unexpected, disruptive, and threatening protests on campuses across the country shaped how the crisis ended and what remained in its aftermath. The plans of action or strategies adopted by PLs in response to the crisis in each year, and the concomitant challenges in implementing such strategies, showed distinct changes from one year to the next.

In 1996, Mitroff *et al.* held that the term 'crisis' has multiple and subjective meanings, but Zdziarski's (2006) definition of crisis seemed much more applicable to the higher education environment, and his description was the comparative point around which responses to the first part of this research question were analysed. For Zdziarski, crises affect the organisation's normal operations and are usually unexpected (2006). Thus, it is interesting that almost all participants in this study agreed that they were completely surprised in 2015

when the crisis erupted, and the prolonged nature of the crisis over two years resulted in significant differences in how PLs responded from one year to the next.

In a follow-up question, the researcher asked PLs to reflect on how they would respond should the crisis recur in the following year, and their responses revealed that they recognised their lack of preparedness, the absence of crisis management teams or plans, and poor communication strategies. Prior to the #FMF protests, all PLs had not considered the need for contingency plans or committee structures to manage crises. There was almost a belief that universities were immune to large-scale crises, or perhaps a lack of realisation that universities could experience large-scale crises. This can perhaps be ascribed to the history of the country, and the collapse of the previous apartheid system and its impact on the education sector contributed to the fallacy that the new order was delivering on its promises. The crisis was a shock revelation that this was not so, and it highlighted the inequities within the higher education system that continued to exclude poor and marginalised communities. It also revealed the economic and social chasms in South African society.

The low priority that PLs placed on the need for a crisis management strategy or structure prior to the #FMF crisis was evident in the chaotic responses to the crisis once it began. Wang and Hutchins (2010) stated that prior to any disaster, a successful crisis management plan exposes weaknesses within the current system and builds capabilities to deal with a wide variety of resultant and interrelated situations. The need for crisis managers, contingency committees, and business continuity plans or strategies was only identified once the crisis occurred, confirming much of the literature which advises that crisis leadership in the absence of a crisis management strategy or plan can result in chaos (Pearson, 2000; Porche, 2009; Parks, 2013).

A few PLs believed that, while this held true for 2015, their teams and strategies evolved from 2015 to 2016, and the experience exposed the existing gaps and areas that required development beyond 2016. Boin and Hart (2003) state that crises are both dynamic and chaotic, representing a disruption of the organisation in several ways, while Stern (2013) asserts that a crisis represents both the fragility and resilience of societies and

organisations. The ability of leaders to recognise deficiencies and establish corrective measures is consistent with Smith and Riley's (2012) views on the role leaders should play in responding to crises, as discussed in Chapter Two.

The findings clearly demonstrate that the strategies employed by most PLs in 2015 differed significantly from those in 2016.

The main differences between the two years are shown in the Table 5.1 below:

2015	2016
Responded reactively	Became more proactive in responses
Responding individually as institutions	Responding collectively either as a region or as a national sector
Increased security on campus as the immediate response	Carefully considered plans and strategies
Leaders responded in the front-line (being individualistic)	Leaders stepped back and delegated responsibilities to role experts or teams, such as Dean of Students; Head of Security; Operations Team
No policies on managing disciplinary issues	Guidelines and policies were developed and followed
No business continuity plans (BCPs)	Development of BCPs
No or limited communication strategies	Improved communication strategies
Crisis management mode of operating	Shift towards crisis leadership mode of operating

Table 5.1 Differences in strategies between 2015 and 2016

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2015 responses were reactive, developed in isolation for individual institutions, increasing security on campus, and making quick, ill-considered decisions that impacted the entire higher education system. PLs' responses in 2016 indicated that they had learnt essential lessons from the previous year that informed a more proactive and collective stance. Moreover, lessons from 2015 encouraged PLs to judiciously and systematically think through and develop strategies for a more considered and coordinated response in 2016.

The improved strategies employed in 2016 were undoubtedly informed from other pertinent lessons learnt in 2015. For instance, some PLs realised their role as crisis leaders was not about frontline management of the crisis, and they therefore deployed joint operations teams to manage the crisis operationally, while they consulted and deliberated on long-term solutions around the larger transformational issues raised by students. Some PLs also implemented disciplinary action as a strategy, where appropriate.

Having learnt from 2015, one institution reviewed its policies on disciplinary action in 2016. One PL used the words 'restorative justice' and 'consequences' in describing their disciplinary code, while for another institution there was a combination of discipline and dialogue. The latter strategy implied that the crisis highlighted the existence of deficits in the university that certain PLs may not have been aware of or had previously not acknowledged as important, such as listening to the student voice. By being open to 'dialogue' with students in 2016, these PLs began embarking on a road to changing components of the institutional culture, a positive outcome of the crisis.

Across the six institutions, the findings revealed that in 2016 there were more meetings, better planning, the appointment of contingency teams, and improved communication strategies, both internally with all stakeholder groups, as well as externally among all universities, and with the DHET. In some institutions, crisis management sub-committees became pivotal when confronting the crisis. The findings also revealed that as protests

gained momentum, some PLs employed a combination of strategies which were interlinked and involved persons from a cross-sector of the institution. These PLs ensured that other staff members became involved by recognising their strengths and allowing them to lead in certain areas, reflecting a collaborative and distributive leadership style that allowed for a shared vision and collective ownership by all staff as they contributed to the solution. It revealed that crisis leadership is not static, hierarchical and based on plans, but is characterised by dynamic power transitions based on the needs of the immediate situation. Individuals with the requisite skills, competencies and legitimacy should be allowed to drive the changes that are required. This dynamic form of leadership is enabled by having a trained pool of leaders, plans that allow for improvisation, and crisis management norms, values, and culture. Clearly, effective leadership involves leaders from across the organisation working outside of their own to contribute to collective efforts.

Implicit in this action is the basis of Kauffman's (2000) chaos and complexity theory, where he speaks of organisational behaviours that are non-linear and unexpected, acting chaotically yet in an orderly fashion. Rooted in the underlying patterns of chaos, these behaviours facilitate the renewal of an organisational system into a new chaotic order. Many of the PLs and PEs pointed to the emergence of such new structures and interdependencies, reinforcing Seeger's (2002) view that through the process of self-organisation new forms, structures, procedures, hierarchies, relationships, and understandings emerge, giving a new, sometimes rejuvenated and more successful form to the system. The notion of a shared vision, as postulated by Ascough (2002) in Chapter Two, is what became necessary, appropriate and desirable during the crisis.

The protests were described by some PLs as violent, involving arson and damage to property, particularly in 2016. Staff and students who were not part of the protests also demanded protection. At one of the institutions, non-protesting students began to arm themselves and the PL noted the need to not focus exclusively on protesting students. Since the majority of PLs cited one of their goals as protecting university property, staff, and students, almost all PLs contracted private security companies and also brought the police

onto campuses. Although this was a common strategy employed at most universities, it posed a dilemma for most PLs who sought to strike a balance between having security to protect the university and everyone on campus, and attempting to foster dialogue with the protestors.

Significantly, most PLs and PEs indicated that increasing security and enlisting the assistance of the police was not their first choice. However, they were acutely aware that protection was a priority and that leaders face a public expectation to keep their campuses safe. Although the education of students is a university's ultimate goal, PLs were focused on establishing an institutional culture of safety and wellbeing, as highlighted by one PL in the previous chapter.

While university leaders are cognisant of the safety of students and staff, there is an urgent need to develop contingency plans which incorporate physical and emotional safety issues, and ensure that the appropriate support structures are available and known to everyone. In my opinion, university leaders had not previously realised that the roles they play outside of a crisis situation are different from what they are expected to execute during a crisis situation. This may primarily be due to not having previously experienced a wide-scale crisis during their tenure, meaning they needed to deal with unfamiliar or specialised tasks, and know what resources were available within each institution, as well as in the system. They also needed to understand how to reach out to others to share the burden and respond constructively.

The responses clearly indicate the steep learning curve that most PLs experienced from 2015 to 2016. From being caught by surprise and responding *ad hoc* and individualistically, to developing communications and contingency strategies, consulting with colleagues and peers, collaborating as a sector via USAf, and engaging with the DHET in finding common solutions to a systemic problem, there was a shift from being reactive to being proactive, prepared, and deliberate. As pointed out by Smith and Riley (2012) it is imperative that during a crisis leaders focus on the immediate present and on minimising harm to individuals. Ensuring the recovery of the *status quo* during a crisis is important. The reactive position of many of the PLs, especially in 2015, therefore underlines the fact that most PLs

had never experienced a campus crisis situation of this magnitude before, nor were they trained for one, as we will see in the next theme. The reactiveness of many PLs in 2015 reflected their unpreparedness and lack of crisis-leadership competence, and only in 2016 did they realise the need for contingency teams and plans.

In 2015, they simply did not know how to respond, apart from protecting the property and people, and completing the academic year. As a few PLs and PEs pointed out, some campuses shut down, or moved operations to off-site venues, while others had their leadership team operate from off-campus venues while other staff either remained at home or continued to function without any leadership. The sudden onset of the crises in 2015 meant there was no opportunity to implement calculated, intentional responses. This aligns with the principles of chaos theory that organisational behaviours that are seemingly nonlinear and unexpected act chaotically.

Crisis management or crisis leadership?

The response to a crisis by those in charge could have assumed either a crisis-management or a crisis-leadership approach. Deciding on an approach during a crisis may depend on a number of factors, such as the maturity of the organisation, and its systems, levels of preparedness, planning, and experience. Klann's (2003) definition of crisis leadership identifies three essential components: communication, clarity of vision and values, and caring relationships. Crisis management is different from crisis leadership as the former focuses on planning; controlling; leading; organising; and motivating prior to, during, or after a crisis. With crisis leadership, the leader provides vision and influence in a non-coercive manner to provide strategic decision-making and guidance across the phases of the crisis. Crisis leadership includes crisis management, but extends beyond to cultivate the followers' desire to achieve a vision and mission in a time of crisis (Weiss, 2002; Porche, 2009). By examining PLs' responses to the crisis in 2015 and in 2016, the researcher sought to determine whether they operated from a crisis management or a crisis leadership platform.

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The #FMF crisis tested leaders and forced them to find effective responses that protected others and minimised consequences. The vast majority of PLs cited protecting the academic project and bringing a conclusion to the protest as their main goal, while a few claimed that understanding the needs of the students and ending the protests was priority, and that protecting the academic project was secondary. The majority of PLs were aware of the learning, teaching and research mandate of their universities and were determined that the academic year should be brought to a successful close. They operated in isolation, focusing on their own institutions with little or no consultation with other institutions' leaders, and their primary focus was on minimising disruptions and damage at their individual institutions.

In responding to the crisis, their efforts were focused on ensuring that the normal business of the university, such as research projects, assessments, promotions, and graduations, continued without disruption. These actions, along with the criticism repeated by many PLs and PEs of the lack of a sound communication strategy, poor team work, and scant consultation, pointed to leaders adopting a crisis-management approach to the crisis. The findings suggest that in 2015, the strategies employed by the majority of the PLs demonstrated that they were operating from a crisis-management mode. However, a shift was observed in 2016 by many PLs and Pes, as communication strategies had improved, and PLs began operating as teams and delegating responsibilities according to strengths and expertise available at institutions. PLs realised the benefit of consulting with other university leaders in the system, as well as with the DHET, and sought solutions for the broader issues that the crisis highlighted, while delegating the day-to-day management of the operational matters to specialists or experts within each university. Recognising the legitimacy of the cause of the students, allowing for engagement with protesting students and, as one vice-chancellor put it, "Finding solutions to the systemic crisis" that the student protestors were emphasising became the focus of PLs who changed their approach in 2016 from managing the crisis to leading in the crisis.

According to Yukl (2006), crisis situations impose added stresses and strains on organisations, their people, and a leader's ability to consult with others in determining well-

conceived, thoughtful decisions. Since the entire higher education system was impacted, they realised that knee-jerk responses to finding individual solutions could not be effective. It required an understanding of the systemic issues and impact, and demanded innovative ways of thinking and responding.

Many PLs admitted to reactively responding to the immediate physical and operational challenges that the crisis unleashed. The evolution to a more strategically-focused approach in 2016 was indicative of the impact that their experience of a first major crisis in 2015 had on PLs and the higher education system collectively. It revealed that leading in a crisis required in-depth understanding that a crisis is a three-step process, and that developing plans to address the pre-crisis phase is as important as knowing how to deal with the crisis, as well as the post-crisis phase. This is echoed by Senge's (1990) views on systems thinking, where he explained how systems thinking, an integral component of chaos theory, helps recognise how our own actions shape and contribute to the current reality, providing confidence in generating a different reality in the future.

The main principles of chaos theory were evident in the way the crisis precipitated, how it unfolded, and how it ended. The national significance of the protests, which initially erupted at individual institutions and later spread to almost all universities, highlighted the issues of inequality and lack of transformation in the country, a scenario that Naicker (2016) describes thus:

> What began as a sit-in and protest against proposed fee hikes at the
> University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg soon led to a complete halt
> of activities on campus. Seven major universities shut down on 21 October
> 2015, with almost all HEIs joining the #nationalshutdown soon after.

A single protest against an increase in tuition fees at one institution ended in a national shut-down, conveying the complexity of intersecting non-linear realities. This aligns with with one of the main principles of chaos theory, a study of non-linear dynamic systems, which maintains that a relatively small but well-timed or well-placed jolt to a system can throw the entire system into a state of chaos.

It was evident that the individual, institutional response to the crisis in 2015 was unsuitable. Instead, a collective and nationally-coordinated response, with guided leadership from DHET was necessary, as demonstrated in 2016. From 2016, PLs worked collaboratively as a team to share information of their individual experiences on their campuses, of how they were managing certain scenarios, about what they believed would be the most appropriate response for the system, and ultimately demanding a national response from DHET. The main objective was to bring an end to the protests that were impacting the entire higher education system. The responsibility was placed on the DHET to guide and collaborate with university leaders in resolving the crisis.

While the goals among the leaders of the six institutions may have differed in the detail, they were generally common because of the pervasive implications these goals had for the sector.

The intersecting gaps that were evident included:

- a lack of a collective voice and response to a systemic issue;

- an initial lack of collaboration among university leaders;

- poor communication strategies among and to stakeholders; and

- weak guidance and leadership from DHET.

If not addressed by university leaders and the Ministry of Higher Education and Training, these gaps could lead to a frailty within universities, which in time could cause a collapse of a sector which significantly contributes to the transformation of South African society.

Responding individualistically to the crisis in 2015, while being aware that the issues were pervasive across the higher education system, was the greatest weakness of university leaders and a reminder of how ill-prepared they were to lead during a crisis. The absence of consultation, both regionally and nationally, revealed the lack of understanding of how to lead in crisis situations, as well as the absence of a crisis leadership strategy and/or focus.

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PLs were focused on operationally managing the crisis at their institutions on a day-to-day basis in 2015, and their lack of coherent crisis management strategies, plans and expertise impacted on how the crisis unfolded, thereby creating new realities at each institution.

The changes in strategies in 2016 certainly had a positive influence on Pls' effectiveness as crisis-leaders. Introducing contingency teams and plans, and better communication strategies, contributed towards an improvement in the 2016 crisis-leadership strategies. Advance, proactive, and regular planning became non-negotiable instruments for organisations to suitably prepare for a crisis situation. The value of this and other factors, such as leadership training, and the culture of each institution, and the impact these can have on crisis-leadership strategies, cannot be understated.

5.3 Theme #2: Past protest experience, leadership training and style, and organisational culture

This theme emanated from the research question, *"What factors influenced leaders' responses to the crisis?"* Various interconnected contextual factors, such as location, class, heritage, culture, demographics, and size of institution, as well as personal or intrinsic factors such as past experiences, leadership training and leadership styles, collectively influenced how PLs responded to the crisis at each institution. These factors also contributed to what each PL identified as top priorities, and influenced their levels of preparedness. Resources, both available and desired, also added to how efficiently and effectively each university operationalised their response systems. Finally, three main factors emerged as markedly significant in how PLs responded to the crisis: their past protest experience, leadership training and style, and organisational culture. These will be discussed separately below.

5.3.1 Past protest experience

The majority of PLs considered their past protest experience to have had a sobering effect on how they responded to the crisis. Most claimed that having had previous protest experience when they were students allowed them to be more empathetic and considerate

of the actions of the protestors. A number of PLs shared other experiences of protests, not only when they were student activists, but from their roles in political groupings, and as researchers or analysts, which made them more considerate of the students' actions and the issues that the protesting students were fighting for. One PL described how well he understood the dynamics of the protestors when they acted as a collective, explaining that his own past experience had sensitised him to 'the nature of the mob, and that the mob has a mind that is of the collective and not of the individual'. According to this PL, understanding mob mentality and behaviour was imperative to separating the individual protestor from the collective. He maintained that understanding that behaviour enables a leader to respond appropriately.

PLs' experiences, while provided them with understanding and insight into what was happening, also caused deep dilemmas. They were expected to provide security and protection to non-protesting individuals, ensure that the normal university operations continued, and account to various stakeholder groups, such as parents, alumni and donors, all while they were negotiating with the protestors. Their leadership roles demanded that they pay attention to a multitude of relationships, and not only focus on the protestors. How effectively they were able to address these sometimes conflicting demands depended on other factors, such as leadership style, leadership training and teamwork.

5.3.2 Leadership training and style

Several PLs discussed the benefits that formal leadership training had on how they responded to the crisis. Those PLs who had received formal leadership training maintained that it provided them with the ability, skills and insights to lead their institutions during the crisis, but they had not received any particular training in crisis-leadership. These PLs commented in varying degrees on the effectiveness of their training in the crisis situation. They found that the programmes they attended were generically designed to develop self-awareness, personal strengths, understanding of and operating in complex organisations.

One PL emphasised the need for particular crisis-leadership training, and was considering contracting external experts to support his university in 2017 if the crisis recurred. This seems to suggest that a void exists in the training of university leaders to effectively lead in crisis situations, which the DHET should consider addressing when it prepares the next generation of university leaders.

The effectiveness of PLs' strategies during this crisis was jointly dependent on extrinsic factors, such as those already mentioned above, as well as such intrinsic factors, such as leadership style and personalities, to which past protest experience and leadership training may have contributed. Therefore, training is only one aspect of preparing leaders to crisis-lead and should not be viewed as the ultimate solution to leading in a crisis. Other factors, like leadership style, the macro environment, organisational culture, and the availability of resources, all affect the situation. As discussed in Chapter Two, Marriner-Tomey's (2009) integrative leadership theory concluded that leaders' awareness of their own behaviour in conjunction with other external factors, and the power it has in influencing people and situations, determines how effective they can be. Kouzes and Posner (1993) understand credibility as the foundation of all leadership, which implies that leaders should build the trust and confidence that others look for in them.

While these personal values can occasionally be learned through training, books, courses, and seminars, the innate characteristics formed over time through the leader's own academic, professional and personal experiences have significant impact on their roles as leaders. Thus, individual leadership styles and the role they played in PLs' adoption of strategies during the crisis cannot be ignored. Smith and Riley (2012) support this view, and believe that effective educational leadership in times of crisis is more about the attributes that the leader can bring to bear on the situation than it is about theoretical models to guide leadership responses.

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Since not all leadership styles are suited to leading in crisis situations, leaders will often have to adapt their normal leadership styles in different situations (Sternberg & Vroom, 2002; Muffet-Willett, 2010), and some PLs reported that they had to alter their regular leadership styles during the crisis to suit the situation. Being placed in situations where their individual and natural leadership tendencies were put to the test required them to adopt styles and behaviours that sometimes conflicted with their normal styles and personalities. This was clearly demonstrated during the crisis when certain PLs, who would normally have led from the front, had to retreat during the 2016 crisis and allow others to assume certain responsibilities. Being cognisant of the peculiarities of the situation is therefore necessary when leading in a crisis. In accepting that it was a national crisis affecting the entire higher education system, PLs' modus operandi was to a large extent influenced by external factors.

Leading in this scenario demanded more than the personal competence and skills that would normally be associated with leaders, and this echoed what Avolio *et al*. (2009) describes as the evolution of leadership, which they see as shared, dyadic, relational, strategic, global, and a complex social dynamic, rather than simply individual characteristics or differences. The complexity of the crisis situation was further exacerbated by the educational environment within which universities generally operated. This reinforced the instrumental and integrative leadership styles that many of the PLs adopted during the crisis.

Instrumental leadership entails scanning the external environment, identifying opportunities, choosing the right strategy and then providing the needed information, tools and resources to get the job done (Antonakis & House, 2014). In this instance, the authors maintain that leadership required knowing which strategy would make the organisation adapt to the external environment, and then aligning that strategy with actions. PLs had to be attuned to what was happening in real-time, both inside and outside their institutions, and then strategise appropriately.

With integrative leadership, the leader, the follower, and the situation all influence leadership effectiveness (Marriner-Tomey, 2009). If a person is the sum of their experiences, then training, education, exposure, engagements, the environment and personal character traits collectively play significant roles in shaping and building such an individual. With training being only one aspect of an individual's development, it can be reasonably assumed that training alone may not be able to fully equip an individual to lead in a crisis. As could be gleaned from the comments made by both PEs and PLs, the context, followers, students, macro environment, as well as the personal attributes of PLs affected how the institution was led during the crisis.

Adopting instrumental and integrative leadership styles during the #FMF crisis was congruent with the theoretical framework of the study. Crises often result in forcing normally linear and hierarchical environments to be re-constructed along non-linear and relational lines for effective resolution. Linear and hierarchical university structures had to collapse to allow for wider and broader consultations and delegation of powers. As universities are hierarchical by nature, PLs had to ensure that traditional centres of power were broken down and re-created at various points where different expertise resided, with the regular hierarchical bureaucracy having to change form and shape to allow for greater engagement and involvement. This pushed PLs out of their comfort zones and demanded that they adapt their normal leadership styles to accommodate the new structures that the crisis imposed.

The decisions taken in 2016 by some PLs to include other staff in the management of the crisis and to consult more widely within each institution, and with government departments across the sector, allude to the reorganisation of traditional structures. This 'new' form and structure of the individual and national systems achieved more success in ending the crisis than when each PL and/or institution functioned in isolation. As stated in earlier chapters, chaos and complexity theory are aligned to organisational behaviours that are seemingly nonlinear and unexpected, that act chaotically but are also orderly, based on underlying patterns of chaos (Kauffman, 2000), that facilitate the renewal of the organisational system

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into a new chaotic order (MacIntosh & MacLean, 2001; Holbrook, 2003). Seeger (2002) asserts that through this process of self-organisation, new forms, structures, procedures, hierarchies, relationships, and understandings emerge, giving new, sometimes rejuvenated and more successful form to the system.

A few PLs commented that what they were experiencing was the 'new normal', and that 'the higher education system was at a tipping point'. The system was fundamentally destabilised at its core and a new order had emerged. This emergence of a new order is what chaos theory refers to as the bifurcation point. As described in Chapter Two, the bifurcation point, or edge of chaos, is a point at which movement in the organisational system can either break down the system toward chaos or stabilise it in a new state of order (Murphy, 1996; Seeger, 2002). This stage is a critical point in the development of an organisation in that it generates new energy for the organisation either to be innovative or to stabilise, becoming resistant to further stimulation. The South African higher education system had reached its 'bifurcation point' in 2016. The inter-connectedness between individual institutions and leaders, the Ministry of Higher Education, and other state entities lent credibility to the notion of the non-linearity of systems, integral to this study.

These observations strengthen my view that leadership should be about being in a state of fluidity which allows for change and movement. While formal leadership training and leadership styles have significant influence on how leaders lead, especially during a crisis, like Marriner-Tomey (2009) I believe that they cannot be viewed in a vacuum. A myriad of other factors, such as the diversity of skills and knowledge available in the team, the expectations from followers, the external environment, and the organisational culture, all contribute to the effectiveness of leaders' ability to lead.

5.3.3 Organisational culture

Organisational culture was also regarded as a defining factor in the strategies that leaders considered, and a few PLs make particular reference to the fact that culture determined

how they responded. Warrick (2017) captures the significance of institutional culture by asserting that leaders throughout an organisation need to understand the importance of strategy and culture in building a successful organisation, and to make both a top priority in their decision making and practices.

It is imperative to remember that the root cause of the crisis was the lack of transformation. This was common across all universities, although the transformation agenda articulated itself differently across various institutions. This highlighted the variances among institutions in the issues that were most pressing to them. From the participants' responses, it was evident that in certain instances it was about the demographic composition of students and staff, while at others it was about its language policy or social and economic class differences. At most institutions, the decolonisation of the curriculum was a focal point, and at others it was about symbols in the form of statues or names of buildings that represented the divided past. Karodia *et al.* (2016) reinforced Jansen's earlier perspective, maintaining that amidst the #FeesMustFall campaign, students were demanding a host of other urgent concessions on the part of government and the National Minister of Higher Education. The demands straddled a wide range of issues, chief among which were transformation of the higher education landscape because of slow transformation over the past 21 years of democracy. A major issue was the call for decolonisation of the curriculum because students believed that it was time for South African universities to consider Africanising the curriculum, making it culturally relevant and rich to South African students. While the main cause for the crisis was the lack of transformation in the country's universities, the specific cultural ethos of each institution required a unique response.

Each institution has its own culture, formed over many years by various factors. According to Warrick (2017), the vision, mission, core values, design, plans, systems, and processes of an organisation, along with the practices and decisions of leaders, begin to shape the culture. These elements weave themselves over many years into what becomes the institution's culture, and once this culture is established, recognised and owned, it demands a particular line of action and adherence, and any deviation from it is frowned upon.

According to Wooten (2007), crisis situations are also a defining moment for an organisation's culture since these incidents bring to light the organisation's core values. Wooten implies that during a crisis, cultural rhetoric becomes apparent not only through words, but also by leadership's behaviour. It is the culture of each institution that to a large extent shaped the strategies employed by PLs in leading during the #FMF crisis. Whether additional security was hired to secure the property and keep people safe, how soon this decision was taken, and by whom, whether there was broad-based consultation before, or unilateral decision-making by PLs, and whether protestors were being engaged and listened to during the crisis, are some of the cultural expectations PLs would have had to consider.

While each institution had its own unique set of challenges that gave substance to its institutional culture, the national issue of transformation united the students across universities. Added to this were the complexities of the institutions and their locations, both historically and geographically, and the dynamics of the experiences of students and staff were key to leading in ways that were unique to each institution. These factors determined how a leader at a historically advantaged university (HAU) led in the crisis, which may have differed significantly from how a leader at a historically disadvantaged university (HDU) led.

Clearly, a 'one size fits all' solution to the crisis does not exist. The contextual realities of each institution determined the approach of its leaders, yet in addressing the common concerns of disruption and damage, university leaders were compelled to unite and seek guidance from the DHET. The issues of wider and equal educational access could only be addressed by the DHET and many participants articulated their disappointment at the lack of direction from the Minister.

Based on lessons learnt from 2015, it became apparent that teamwork, openness and trust were essential in responding to students. Effective leadership is dependent on a combination of factors, including personality, experience, training, followers, environment, culture, and awareness. Added to this are leaders' own   values – the importance they place

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on safety and how that synergises and demonstrates coherence between their words and actions. Garcia (2015, p. 152) asserts that, "In and out of crises, all leaders inevitably possess their own distinctive manner of communicating; and specifically in a crisis, a unique way of making decisions, showing support, and responding".

Both PEs and PLs emphasised the significance of management unity, consensus-building with teams, and mainstreaming information and communication among all team members. Their opinions reiterate that collaboration is at the foundation of any successful shared leadership process, and an indelible aspect of any collaborative effort is communication within such a situation.

5.4 Theme #3 Communication

This theme arose out of the research question, *"What were the challenges and dilemmas experienced by leaders?"* Communication was cited as being one of the biggest challenges that leaders confronted across the six participating universities. Many PLs and PEs commented not only on the absence of effective communication strategies, which was considered to be a leadership weakness, but also recognised that communication was crucial to any crisis.

There was ample evidence that communication was a significant factor in the crisis at various levels, and this took numerous forms:

- internal communication within an institution from leaders to various stakeholder groups, such as staff, students, parents, donors, and alumni, informing them of what was transpiring and how it was being managed;
- communication between leaders from different institutions, to share information and views of systemic issues, consult on decisions, offer moral support, and operate as a collective;
- external communication channels, such as print media, television, and social media, broadcasting the events as they unfolded on campuses across the country; and,

- perhaps most importantly, communication from the protesting students via social media platforms, communication platforms that they got to own and occupy.

Wang and Dong (2017) define crisis communication as the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation, and it focuses on the interrelationships between the crisis situation, response strategies, and public perceptions. Various PLs and PEs said universities were ineffective in managing the communication arenas by not communicating within institutions, within the sector, or to the broader public. Consequently, public perceptions were formed largely by print and/or visual media, or via social media platforms. Initially universities were 'out-of-touch' with the social media platforms that students dominated, and some PLs admitted to not having had sound communication strategies or experts. This enabled students and external media houses to own the protestors' versions of activities. Students from various universities were able to almost instantaneously mobilise support and act nationally by using social media platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook, and could quickly join forces against university leaderships. A few examples of such communication follow:

> *We are here {[Union Buildings] to also shut it down. We will burn it and take pictures for the world to see our anger. Our parents are poor at home and we are their only hope (one author's recollection, translated from isiZulu)*

> *Our parents were sold dreams in 1994, We are just here for our refund.*

This last Twitter message alludes to the democratic promises made to South Africans by the government elected in 1994 (Ngidi *et al.*, 2016).

Walker *et al*. (2013) also observed that open and honest communication is important in understanding the complex nature of the crisis, helping leaders to navigate the organisation through the crisis, and in some ways framing their experiences in the crisis. A few PLs and PEs commented on this by highlighting the lack of appropriate communication strategies at their institutions. In addition to open and honest communication, there is a need for frequent communication to keep people up to date with what's transpiring, and providing the institution's perspective.

According to Lawson (2007), the speed with which an institution responds to a crisis by disseminating critical information to its various target audiences can become the primary factor in whether or not the institution is perceived as managing a crisis well. Effective communication can get people to safety, calm nerves, and prevent further misinterpretations or complications, while poor communication can cause chaos, anxiety, confusion, and promote additional disruptions.

Both Coombs (2009) and Schoenberg (2004) maintain that effective communications management before, during and after a situation is critical to protecting an organisation's brand, reputation and value among internal and external audiences. Coombs adds that the form that communication should take during the three stages of a crisis is as follows:

- pre-crisis should embrace concerns for prevention and preparation;
- the crisis stage is concerned with response: process and content; and
- the post-crisis phase is an opportunity for follow-up communication, such as offering the lessons learned from the crisis that can reduce the likelihood of recurrence, mitigate it if it does, prevent recurrence, and prepare stakeholders for that event.

Effective communication may have been the one area where students took the lead, and it may have been the greatest weakness of institutions nationally. From the onset of the crisis in 2015, students had established their communication strategy and had used social media platforms effectively. Students, many of whom are technologically savvy, were able to dominate those spaces, allowing them to own the #FMF narrative. Universities were either unable or slow to compete with students' expertise in the social media space. Being heavily reliant on print and visual media, university leaderships were unable to get their versions of the crisis out speedily. Television coverage tended to rely on the visuals they had in their archives, which were at times outdated, or of particular institutions, to cover events as they unfolded on different campuses. Print media often opted for sensationalism and published pictures of the worst scenarios from a few institutions, reporting those events as though they referred to all institutions. One PL discussed how the visuals that were being communicated on television news channels in 2016 were showing her in her role at an institution which she had left at the end of 2015. These communication channels may have

added to the chaos and concern felt by many parties, requiring university leaders to manage public perceptions in addition to managing the crisis.

Communication extends beyond what is being said or how often it is being said. I believe that communication to internal stakeholders is only effective if more than mere information is shared. Who is conveying the information, the language that is used, the tone of the message, if there is acknowledgement and concern expressed for the way people are feeling, if the information is merely being churned out via the communications department or if the leader is taking time to make the communique personal and empathetic, if the information is honest, and if the tone is respectful or patronising, are some of the elements that add meaning to how a leader communicates with internal constituencies. These factors add authenticity and integrity to information-sharing and make communication effective. This will require some discussion and reframing as institutions plan for future crises.

In 2015, many PLs and PEs recognised the impact of the absence of effective communication strategies at their universities, and in 2016 some PLs had decided to make it a priority, opting for contracting communication experts to assist, especially on social media platforms. Kielkowski (2013) discusses the importance of communication before, during, and after a crisis, which also found resonance in this study. Many PLs indicated that communicating with internal and external stakeholders, from employees to protestors, would have greatly aided in identifying, responding to, and developing an action plan in order to prevent the crises. They also identified it as an area that needs immediate attention to deal with any future crisis. One PL commented on the speed with which students were able to capture what was happening and communicating this with the public, and referred to the students' excellent use of the web and other social media platforms in communicating in real time, something universities were not able to do very efficiently.

Although many individuals continue to access and are made aware of crises through traditional media, more and more are accessing online social media sites. Thelwall and

Stuart (2007) recognised that new technologies, including social media, can influence what information is reported, how it is reported, who reports it, and in what format it is reported, while Dinardo (2001) maintained that the internet and social media can also aggravate matters since they have the potential to escalate crises. It can also change how fast a crisis is reported and dealt with.

As Wang and Dong (2017) point out, the rapid development of social media offers opportunities as well as challenges for organisations in crisis. They believe that while social media is a major crisis communication platform between organisations and stakeholders, it can also rapidly spread negative information and commentary on a crisis situation. It is imperative that organisations use social media effectively to handle crises and communicate with their constituencies during and in the aftermaths of crises.

Not possessing adequate expertise to match students' use of social media or get news out in real time meant that most universities were constantly trying to defend their positions in the face of what students were posting. This added to the complexity of the problems PLs faced. The following are examples of students' tweets:

> #FeesMustFall is more than fees. It's abt (sic) #SouthAfrica ppl's rt to quality
> education, esp working class, black, poor.
> Don't be distracted by 0%. It literally means NOTHING has changed. Fees remain
> the barrier between the poor and an education #FeesMustFall
>
> How will I become an educator if I can't educate myself Apartheid said you are
> not educated, stay poor. Democracy says you are too poor, stay uneducated. Its
> been 21 years. #FeesMustFall

In 2016, universities mostly unsuccessfully attempted to reclaim the communication spaces which students and the media had dominated in 2015. This lack of a stronghold in the communication arena amounted to a certain loss of control of the situation. Invariably, public perceptions were largely being formed or strengthened by what was being communicated via social media and these perceptions added to the complexity of leading during the crisis. In the struggle to keep their institutions operational while attempting to

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manage the crisis, PLs also had to rely on information that was being shared in the absence of communication expertise within their institutions.

Notwithstanding the fact that some universities were ineffective in the media terrain, there were a few PLs who used their own individual styles in communicating information and decisions with stakeholders. Some PLs attempted to alter the negative tone of the protests by meeting with protestors and discussing concerns, allowing these leaders to show transparency in their response to protestors. Another PL held town-hall meetings throughout the crisis to communicate to both the media and the community regarding the university's plans, goals, and vision to move forward throughout the crisis. Some PLs took to writing articles in the national newspapers articulating their views and actions, while a few used social media, such as Twitter and personal blogs, to get their messages out. This transparent and open form of communication with stakeholders was perceived by PLs as a means of fostering a sense of trust among all groups. Examples of such initiatives include an Op-Ed: The Politics of Spectacle – reflections on the 2016 student protests, by Adam Habib (05 Dec 2016) (Appendix I); USAf Media statement (16 Nov 2015) (Appendix J); and a Joint letter from Habib and Bawa (July 2016) (Appendix K).

Communication also extended beyond campuses and involved the DHET and other government departments. A vital external role-player was the Minister of Higher Education and Training. In 2015, university leaders attempted to manage the crisis without support or guidance from the DHET. Preceding chapters argued that a declining state subsidy alongside the expansion of the sector unquestionably precipitated the crisis. Yet universities were left to respond to the call for broader access and free education individually without mediation from the Ministry. In terms of owning the crisis and demonstrating leadership, the DHET was palpably absent, especially since they were considered a key stakeholder in the crisis. Here too, communication between the Ministry and institution leaders was vital. This was suitably captured by a couple of PEs who described how such a lack of communication had a deleterious effect on collaborative responses to the crisis. There was an expectation from PLs and PEs that communication from the Minister and DHET to universities and   the public

would provide much-needed guidance and leadership on the national issues that students were raising.

A few PEs and PLs articulated their concern that apart from an initial statement from the Minister of Higher Education and Training in 2015, the Ministry was mostly silent, even though the crisis that was raging on campuses could only be resolved by the Ministry. While leaders and students were taking advantage of every available communication channel to convey their concerns or plans, the silence from the Minister of Higher Education and Training was of great concern. Although the crisis revolved around a national concern, which required appropriate state intervention and response, university leaders and students were engaged in a monologue in 2015, which only changed to a dialogue much later in 2016 when the DHET eventually joined the national conversation.

The absence of leadership and guidance from the Ministry did not augur well for university leaders who needed support at a critical point in the history of South African higher education. Being expected to lead in a vacuum, especially in 2015, many PLs initially felt rudderless as they navigated the complex crisis environment alone. In 2016, this resulted in a positive collaboration among universities through USAf, a forum of all vice-chancellors, as university leaders gravitated towards one another for support since none was forthcoming from the Ministry, again supporting the view of hierarchical re-structuring that chaos theory espouses. Communication about the crisis among vice-chancellors in 2015 was absent, and it was only in 2016, under the guidance of USAf, that leaders began communicating with their peers and demanded state intervention. As many of the participants asserted, the systemic nature of the national crisis needed an inclusive approach that could ultimately contribute to changing the landscape of higher education in post-apartheid South Africa.

Crisis communication focuses on the interrelationships between the crisis situation, response strategies, and public perceptions. The absence of crisis communication strategies at individual institutions and from the Ministry of Higher Education and Training contributed to the skewed national and international public perceptions of what was happening at

universities and why. These perceptions were formed by dynamics within institutions, as well as the relationship each institution had with the public and society. It is important for leaders to constantly be aware of how their actions and views are expressed to both internal and external audiences.

Universities are usually established for the public good and they do not operate in a vacuum. In addition to the internal operations and complexities, they are also shaped by and accountable to external constituencies. Consequently, we cannot examine universities as self-standing independent structures, as we need to understand their relationships with the external environment as we consider how the internal environment needs to redefine itself.

5.5 Theme #4: The macro (external) environment vs the micro (internal/institutional) environment

Universities play an undeniably significant role in transforming and building society, since they are created for the public good. They produce leaders, generate new knowledge, and transfer knowledge to the next generation. In 2010, Harvard President, Drew Faust, emphasised the university's place as a paramount player in a global system increasingly driven by knowledge, information and ideas.

According to the Essop (Kagisano, 2013), higher education institutions, despite popular perceptions to the contrary, do not exist in splendid isolation from the societies in which they are located. They reflect, reproduce, and to some extent shape, the social, cultural, economic and political values and relations that are characteristic of the broader society. It follows that universities are accountable to the societies they serve and are expected to operate with ethics and integrity, and this accountability contributes to the complexities that university leaders are expected to manage. University leaders realised the importance of keeping their constituencies and the greater public apprised of circumstances, and this was clearly demonstrated in the article written by USAf to the public (See Appendix L).

In analysing the research question on the challenges and dilemmas that PLs experienced, the theme of the relationship between the external (macro) and the internal (micro/institutional) environments emerged quite strongly. This theme described how leaders were confronted by the tension between these opposing realities and how they had to constantly mediate the crisis in terms of all stakeholders.

This chapter discussed the organisational culture of universities and the substantial role this plays in the functioning of the institution. In addition to the culture of a university, other factors such as its staff, students, financial sustainability, resources, and infrastructure also contribute to its internal complexities. PLs had to ensure that these factors, along with the macro environment of parents, religious organisations, alumni, the private and business sectors, donors, the international community, and various government departments, especially the DHET, were all considered. Each of these constituencies had a vested interest in the crisis and pressurised PLs to resolve the crisis expeditiously. The external environment was at the mercy of the media, in the absence of regular feedback from DHET or sufficient information emanating from institutions.

External constituencies tended to have certain expectations of individual PLs based on what they saw in the media. Invariably, leaders from different institutions were compared in terms of how assertive ('hard') or sensitive ('soft') they were as they managed the crisis. Externally, it appeared that all universities were regarded as being similar, creating an expectation that responses from leaders should be similar too. Hence, I believe that the failure to recognise the effect of institutional culture, ethos, and other factors that exist within each institution, as well as the individuality of each leader in how they responded to the crisis, impacted on the ability of leaders to lead effectively.

PLs decisions were continuously being judged by various sectors, some harshly and others favourably, and this placed enormous pressure on individual PLs. A few PEs believed their

respective PLs had done what was best for their institutions, while others believed that there was more that could have been done, or done differently. Doing "the best they could under the circumstances", as one PE described it, demonstrates the lacuna that seems to exist among leaders in the higher education sector, with no expertise in negotiation, conflict-management, communication, and crisis-leadership skills. The various perceptions, whether positive or negative, underscored that leaders were not suitably trained and equipped to lead in crisis situations. Not all leaders demonstrated competencies in communication, clarity of vision and values, or a sense of caring, which Klann (2003) states are components essential to crisis leadership. In conceding that that there is a human dimension to crisis leadership, there must be relative attention paid to these areas.

Clearly, a myriad of factors contributed to the decisions of PLs at individual institutions. Yukl (2003) maintains that leaders continuously find themselves vulnerable to crises, and the need for quick decision-making can force individuals to make decisions intuitively rather than intellectually. However, according to Schoenberg (2004), true leaders can learn lessons from even the most difficult and challenging situations, and the lessons learnt from their experiences would most likely add to PLs' skills as they reflect on what is needed to lead through future crises.

5.6 Chapter summary

The discussion and analysis contained in this chapter was conducted in reference to the aim and research questions set out at the beginning of this study. The four themes revealed the challenges and dilemmas university leaders experienced as they attempted to understand, engage with and manage the crisis which triggered mayhem nationally. Their lack of preparedness, poor communication and crisis leadership strategies, combined with the unpredictability of the actions of students and the absence of appropriate support from the DHET, contributed to the chaos which erupted in 2015, and continued into 2016. The next chapter will focus on the conclusions and proposed recommendations for crisis leadership

strategies and interventions for South African university leaders and the Ministry of the DHET.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.2 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the key findings, and this chapter completes the study by providing a conclusive commentary. It contains a summary of the purpose, methodology, themes, major findings, and the significance of the findings, and closes by drawing conclusions, giving recommendations and pointing to areas for future research. This study set out to examine crisis leadership at South African universities against the backdrop of the #FeesMustFall student protests of 2015 and 2016. The main assumption was that because leading during crises is different from leading during normal conditions, crisis management is fundamentally different from crisis leadership.

6.3 Current status

This research area remains relevant, and while there have been several developments in the South African higher education sector since the commencement of this study, university leaders continue to be on high alert as the system has not yet fully stabilised. This study will hopefully contribute to the development of crisis leadership strategies in an educational setting and spur debates on the issues currently facing the sector.

6.4 Summary of the purpose

This study set out to examine the strategies university leaders implemented during the crisis, going on to explore the effectiveness of such crisis leadership strategies/responses and the factors that influenced their responses. Findings may benefit university leaders in identifying gaps within their own training and development, and contribute to designing appropriate leadership programmes to prepare leaders to effectively lead in a crisis.

6.5 Methodology

The investigation employed a qualitative phenomenological methodology to understand participants' lived experiences. This aligns with the interpretive paradigm which seeks to gather descriptions and narratives from research participants.

The study gathered data by interviewing leaders and other employees from six institutions to uncover both how leaders perceived their own responses, and how their actions were perceived by others. This triangulation of perceptions, from both employees and leaders within universities, pointed to the complex environment within which different realities and subjectivities operated.

6.6 Overview of main findings, themes and their significance

The study wished to determine leadership under conditions of crisis and focused on the following three research questions:

Firstly, what strategies were employed by university leaders during the #FMF crisis;

Secondly, what factors influenced the responses of leaders during the crisis, and

Thirdly, what were the challenges and dilemmas experienced by the university leaders, and why were they experienced as such?

The overarching research question concerned the strategies that university leaders used in responding to the crisis, and their effectiveness in resolving the crisis.

The findings revealed that both groups of participants believed that the strategies used in 2015 differed significantly from those used in 2016. The shortcomings of the 2015 experience were identified, and in many instances improved upon or changed entirely in 2016, although some participants maintained that the strategies employed in both years were far from ideal. The lessons learnt included reviewing the organisation's level of preparedness to lead and manage crisis situations. Besides the inordinate pressures from

their own institutions, university leaders had to contend with demands from external sources to resolve the impasse swiftly, e.g. the NECF intervention (see Appendix M). This further exacerbated the pressure and undoubtedly influenced the strategies that the leaders adopted to continue and complete the academic project.

However, in the context of this study, the two main sectors under scrutiny were the higher education sector, comprising all universities, and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), representing government. The findings of the study revealed the areas that require urgent attention both at institutional level as well as at governmental level.

The research findings were clustered according to the following main themes that emanated from the data analysis:

- Crisis management vs crisis leadership;
- Past protest experience, leadership training and style, and normative organisational culture;
- Communication; and
- The macro environment vs the micro (institutional) environment.

These themes assisted in developing and explaining the meta-narratives that emerged from the analysis.

6.6.1 Crisis management vs crisis leadership

According to the findings, in 2015 university leaders took on the role of crisis managers. In many instances, they tried to manage the crisis by assuming the 'take-charge' role, whereas in 2016 they delegated this to managers. This may be explained as university leaders being unaware that the roles they play outside of a crisis situation are different from what they are expected to execute during a crisis situation. Additionally, it may well be that prior to

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the #FMF protests, university leaders had not experienced a large-scale national crisis and their lack of experience resulted in an intuitive handling of the crisis.

Emphasising that it was national crisis status is crucial for the following reasons:

- As a national crisis, it presented its own set of challenges and dilemmas which were different from previous small-scale crises that took place at individual institutions.
- The scale of the crisis required leadership not only from individual universities, but from university leaders as a collective to represent the system, as well as from the DHET, and various other stakeholders.
- This meant that, in addition to dealing with internal, institutional challenges and constituencies, university leaders also had to contend with various external interest groups, such as government departments, religious organisations, the media, international educational partners, etc.
- It also implied that the unfolding and resolution of the crisis attracted national and international attention.

The experiences in 2015 and 2016 revealed the deficiencies in leaders' professional knowledge, experience, planning, and processes at their individual institutions. The crisis indicated that university leaders needed to be prepared to deal with unfamiliar or specialised tasks, and had to know what resources were available within their institutions, as well as in the system. They also needed to understand how to reach out to others to share the burden and respond constructively. It became important to identify and acknowledge any possible gaps and to learn from the various experiences.

In 2015, the focus was clearly on managing the crisis operationally. It was only in 2016 that leaders began to understand that leading in a crisis was different from managing a crisis. Their approach changed from front-line, individual, reactive, and operational management, evident in 2015, to delegating certain responsibilities to others, being proactive by developing plans of action and consulting experts, working systemically, and focusing on broader issues of long-term resolutions in 2016. University leaders had finally decided to lead.

6.6.2   Past protest experience, leadership training and style, and organisational culture

Internal and external pressures played a significant role in the strategies that leaders implemented. The findings suggest that the three main factors that influenced their crisis leadership strategies were leaders' own past personal experiences of student activism and protests; the impact of leadership training and leaders' personal leadership style; and the normative organisational culture of each institution. These factors then gave rise to many challenges and dilemmas which further affected the responses from leaders.

6.6.2.1 Past protest experience

Many of the leaders who were interviewed were keen to share how much their own personal experiences of student activism as students during the apartheid era influenced their responses to the crisis. This is indicative of the impact that personal experience can exert on one's ability to respond objectively to a crisis. They were unable to adequately separate the demands of the crisis on themselves, as leaders, from their own personal judgements of the reasons for the crisis. This may well have impeded their effectiveness in leading during the crisis.

Alternatively, their own experiences may have had a positive impact on their response. For example, in some instances past experience gave rise to a more empathetic response to students, and leaders considered alternative approaches instead of taking hard decisions. This raises the question of whether leaders who are objective in leading during a crisis are more effective than those who are subjective in their decision-making. This may be an area of future research.

6.6.2.2 Leadership training and leadership style

Some leaders cited leadership training they had received as providing them with the skills and tools they required to approach the crisis more strategically, while others believed that the training they received had provided little value in this. Strategic thinking, business

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continuity planning, negotiation and mediation skills, crowd management, media management, and social media skills were some of the areas in which some leaders believed they had limited or no expertise, and none of these were included in any formal leadership training programme in which they had participated. This highlights the need to redesign educational leadership training programmes to include training specific to crisis leadership.

While the study did not specifically focus on the effect of individual leadership styles on leaders' responses, this emerged as a theme indicating that it played a significant role. The more common styles that emerged included collaborative, distributive, instrumental and integrative, participatory, autocratic and consultative styles of leadership.

There was a definite shift in leadership styles from 2015 to 2016 as leaders learnt from their experience. For example, the natural tendency of certain leaders was to make unilateral decisions and take a front-line approach, and it was necessary to change this approach as the crisis unfolded, meaning that these leaders had to modify their natural leadership styles to suit the demands of the situation. This confirms the assumption made at the beginning of this study that leading during normal circumstances is different from leading in crises situations.

As suggested by previous research, leadership is about the ability to cope with change, teamwork, engaging in high levels of both task-oriented and relationship-centred activities, as well as dealing with challenges and complexities arising from a dynamic environment. In both years, university leaders showed varying levels of agility, awareness, and adaptability. Normal linear and hierarchical university structures were forced to make way for wider and broader consultations and delegation of powers. Traditional centres of power had to be broken down and re-created at various points where different types of expertise resided to allow for greater engagement and involvement. This meant that leaders had to adapt their normal leadership styles to accommodate the new structures that the crisis had imposed.

6.6.2.3 Organisational culture

One cannot understate the role that the institutional culture played at each university. It determined the way the crisis unfolded and how leaders responded. Location, history,

values, vision and mission are some of the factors that define the normative culture of each university, and since the normative organisational culture reflects the values and philosophy of the institution, leaders were bound by the institution's culture to act in particular ways. Consequently, there could not be a standard response to the crisis across the 26 universities. Leaders were expected to act in a manner that was aligned to each institution's culture, and this placed added pressure on each leader, as while they could consult with the Ministry of Higher Education and Training and with other university leaders on the broader, cross-cutting issues, individual decisions were influenced by the uniqueness of each university campus. This led to a degree of isolation and helplessness in the face of a national crisis, and compounded the complexity of the situation.

6.6.3 Communication

The study reiterated and underscored what has been advocated and elaborated on by various previous studies: that communication is a core competency of leadership and in dealing with a crisis effectively. Engagement with other leaders who have influence among specific constituency groups, and with individuals with expertise is necessary during a crisis. This has to be accompanied by a willingness to engage in collective decision-making. Inter- and intra-communication plans, strategies, and expertise were revealed as massive weaknesses during the crisis, especially in 2015. This changed marginally in 2016 when leaders consulted as a group more regularly, and ideas and decisions were shared and discussed.

Communication was explored at four levels and during each stage of the crisis – pre-crisis, during the crisis, and post-crisis:

- Internally, among different constituencies;
- Externally, with the media;
- among institutions (the higher education system); and
- within the social media space.

While a few participants in this study saw some improvement at their universities in 2016, all agreed that universities needed to develop proper proactive and relevant communication strategies tailored to the audiences with whom they engage.

More importantly, the lack of guidance from the Ministry on how to immediately respond to the national crisis, and on the quality of leadership in directing the sector was disconcerting, if not debilitating. Their silence created a void where leaders of state universities felt unsupported by the government, and this gave rise to a distrust of the Ministry.

Crises are events that arise or are amplified by social media and have the potential to harm an organisation's reputation. This study's findings suggested that the expert use of social media by the protestors contributed significantly to the national coordination of the protest and may have skewed public perception, since university leaders were less equipped to effectively engage on those platforms. It is therefore important that university leaders receive training in this area.

6.6.4   The macro environment vs the micro (institutional) environment

While universities operate as distinct communities, they cannot be separated from their macro environment. At a micro level, each university functions within its own set of philosophies, principles, norms and values, and its individual context is shaped by its physical location, students, staff, parents, alumni, and other constituents. This context is unique and gives each university its own character and persona. These in turn demand that the university operates within a framework determined by its own constituencies and policies.

However, universities are also a part of a larger ecosystem. Although they may compete with one another, they function in a system that shares a common larger purpose – the upliftment and advancement of society, locally and globally. It follows that universities are accountable to the societies they serve and are expected to operate within a particular framework, regulated by ethics and integrity. This accountability to external stakeholders contributes to the complexities that university leaders are expected to manage.

The relationship between the micro and macro environment emerged as a strong theme in this study. It reflected how leaders sometimes felt conflicted due to the tension between these two opposing realities and how they struggled to mediate this tension with all stakeholders.

6.7 CONCLUSIONS

In this section, I will offer several conclusions which emanated from an interrogation of the challenges reported by participants.

6.7.1 Magnitude of the crisis

It became clear that it is not the type of crisis but rather the nature and magnitude of the crisis that makes crisis leadership complex, and the fact that this was a national crisis dictated its complexity. The involvement of various stakeholders, and the need for a coordinated approach during a national crisis, are essential for its successful resolution.

6.7.2 Lack of adequate crisis-leadership knowledge

This analysis strongly reflects that the crisis leadership strategies used by South African higher educational leaders were not grounded in sound empirical research and evidence, and instead emanated from knee-jerk reactions, intuition or sincere attempts at doing one's best under trying circumstances. The lack of adequate crisis-leadership knowledge and experience revealed a significant gap in their training and development as educational leaders.

6.7.3 Lack of a collective response

The higher education sector in South Africa failed to operate as a collective. Cooperation, collaboration, and a unified response to a systemic issue were missing when decisions were taken at selected institutions. This resulted in some institutions being marginalised and

targeted by protestors, who expected uniform responses from the sector. This may be remedied through the development of a national university crisis leadership policy.

6.7.4   Communication

The lack of a coherent and sophisticated communications strategy at various levels was evident, and almost all universities that participated in the study identified the lack of a communication strategy as one of the most significant gaps in their organisation. Not having the requisite expertise in social media also emerged as a weakness among universities.

6.7.5 Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)

Guidance, support and direction from the DHET were initially not forthcoming, even though the universities under attack were public universities, primarily funded by the State. Responses to the demands made by protesting students required state support, but the relevant government departments, especially the DHET, detached themselves from the crisis in 2015, and communication was non-existent. The absence of clear communication from the DHET to university leaders on how to respond to students' demands significantly contributed to the mayhem that ensued.

This may have been a reason for university leaders initially responding to the crisis from a crisis-management mode. Unable to adequately respond to the call for a fee-free education, universities became soft targets and leaders reacted intuitively and operationally by protecting their staff, students and buildings. It was only in 2016, once the DHET took an active role in responding to the crisis via the NECF, that university leaders were able to step back and crisis-lead.

6.8 Summary

The readiness of a university leader to respond to a crisis is a relatively new concern, an area of responsibility that is still not typically considered as part of the role of the South African university leader, yet it is fast becoming one of the most significant. If not addressed by university leaders and the DHET, these deficiencies could lead to a major fault line within the higher education system, which in time could result in the collapse of a sector that is a significant contributor to the transformation of our society.

6.9 RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the focus, objectives and findings of the study, the following recommendations are directed at the two main role-players: university leaderships and the DHET.

6.9.1 Recommendations for university leaderships
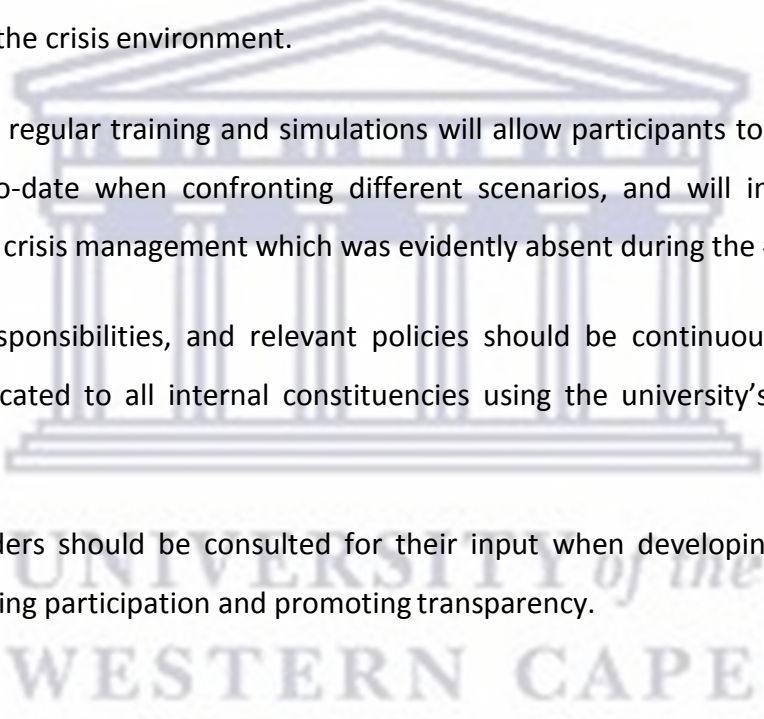
Findings from the primary study, supported by the literature and captured in the proposed crisis-management model (Fig. 5.1), suggest that for effective resolution of any crisis situation, the following elements are indispensable:

6.9.1.1 Contingency teams and business continuity plans

As Jin *et al.* (2017) suggest, it is an essential part of planning to implement effective issues-management programmes to reduce the risk of crises.

Recommendations:

➢ It is therefore necessary for university leaderships to identify crisis management teams and develop business continuity (BC) and recovery plans, as was articulated by PL17 stating, *"What do we need to do to ensure that we finish the exams?"*

➢ Institutional business continuity plans must include disaster recovery measures and requisite protocols and policies, such as health and safety, and data management policies. BCPs should be developed within a robust framework of people, processes, policies, systems, health and safety.

➢ The requisite training and development of the team/s must be conducted regularly, and BC plans must be communicated with the university community.

➢ The external and internal environments should be regularly scanned for potential threats, and scenario-planning should form an integral component of annual planning meetings. Such planning and training will help staff and students to better navigate the crisis environment.

➢ Providing regular training and simulations will allow participants to remain engaged and up-to-date when confronting different scenarios, and will imply a proactive stance to crisis management which was evidently absent during the #FMF crisis.

➢ Roles, responsibilities, and relevant policies should be continuously updated and communicated to all internal constituencies using the university's communication channels.

➢ Stakeholders should be consulted for their input when developing plans, thereby encouraging participation and promoting transparency.

6.9.1.2 Effective and relevant communication strategies

The literature on crisis-management identifies communication as being a core requirement of effective crisis response. These findings have similarly revealed deficiencies in communication strategies and plans at universities.

Recommendations:

- Communication is central to building or destroying an institution's reputation and brand. This compels university leaders to attend to their communication strategies for all events, not only during times of crisis.

- It is imperative to filter through the informational and emotional chaos of a crisis to design institutional messages that are clear and relevant.

- Communication strategies within institutions should encompass three areas: content, methods and commitments. The following are recommended:

  - Multiple means of disseminating information and processing issues with constituency groups should be considered;

  - Successful communication also hinges on leaders making certain commitments, e.g. staying connected to internal constituency groups, being a spokesperson when called upon, sharing an opinion on the crisis, etc;

  - Media training, including the use of social media in the institution, should occur regularly; and

  - Universities should use specialists in different communication methods to assist in developing effective strategies.

6.9.1.3 Leadership capacity-enhancement

Leadership capacity-enhancement is an important requirement to ensure business continuity, succession planning, and shared leadership responsibilities.

Recommendations:

- Crisis leadership training should be factored into capacity development programmes;

- Programmes which develop future leaders for universities should take cognisance of the development of skills relevant for the 21st century.

- Content developers need to be aware of the current political, economic, environmental, and technological climate within which higher education operates.

The above recommendations for university leaders are captured in Figure 6.1 below.

Figure 6.1 Synopsis of recommendations for university leaders

6.9.2 Recommendations for the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)

The DHET is responsible for ensuring stability in and protection of the higher education sector. In working together with the sector's leaders, the following recommendations are being suggested to mitigate risks in a crisis situation.

6.9.2.1 National communication strategy

Universities receive their operational mandate from the DHET, implying that communication from the DHET to universities must be consistent, regular, and clear.

Recommendation:

➢ As was demonstrated by these findings, a national communications strategy for the higher education sector is imperative. For example, it could include regular communication to the public from a single source representing DHET's opinions and position, and constant communication with university leaders, perhaps via group-chat. Once developed by the DHET, it will ensure support and involvement during national crises, and more importantly would cement coherence and trust among all stakeholders.

6.9.2.2 National policy on crisis resolution

The #FMF crisis revealed that there needs to be a coordinated approach to managing national crises.

Recommendations:

➢ Due and urgent consideration should be given to developing a national policy on crisis-management within the higher education sector.

➢ A coherent, integrated policy incorporating government entities such as the Treasury, the Department of Social Development, NSFAS, DHET, and others is vital because crises are not discrete events.

➢ A policy will provide a framework for action, and clarify roles and responsibilities within the different stakeholder groups.

6.9.2.3 A higher education leadership academy

In developing an improved higher education system, leadership development programmes should incorporate crisis leadership training. Operating in a dynamic environment requires training in agility, resilience, and skills related to crises situations for university leaders.

Recommendation:

➢ DHET should consider establishing an academy for university leaders, aimed at building capacity. In addition to the regular leadership training modules the development of high-level skills to lead in and manage all aspects of a crisis could be included. Examples of these include specific interpersonal skills such as managing confrontation or hostile environments; decision-making under extreme pressure; role-play exercises for a variety of crisis scenarios; media management; appropriate phrase, idiom and vocabulary choices; and understanding body language and other subtle messages.

The above recommendations for DHET are captured in Figure 6.2 below.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Develop a national communication strategy on crisis management in the HE sector;

Develop a national crisis management policy for the sector considering various crisis scenarios with clear implementation guidelines

Establish an HE Leadership/ Rector Academy – to train and develop leaders towards becoming Rectors
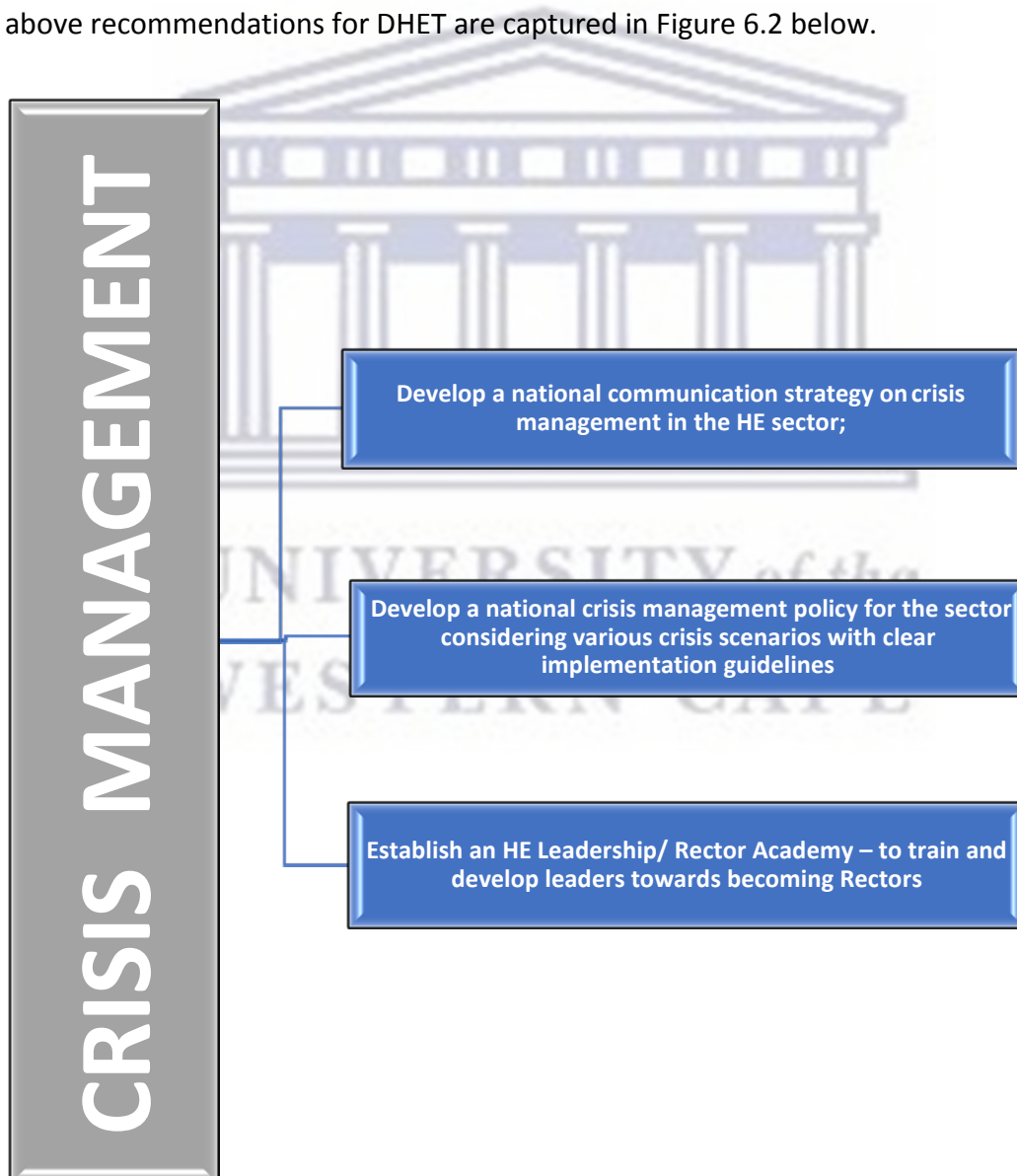
Figure 6.2 Synopsis of recommendations for DHET

The DHET can be an effective partner if there are concerted efforts to consult with university leaders before taking major decisions. This will ensure that all apparent and latent risks are identified, and proper mitigation measures considered. The Ministry must also be seen to be taking the lead when matters of national concern surface. This improves confidence within the sector, as well as when viewed by other stakeholders and parties.

6.10 CONTRIBUTION OF THIS RESEARCH

This study is the first such study within the South African higher education environment. However, being the first, it has identified the need for more research in the many components of crisis leadership within the educational environment.

Through the literature review, the study raised awareness of campus crises across the world, and that no university is immune to it. While the typology of crises in South African universities may differ from their international counterparts, the principles of crisis-leading in an educational environment remain similar.

This study has therefore revealed that there may be value in examining international responses to campus crises,

- firstly, this is because crises are global phenomena, and
- secondly, it seems that the frequency of crises, such as incidents of campus shootings, natural disasters, and acts of terrorism, has increased on international campuses.

South Africa may not be able to remain untouched by such crises in the future, and should be as prepared as possible to deal with any eventuality.

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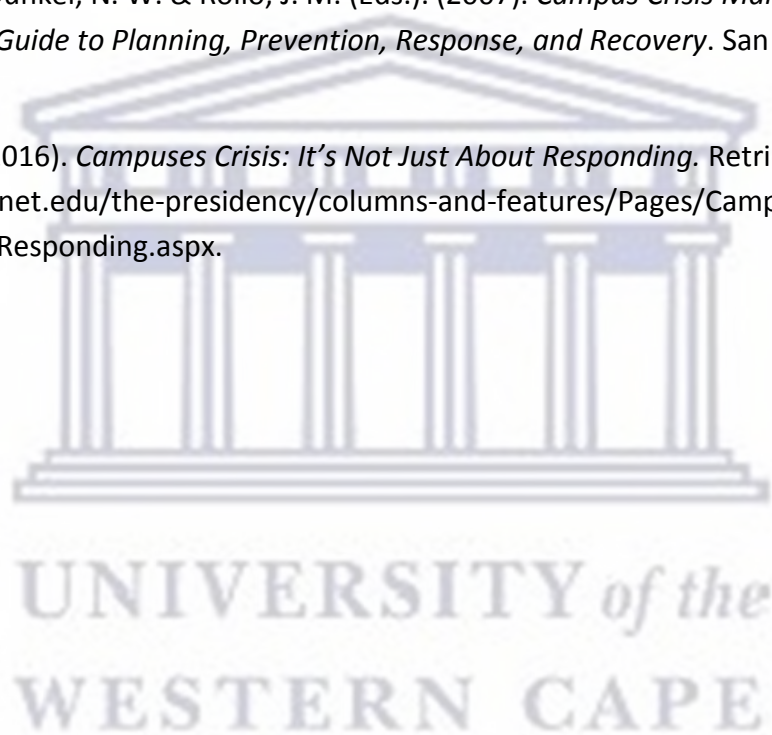
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DIVISION

Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535
South Africa
T: +27 21 959 2988/2948
F: +27 21 959 3170
E: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za
www.uwc.ac.za

12 April 2017

Ms N Lawton-Misra
Faculty of Education

Ethics Reference Number: HS17/3/4

Project Title: Crisis leadership at South African universities: An exploration
of the effectiveness of the strategies and responses of leadership
teams to the #FeesMustFall protests at South African
universities in 2015/2016.

Approval Period: 12 April 2017 – 12 April 2018

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of
the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above
mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted
to the Ethics Committee for approval. Please remember to submit a progress report in
good time for annual renewal.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of
the study.

Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape

PROVISIONAL REC NUMBER - 130416-049

FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.

**UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG**

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY REGISTRAR

5 May 2017

Ms Nita Lawton-Misra
University Registrar
University of the Western Cape

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**"Crisis leadership at South African universities: An exploration of the
effectiveness of the strategies and responses of leadership teams to
the #FeesMustfall protests at South African universities in 2015/2016"**

This letter serves to confirm that the above project has received permission to
be conducted on University premises, and/or involving staff and/or students of
the University as research participants. In undertaking this research, you
agree to abide by all University regulations for conducting research on
campus and to respect participants' rights to withdraw from participation at
anytime.

Ethical clearance has been obtained.

, Qj

n ot i;er
Deputy Registrar

Directorate for Research and Postgraduate Support
Durban University of Technology
Tromso Annexe, Steve Biko Campus
P.O. Box 1334, Durban 4000
Tel.: 031-3732576/7
Fax: 031-3732946
E-mail: **moyos@dut.ac.za**

17ᵗʰ May 2017

Ms Nita Lawton-Misra
c/o Faculty of Education
University of Western Cape

Dear Ms Lawton-Misra

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE DUT

Your email correspondence in respect of the above refers. I am pleased to inform you that the Institutional Research Committee (IRC) has granted permission for you to conduct your research "Crisis leadership at South African universities: An exploration of the effectiveness of the strategies and responses of leadership teams to the #FeesMustFall1 protests at South African universities in 2015" at the Durban University of Technology.

The DUT may impose any other condition it deems appropriate in the circumstances having regard to nature and extent of access to and use of information requested.

We would be grateful if a summary of your key research findings can be submitted to the IRC on completion of your studies.

Kindest regards.
Yours sincerely

_____
PROF SIBUSISO MOYO
DVC (ACTING): RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND ENGAGEMENT
DIRECTOR: RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE SUPPORT

UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY

jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION:

AGREEMENT ON USE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION IN RESEARCH

Name of Researcher: Ms Nita Lawton-Misra

Name of Research Project: Crisis leadership at South African universities: An exploration of the effectiveness of the strategies and responses of leadership teams to the #FeesMustFall protests at South African universities in 2015/2016.

Service Desk ID: IRPSD 467

Date of Issue: 29 May 2017

You have received institutional permission to proceed with this project as stipulated in the institutional permission application and within the conditions set out in this agreement.

1	WHAT THIS AGREEMENT IS ABOUT
What is POPI?	1.1 POPI is the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013. 1.2 POPI regulates the entire information life cycle from collection, through use and storage and even the destruction of personal information.
Why is this important to us?	1.3 Even though POPI is important, it is not the primary motivation for this agreement. The privacy of our students and employees are important to us. We want to ensure that no research project poses any risks to their privacy. 1.4 However, you are required to familiarise yourself with, and comply with POPI in its entirety.
What is considered to be personal information?	1.5 'Personal information' means information relating to an identifiable, living, individual or company, including, but not limited to: 1.5.1 information relating to the race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, national, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, physical or mental health, well-being, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth of the person; 1.5.2 information relating to the education or the medical, financial, criminal or

	employment history of the person;
	1.5.3 any identifying number, symbol, e-mail address, physical address, telephone number, location information, online identifier or other particular assignment to the person;
	1.5.4 the biometric information of the person;
	1.5.5 the personal opinions, views or preferences of the person;
	1.5.6 correspondence sent by the person that is implicitly or explicitly of a private or confidential nature or further correspondence that would reveal the contents of the original correspondence;
	1.5.7 the views or opinions of another individual about the person; and
	1.5.8 the name of the person if it appears with other personal information relating to the person or if the disclosure of the name itself would reveal information about the person.
Some personal information is more sensitive.	1.6 Some personal information is considered to be sensitive either because:
	1.6.1 POPI has classified it as sensitive;
	1.6.2 if the information is disclosed it can be used to defraud someone; or
	1.6.3 the disclosure of the information will be embarrassing for the research subject.
	1.7 The following personal information is considered particularly sensitive:
	1.7.1 Religious or philosophical beliefs;
	1.7.2 race or ethnic origin;
	1.7.3 trade union membership;
	1.7.4 political persuasion;
	1.7.5 health and health related documentation such as medical scheme documentation;
	1.7.6 sex life;
	1.7.7 biometric information;
	1.7.8 criminal behaviour;
	1.7.9 personal information of children under the age of 18;

	1.7.10	financial information such as banking details, details relating to financial products such as insurance, pension funds or other investments.
	1.8	You may make use of this type of information, but must take extra care to ensure that you comply with the rest of the rules in this document.

2 COMMITMENT TO ETHICAL AND LEGAL RESEARCH PRACTICES

You must commit to the use of ethical and legal research practices.	2.1	You must obtain ethical clearance before commencing with this study.
	2.2	You commit to only employing ethical and legal research practices.
You must protect the privacy of your research subjects.	2.3	You undertake to protect the privacy of the research subjects throughout the project.

3 RESEARCH SUBJECT PARTICIPATION

Personal information of identifiable research subjects must not be used without their consent.	3.1	Unless you have obtained a specific exemption for your research project, consent must be obtained in writing from the research subject, before their personal information is gathered.
Research subjects must be able to withdraw from the research project.	3.2	Research subjects must always be able to withdraw from the research project (without any negative consequences) and to insist that you destroy their personal information.
Consent must be specific and informed.	3.3	Unless you have obtained a specific exemption for your research project, the consent must be specific and informed. Before giving consent, the research subject must be informed in writing of:
	3.3.1	The purpose of the research,
	3.3.2	what personal information about them will be collected (particularly sensitive personal information),
	3.3.3	how the personal information will be collected (if not directly from them),
	3.3.4	the specific purposes for which the personal information will be used,
	3.3.5	what participation will entail (i.e. what the research subject will have to do),
	3.3.6	whether the supply of the personal information is voluntary or mandatory for

	purposes of the research project,
	3.3.7 who the personal information will be shared with,
	3.3.8 how the personal information will be published,
	3.3.9 the risks to participation (if any),
	3.3.10 their rights to access, correct or object to the use of their personal information,
	3.3.11 their right to withdraw from the research project, and
	3.3.12 how these rights can be exercised.
Consent must be voluntary.	3.4 Participation in the research project must always be voluntary. You must never pressure or coerce research subjects into participating and persons who choose not to participate must not be penalised.
Using the personal information of children?	3.5 A child is anybody under the age of 18. 3.6 Unless you have obtained a specific exemption in writing for your research project, you must obtain 3.6.1 the consent of the child's parent or guardian, and 3.6.2 if the child is over the age of 7, the assent of the child, before collecting the child's information.
Research subjects have a right to access.	3.7 Research subjects have the right to access their personal information, obtain confirmation of what information is in your possession and who had access to the information. It is strongly recommended that you keep detailed records of access to the information.
Research subjects have a right to object.	3.8 Research subjects have the right to object to the use of their personal information. 3.9 Once they have objected, you are not permitted to use the personal information until the dispute has been resolved.

4   COLLECTING PERSONAL INFORMATION

Only collect what is necessary.	4.1 You must not collect unnecessary or irrelevant personal information from research subjects.

| Only collect accurate personal information. | 4.2 | You have an obligation to ensure that the personal information you collect is accurate. Particularly when you are collecting it from a source other than the research subject. |
| | 4.3 | If you have any reason to doubt the quality of the personal information you must verify or validate the personal information before you use it. |

5   USING PERSONAL INFORMATION

Only use the personal information for the purpose for which you collected it.	5.1	Only use the personal information for the purpose for which you collected it.
	5.2	If your research project requires you to use the personal information for a materially different purpose than the one communicated to the research subject, you must inform the research subjects and Stellenbosch University of this and give participants the option to withdraw from the research project.
Be careful when you share personal information.	5.3	Never share personal information with third parties without making sure that they will also follow these rules.
	5.4	Always conclude a non-disclosure agreement with the third parties.
	5.5	Ensure that you transfer the personal information securely.
Personal information must be anonymous whenever possible.	5.6	If the research subject's identity is not relevant for the aims of the research project, the personal information must not be identifiable. In other words, the personal information must be anonymous (de-identified).
Pseudonyms must be used whenever possible.	5.7	If the research subject's identity is relevant for the aims of the research project or is required to co-ordinate, for example, interviews, names and other identifiers such as ID or student numbers must be collected and stored separately from the rest of the research data and research publications. In other words, only you must be able to identify the research subject.
Publication of research	5.8	The identity of your research subjects should not be revealed in any publication.
	5.9	In the event that your research project requires that the identity of your research subjects must be revealed, you must apply for an exemption from this rule.

6   SECURING PERSONAL INFORMATION

| You are responsible for the confidentiality and | 6.1 | Information must always be handled in the strictest confidence. |

security of the personal information	**6.2** You must ensure the integrity and security of the information in your possession or under your control by taking appropriate and reasonable technical and organisational measures to prevent: 6.2.1 Loss of, damage to or unauthorised destruction of information; and 6.2.2 unlawful access to or processing of information. **6.3** This means that you must take reasonable measures to: 6.3.1 Identify all reasonably foreseeable internal and external risks to personal information in your possession or under your control; 6.3.2 establish and maintain appropriate safeguards against the risks identified; 6.3.3 regularly verify that the safeguards are effectively implemented; and 6.3.4 ensure that the safeguards are continually updated in response to new risks or deficiencies in previously implemented safeguards.
Sensitive personal information requires extra care.	**6.4** You will be expected to implement additional controls in order to secure sensitive personal information.
Are you sending any personal information overseas?	**6.5** If you are sending personal information overseas, you have to make sure that: 6.5.1 The information will be protected by the laws of that country; 6.5.2 the company or institution to who you are sending have agreed to keep the information confidential, secure and to not use it for any other purpose; or 6.5.3 get the specific and informed consent of the research subject to send the information to a country which does not have data protection laws.
Be careful when you use cloud storage.	**6.6** Be careful when storing personal information in a cloud. Many clouds are hosted on servers outside of South Africa in countries that do not protect personal information to the same extent as South Africa. The primary example of this is the United States. **6.7** It is strongly recommended that you use hosting companies who house their servers in South Africa. **6.8** If this is not possible, you must ensure that the hosting company agrees to protect the personal information to the same extent as South Africa.

7	**RETENTION AND DESTRUCTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION**	
You are not entitled to retain personal information when you no longer need it for the purposes of the research project.	7.1	Personal information must not be retained beyond the purpose of the research project, unless you have a legal or other justification for retaining the information.
If personal information is retained, you must make sure it remains confidential.	7.2	If you do need to retain the personal information, you must assess whether:
	7.2.1	The records can be de-identified; and/or whether
	7.2.2	you have to keep all the personal information.
	7.3	You must ensure that the personal information which you retain remains confidential, secure and is only used for the purposes for which it was collected.

8	**INFORMATION BREACH PROCEDURE**	
In the event of an information breach you must notify us immediately.	8.1	If there are reasonable grounds to believe that the personal information in your possession or under your control has been accessed by any unauthorised person or has been disclosed, you must notify us immediately.
	8.2	We will notify the research subjects in order to enable them to take measures to contain the impact of the breach.
This is the procedure you must follow.	8.3	You must follow the following procedure:
	8.3.1	Contact the Division for Institutional Research and Planning at 021 808 9385 and permission@sun.ac.za;
	8.3.2	you will then be required to complete the information breach report form which is attached as Annexure A.
	8.4	You are required to inform us of a information breach within 24 hours. Ensure that you have access to the required information.

9	**MONITORING**	
You may be audited.	9.1	We reserve the right to audit your research practices to assess whether you are complying with this agreement.

	9.2	You are required to give your full co-operation during the auditing process.
	9.3	We may also request to review:
	9.3.1	Forms (or other information gathering methods) and notifications to research subjects, as referred to in clause 3;
	9.3.2	non-disclosure agreements with third parties with whom the personal information is being shared, as referred to in clause 5.4;
	9.3.3	agreements with foreign companies or institutes with whom the personal information is being shared, as referred to in clause 6.5.

10   CHANGES TO RESEARCH

You need to notify us if any aspect of your collection or use of personal information changes.	10.1	You must notify us in writing if any aspect of your collection or use of personal information changes (e.g. such as your research methodology, recruitment strategy or the purpose for which you use the research).
	10.2	We may review and require amendments to the proposed changes to ensure compliance with this agreement.
	10.3	The notification must be sent to permission@sun.ac.za.

11   CONSEQUENCES OF BREACH

What are the consequences of breaching this agreement?	11.1	If you do not comply with this agreement, we may take disciplinary action or report such a breach to your home institute.
	11.2	You may be found guilty of research misconduct and may be censured in accordance with Stellenbosch University or your home institute's disciplinary code.
You may have to compensate us in the event of any legal action.	11.3	Non-compliance with this agreement could also lead to claims against Stellenbosch University in terms of POPI and/or other laws.
	11.4	Unless you are employed by or studying at Stellenbosch University, you indemnify Stellenbosch University against any claims (including all legal fees) from research subjects or any regulatory authority which are the result of your research project. You may also be held liable for the harm to our reputation should there be an information breach as a result of your non-compliance with this agreement.

12   CONTACT US

Please contact us if you have any questions.	Should you have any questions relating to this agreement you should contact permission@sun.ac.za.

Annexure 'A'

Instruction:

Please send this Notice to permission@sun.ac.za. If you have any difficulty completing the Notice, please contact the Division for Institutional Research and Planning at 021 808 9385. You must confirm that the Notice was received.

NOTIFICATION OF INFORMATION BREACH

Name of Researcher:

Name of Research Project:

Service Desk ID:

A security breach happens when you know (or you **reasonably believe)** that there has been:

   (a) loss of Personal Information ("PI")
   (b) damage to PI
   (c) unauthorised destruction of PI
   (d) unauthorised access to PI
   (e) unauthorised processing of PI

Date and time of security breach:	
Brief description of the security breach (what was lost and how). Please identify the equipment, software and/or physical premises and whether it is by hacking, lost device, public disclosure (email), theft or other means:	
Name of the person/s responsible for the security breach (if known):	
Is the security breach ongoing?	
Describe the steps taken to contain the security breach:	
What steps are being taken to investigate the cause of breach?	

r&.ld

23 April 2017

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Name of Researcher	Nita Lawton-Misra
Research Topic	Crisis leadership at South African universities: An exploration of the effectiveness of the strategies and responses ofleadership teams to the #FeesMustFall protests at South African universities in 2015/2016
Date of issue	23/04/2017
Reference number	UWCRP23 0417NLM

This serves as acknowledgement that you have obtained and presented provisional ethical clearance and your institutional permission required to proceed with the above referenced project.

Approval is granted for you to conduct research at the University of the Western Cape for the period 23 April 2017 to 12 April 2018 (or as determined by the validity of your ethics approval). You are required to engage this office in advance if there is a need to continue with research outside of the stipulated period. The manner in which you conduct your research must be guided by the conditions set out in the annexed agreement: *Conditions to guide research conducted at the University of the Western Cape.*

The University of the Western Cape promotes the generation of new knowledge and supports new research. It also has a responsibility to be sensitive to the rights of the students and staff on campus. This office will require of you to respect the rights of students and staff who do not wish to participate in interviews and/or surveys.

It is also incumbent on you to first furnish this office with a copy of the proposed publication should you wish to reference the University's name, spaces, identity, etc. prior to public dissemination.

Please be at liberty to contact this office should you require any assistance to conduct your research or specifically require access to either staff or student contact information.

Yours sincerely

DR AHMED SHAIKJEE
DEPUTY REGISTRAR: ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

UWCRP230417NLM
Page 1 of 3

FROM HOPE TO ACTIO!II THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

ANNEXURE

CONDITIONS TO GUIDE RESEARCH CONDUCTED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

The onus rests on the researcher/investigator to observe and comply with the conditions set out below with the aim to conduct responsibly ethical research. Clarity must be sought from the authorising office should the interpretation of the conditions be unclear.

1. ACCOUNTABILITY

1.1. The University reserves the right to audit the research practices of the researcher/ investigator to assess compliance to the conditions of this agreement.

1.2. Data collection processes must not be adapted, changed or altered by the researcher/ investigator without written notification issued to the authorising office.

1.3. The University reserves to right to cease research if any proposed change to the data collection process is found to be unethical or in contravention of this agreement.

1.4. Failure to comply with any one condition in this agreement may result in:

1.4.1. Disciplinary action instituted against a researcher/investigator employed or registered at the University;

1.4.2. The contravention reported to the organisation employing or registering the external researcher/ investigator.

2. GOVERNANCE

2.1. Approval to conduct research is governed by the Protection of Personal Information Act, No 4 of 2013, which regulates the entire information life cycle from collection, through use and storage and even the destruction of personal information and it is incumbent on the researcher/investigator to understand the implications of the legislation.

2.2. The researcher/investigator must employ the necessary measures to conduct research that is ethically and legally sound.

3. ACQUIRING CONSENT & RIGHTS OF PARTICIPANTS

3.1. It is incumbent on the researcher / investigator to clarify any uncertainties to the participant about the research.

3.2. Written consent must be obtained from participants before their personal information is gathered and documented.

3.3. Participation in the research must be voluntary and participants must not be pressured or coerced.

3.4. Participants have the right to access their personal information, obtain confirmation of what information is in the possession of the researcher/ investigator and who had access to the information.

3.5. Participants have the right to withdraw from the research and insist that their personal information not be used.

4. DATA AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

UWCRP230417NLM
Page **2** of **3**

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Acade m ie
Administrati

AR:

Administration Building, 1st Floor
ashaikjee@uwc.ac.za, nschoeman@uwc.ac.za
021959 2110

4.1. Due diligence must be afforded by the researcher/investigator to:

    4.1.1. Mitigate any risks that could compromise the privacy of participants before

    4.1.2. during and after the research is conducted;

    4.1.3. Collect only information that is relevant to the aim of the research;

    4.1.4. Verify all personal information collected about a participant if the information is supplied by a source other than the participant;

    4.1.5. Refrain from sharing participant information with a third party;

    4.1.6. Apply for an exemption if the identity of participants should be revealed in the interest of the research aims.

4.2. The researcher/investigator must employ appropriate, reasonable and technical measures to protect, prevent loss of and unlawful or unauthorised access of research information.

Should you have any questions relating to this agreement please contact:
ashailtjee@uwc.ac.za. or
researchpenn@uwc.ac.za

Research question bank:

Questions for Staff

1. What in your opinion was the reason/s for the protests?
2. Were you in your role prepared for the 2015 #FMF protests? And the 2016 protests?
3. What role do you think the Vice-Chancellor or Management played in the build up to the student protests?
4. What do you make of how the VC/ management dealt with the crisis once it erupted?
5. How did the management respond to the crisis in 2015, and then in 2016?
6. Do you think that management's response was appropriate? Why?
7. What leadership competencies do you believe were apparent in the leadership team?
8. What competencies were lacking?
9. What effect did the views, positions, and responses of management have on the protests?
10. Do you think there were genuine attempts to meet and communicate with protestors and to keep channels open at all times? If yes, how was this achieved?
11. Were there alternative ways of responding, and if so, what could these have been?
12. What did the crisis/protests highlight about management's:
    12.1   preparedness to deal with a crisis
    12.2   strengths
    12.3   weaknesses
13. What did the response highlight about the institution's culture?
14. How did you, in your professional role, respond to the protests?
15. How did you feel about decisions taken that impacted on your particular area of responsibility?
16. How did you communicate your views of the protests and the institution's responses to your management?
17. What would you recommend as preferred crisis leadership strategies for future similar crises, and why?
18. Do you have any additional comments you would like to make?

Questions for Leaders

1. How did you respond to the crisis in 2015?
2. Was your response in 2016 different from 2015? If so, then what changed, and why?
3. What would you do differently if there is a repeat of the protests in 2017?
4. What were the goals of leadership during the crisis?
5. What were the challenges and dilemmas experienced by the leadership?
6. What leadership strategies were employed during the crisis?
7. What leadership competencies were available among the team that were useful during the protests?
8. What competencies were lacking?
9. Which leadership strategies did you support and which were you uncomfortable with?
10. Have you received any leadership training in the past, and how did you experience its relevance to the crisis?
11. In what ways did any past student protests influence your response to the campaign, and to the actions of the students?
12. How did you feel about responses to the crises by other institutions in the higher education sector?
13. What effect did the views, positions, and responses of your leadership have on the protests?
14. Were the grievances and demands of students seen as a criticism of the leadership of the universities, and how did this shape your responses?
15. Were there genuine attempts to meet and communicate with protestors and to keep channels open at all times? If yes, how was this achieved?
16. What would you recommend as preferred crisis leadership strategies for future similar crises, and why?
17. Would you like to make any additional comments?

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X 17, Bellville, 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21 959 2111

Email: nlawtonmisra@uwc.ac.za

INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: Crisis leadership at South African universities: An exploration of the effectiveness of the strategies and responses of leadership teams to the #FeesMustFall protests at South African universities in 2015/2016

Dear Participant

 Thank you for taking time to consider assisting in my research.

My name is Nita Lawton-Misra and I am a PhD researcher studying at the University of Western Cape. I invite you, as a member of the leadership team at your university, to participate in a study I am conducting to determine how you responded to the student crises (#FMF) at your university in 2015 and 2016.

The purpose of this study is to explore the different leadership responses to and strategies used in resolving the student crises in an attempt to gauge the impact and/or the effectiveness of such strategies. Further, it aims to understand if crisis leadership at universities has given rise to a new style to leadership within the higher education environment.

Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study. Should you agree to participate you will be taken through a semi-structured interview at a time and place that is convenient to you. The interview should be completed within an hour, and will be audio-recorded to assist with data analysis.

No risks are anticipated for the study, and there will be no compensation for participating in the study.

The data from this study and your identity will remain anonymous and confidential. Reports will not include any information that can possibly identify you and pseudonyms will be used where necessary. All data from the survey will be confidential with only the researcher and supervisor having access to it. Soft data will be kept in a database on a password-protected computer and any printed information kept in a locked desk. Results from analysis of the data will be available in at

least one of the following: journal papers, conference papers and the thesis itself. The final thesis will be available in the University of Western Cape archives and online in the public domain. Data will be kept for a minimum of three years after the research is completed.

Participating in this study is on a voluntary basis. You may skip any question that you feel unable to answer. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time. On withdrawal, permission will be requested before we use any data you have provided till that point. If you require a summary of results at the completion of the research, this can be provided. Any questions may be referred to the researcher at nlawtonmisra@uwc.ac.za or to the supervisor Prof Michael Guilfoyle at mguilfoyle@uwc.ac.za .

Any concerns about the research may be directed to the Dean at the Faculty of Education, University of Western Cape by writing to:

Prof V Nomlomo
Faculty of Education
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville 7535

You will be given a copy of this Participation Information Sheet to keep for your records.

This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Senate Research Committee.
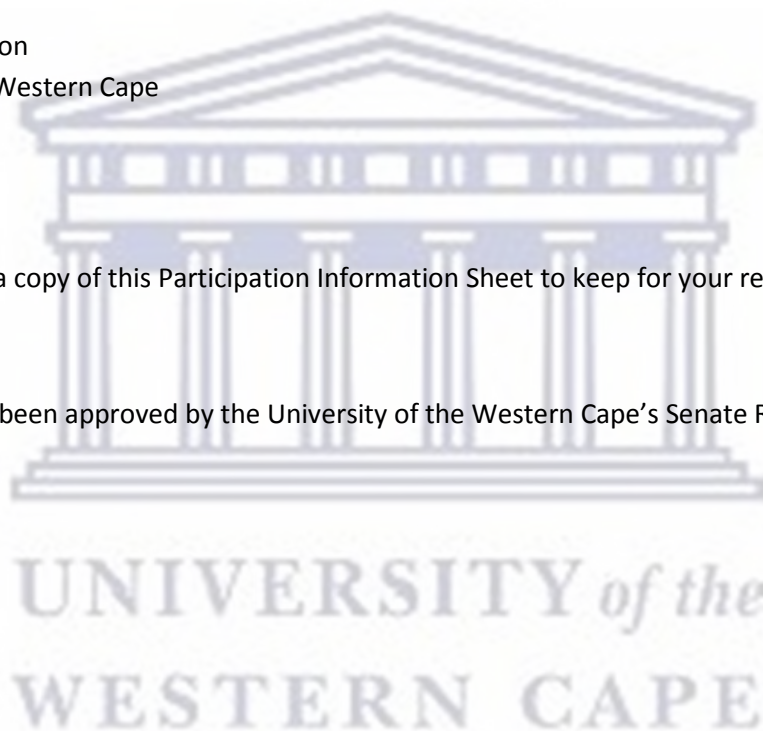
Appendix H

University of the Western Cape
Nita Lawton-Misra
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CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Crisis leadership at South African universities: An exploration of the effectiveness of the strategies and responses of leadership teams to the #FeesMustFall protests at South African universities in 2015/2016

I have read the information contained in the Participant Information Sheet, have had the research explained to me, and I am satisfied with the answers to my questions. I have understood the following:

1. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my own free will.
2. Participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time.
3. If I withdraw my permission will be sought before any information I have provided will be used in the research.
4. There is no compensation monetary or otherwise from being a participant.
5. My anonymity is important to the researcher and I will be referred to by a code in any data collected.
6. All data obtained will be treated in a confidential manner by the researcher.
7. There is no foreseeable risk associated with my participation.
8. The data obtained may be used in journals, conference papers and the final thesis.
9. I may request a summary of the results of the research.
10. I am free to contact the researcher, supervisor or the Faculty of Education if I have any questions or I am dissatisfied with the manner in which the research is conducted.

I consent to participating in the study: YES……… NO………….

I consent to being audio-recorded during the interview: YES……… NO………..

Signature………………………………………..   **Date ……………………………………….**

Name ………………………………………..

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.

DAILY MAVERICK

South Africa

Op-Ed: The Politics of Spectacle – reflections on the 2016 student protests

- Adam Habib
- South Africa
- 05 Dec 2016 12:24 (South Africa)

16 Reactions

This reflection builds on my earlier analysis of the #FeesMustFall protests, telling the story of the 2016 protests, explaining why the executive team made the choices we did, and reflecting strategically on the challenges facing higher education today. By ADAM HABIB.

I do not pretend that mine is an impartial voice, and I recognise that the story of the student protests will only be fully explained in the years to come.

In my last reflection, I stressed the legitimacy of the struggle of the student protesters for lower or no fees. I stand by this view. Fee increases were occasioned by a declining per capita subsidy to universities, and in an effort to retain quality, most higher education institutions annually increased fees, often in double digits. This priced university education outside the affordability of not only the working but also the middle classes. University executives have known for some time that this is not sustainable, but government has not been responsive to their concerns. The student protests changed this and have brought to an end this complacency. As I suggested previously, "the students achieved in 10 days what vice-chancellors had been trying to do for 10 years".

My earlier reflection also bemoaned, at least implicitly, the lack of political leadership on the part of the state. This is still true despite the initial valiant attempts at consultation by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). In these consultations, the DHET was abandoned by other state departments, especially the Presidency. Once it announced the fee recommendations and the protests erupted across the higher education system, the DHET effectively retreated, leaving the universities to fend for themselves.

Violent protests

My earlier reflection also subjected the protesters to scathing criticism, suggesting that subsequent to the October 2015 protests, the movement became more factionalised with smaller groups becoming prone to racism and violence. At Wits University, we could count at least eight groups including new informal student societies all of whom represented different political constituencies. These features of factionalisation, racism and violence consolidated in the student protests in 2016 and were especially apparent in the round of protests which emerged in September. Perhaps the most disconcerting feature of the current round of protests has been the propensity to violence and arson. Some analysts of the movement – Jane Duncan in particular – have suggested that the violence is a result of police and security action. But this is a classic case of empirical facts not being allowed to stand in the way of the analyst's conclusion. It is striking that the conclusion is often arrived at on the basis of an analysis of police action in community struggles and a selective reading of events on university campuses.

Let me demonstrate the fallacy of this conclusion through a study of events at Wits, which is the case that I know best. In January 2016, a small group of students disrupted our registration process. They were violent and threatened staff and students. When negotiations failed to resolve the issue, we brought in private security, and I made the case for this in a letter to the university community. The decision was opposed by a small group of liberal and left-leaning academics, largely from one or two schools in the Faculty of Humanities, although it was supported by the vast majority of academics at the university. Once the conflict stabilised, we withdrew the security. Subsequently, in the beginning of the second

term, some protesting students, many from other universities, tried to disrupt the academic programme.

Again, students and staff were threatened and assaulted. Private security was brought in. This repeated itself three or four times during the course of the year, although we did not lose any academic time. We did have a bus burnt (the fire was started with students on it) in February, and there were multiple attempts to burn down buildings, including libraries. Mercifully, none was successful. The fact to note, however, is that none of this happened as a result of the presence of private security, or for that matter the police. In fact, neither private security nor police were present. Instead, they were brought in as a result of the arson or disruptions of the academic programme.

How then were selected social scientists of good standing able to arrive at a conclusion in violation of the empirical facts? The answer emanates from their overtly ideological approach to the student protests. The conclusions had been arrived at even prior to their analysis. What was also shocking was the implicit condoning of violence by this small group of scholars. They often claimed that they were not partial to the violence, but their complicity was evident both in their failure to publicly condemn the violence and in their deliberate misrepresentations of the events on campus. Moreover, while this small group of academics demanded the withdrawal of police and private security, they were not willing to publicly demand the renouncing of violence by the student protesters. What they refused to recognise is that until violence is rejected, both in rhetoric and in practice, there is no moral legitimacy in the demand that a public institution should withdraw security.

The same could be asked of some non-governmental organisations and groups of progressive lawyers all of whom seemed to have suspended their moral or even strategic political judgements in their representations of some students. Needless to say the court ruled in favour of the university in many of the cases that were brought against it. But in which moral universe can progressive lawyers justify continuously bringing legal cases against the university to prevent it from hosting examinations and determining the sentiments of its student body and university community? Where is the justification in forcing a public university that is severely financially constrained to divert scarce resources to fight frivolous legal cases so that it can effectively fulfil its institutional mandate? How could progressives be party to attempts to shut down a public university's examinations, or be complicit in a project to advance a political agenda that advocates that there should be "no education if there is no free education"? How can one be willing to sacrifice so many innocent lives and then claim to be supporters of the poor and marginalised? These are hard questions that "progressive" lawyers and activists must ask of themselves when they suspend judgement of the tactics deployed by sections of the student movement in this round of protests.

I must hasten to state that the vast majority of academics have been unquestionably critical of the violence at our institutions and largely supportive of the continuation of the academic programme. Indeed, this was evident on multiple occasions. In the beginning of the year, on calling in private security, I visited each of the faculties to engage staff members and the vast majority recognised that, however unpalatable, this was a decision that had to be made. This was also reflected in the poll in which 91% of staff supported the resumption of the academic programme even if security had to be deployed. And it was most gratifyingly evident in a petition which I received from 437 staff members who expressed support for me when some students forced me to leave a peace rally in Braamfontein.

My reflections on the behaviour and strategies of left-leaning academics and progressives is not meant to imply that they represent the dominant voice within the academy or society. Neither is it meant to target them unfairly. Rather, it is done to robustly confront their ideas and to demonstrate that whatever their intentions, their failure to condemn violence and related behaviours of spectacle could literally undermine the very goal of free education itself. Their narrative of an ascendant, repressed social movement and a hostile management is also not an accurate reflection of the state of affairs. Rather, almost all of us agree on the goal of free education. The dispute is about how to get there and what the trade-offs should be.

Will of the people?

Another feature that has consolidated itself in the current round of student protests is the increasingly factionalised nature of the movement. At the height of the protests in 2015, the student protesters numbered tens of thousands. This time, at the height of the protests at Wits, the protesters numbered less than a thousand and even that is magnanimous. This was perhaps best demonstrated by the University poll in which 77% of students and 92% of staff who responded, voted to return to the academic programme, with appropriate security measures in place. There have been some attempts to question the results of the poll on methodological and political grounds. Some suggest that the results did not represent an overwhelming majority because only 17,000 students voted in favour of resuming the academic programme. But this reflects an ignorance of the process of polling and a failure to realise that there is never a 100% response rate. Given that 30,000 students received the SMS (as a result of a technical glitch on the part of the service provider) and that 21,000 students voted, the results represent an overwhelming endorsement to return to class. No other stakeholder has provided more comprehensive data on popular attitudes of students or staff on the issue.

Given this, it is appalling that the small left-leaning and liberal academic cohort argued against resuming the academic programme. It suggests that they were more interested in being responsive to political commissars than to ordinary student voices, especially the poor, who do not have the luxury of sacrificing the academic year. Not only does it reflect a shocking abrogation of their academic responsibility to teach, it also reflects either a lack of understanding of the politics that was playing out, or a political bankruptcy in responding to the challenges of our time, a matter to which I will later return.

Role of the media

But small groups of student protesters and left-leaning academics are not the only ones that need to account. The media establishment must also take responsibility for dismaying coverage of the student protests. Mainstream journalism, which has become very juniorised, has been incapable of nuanced reporting of the protests and their causes. Instead, they have focused largely on the most dramatic incidents, which were often staged for the camera.

But there have also been instances of what was simply bad journalism. In a few extreme cases, we observed that coverage of student protests at other institutions was accompanied by video footage of Wits. Essentially, these broadcasting houses were too apathetic to send camera crews to where the protests were actually happening. We had to write to some editors of the broadcasting houses and threaten to sue if they did not stop this practice.

Perhaps what has been most disturbing is the digital media like the *Daily Vox* which have become crude cases of embedded journalism, even if it is of a left-wing variety. There have been too many cases of journalists with conflicted interests, on the one hand serving as activists of the student protest movement and on the other parading as legitimate journalists. Misrepresentations abound on the *Daily Vox*, because information is at no point verified. Describing itself as citizen journalism, the site has become the online left-wing manifestation of Fox TV where information, propaganda and skewed analyses all morph into a toxic mix that is peddled as legitimate journalism.

Engagement and the politics of spectacle

One feature that is striking about this round of protests has been our attempt to use mediators to broker a solution. This of course failed. We had initially engaged Tiego Moseneke and Sipho Maseko, both of whom are former presidents of the Wits Black Students Society. Others subsequently joined them, including one who is the chair of a political party, and other former student leaders. Initially, they brokered a solution involving a pledge in which we committed to the goal of free education, and agreed to hold a General Assembly and to march as the Senate and Council with the protesting students. The intention of the pledge was to create an alliance of students and staff across the system, as well as with civil society, business and other stakeholders, to drive an advocacy agenda for the progressive realisation of free, fully funded, quality, decolonised higher education, without ignoring the systemic crises in primary and secondary education. But at the last minute, only hours before the Assembly, the protesting students reneged on returning to class. The mediators wanted us to proceed with the General Assembly, but executive management felt that we had no choice but to cancel the event, given that there was no guarantee that it would not be disrupted and that the safety of those in attendance was not assured. In the weeks ahead, the mediators repeatedly tried to broker a solution without success.

Understanding why this was the case is important for our endeavours to find a political solution to the crisis. The mediators assumed that it was in the rational interest of all sides to institutionalise the matter and arrive at a resolution. But this was not the case for a small faction. This faction, essentially taking instructions from an outside political party which called for the complete shutdown of universities, was not in a position to accede to a resolution. In fact, given that it was a very small minority (it had not won a single seat in a recent student leadership election), it served its strategic interest to effectively play a politics of spectacle. This involved insisting that all decisions were made in the mass meeting, where rational and pragmatic voices were silenced by accusing them of selling out.

The most dramatic example of this "spectacle" was at a peace rally at a church in Braamfontein. Initially, when the idea of the peace rally was broached with us by some in the academic union, we cautioned against it. We suggested that it was at risk of being hi-jacked and could reinvigorate the protest that had by then been contained. But not to have gone would have led to us being perceived as hostile to a solution. So we attended, even though we knew that it could turn into a debacle. When we went into the church, we were not particularly challenged. After all, the students had publicly called for such an engagement. But after a few minutes, one of the EFF student leaders, Vuyani Pambo, took to the podium and in his usual flamboyant language demanded that the meeting could not continue with my presence.

Suddenly the atmosphere changed. A small group of students surrounded me, swearing and issuing verbal abuse, and took over the meeting. The organisers were paralysed, having been taken by surprise, and the academic left who supported the movement were cowed into silence. The mainstream press loved the spectacle, as did embedded journalists from the *Daily Vox* and documentary filmmakers, all of whom needed footage. Pambo, to be fair, indicated that he did not want violence and asked the students to give me an opportunity to leave. But the event had morphed from a multistakeholder peace rally into a student meeting. A student leader from a faction with minimal support had effectively taken control of the political narrative, while those in the majority were outmanoeuvred and stood by, helpless.

This was to play itself out time after time in this round of protests. It paralysed the mediation attempts and effectively held the institution hostage. In this context, the only solution was to secure the campus through police and private security, and to proceed with the academic programme. The failed peace rally reinvigorated the protests. After seven days of no substantive disruptions, protesters broke into lectures and tests, and some even tore test scripts. Police disbursed the protesters, opening fire with rubber bullets, and some students were injured. The police action is currently being investigated by the IPID. Thereafter, an uneasy calm returned to campus, the lecture schedule was completed, and the examinations were started. Two weeks into the examinations, after Mcebo Dlamini had been released from prison, the student leaders called for a negotiated resolution. Within days, an agreement was reached in which the examinations were allowed to proceed and we now refer to our deferred examinations as a second sitting.

Three lessons flow from this narrative of events. First, it is rational for smaller factions to emphasise the politics of spectacle for it is only through this that they can control the political narrative. Asking them not to do so goes against their rational interest. It is worth noting that this strategy was perhaps best perfected by the Nazis in the Weimar Republic in the 1920s. As a minority, the Nazis effectively used the politics of spectacle to capture political power by mobilising on the very real grievances of ordinary people. Moreover, it should be remembered that the politics of spectacle is as much a means of silencing ordinary, pragmatic voices as it is of mobilising others.

To take one example, a student supporter of the Fees Must Fall movement who felt that he could not afford not to complete the academic year went to a student meeting to raise his concerns. Afterwards, he wrote an e-mail to me and this is what he said:

"I took the opportunity to express that I am in full support of the free education movement but not at the expense of my qualification. I explained that I was also a NSFAS student for two years and that I am now funded by BankSETA … I cannot afford to not write my exams this year. I was IMMEDIATELY attacked and told how selfish I was and that I need to heed the call of our generational struggle which is free education. Another young lady expressed the same views and was also attacked and intimidated to the point where the speaker of the house (an incoming SRC member) had to call for our protection. Naturally, there was a lot of whispering among the other students who would like to go back to class but who were too scared to voice their opinions due to what the reaction was towards myself and the young lady … These students will not listen to ANYONE who has an opposing view and I feel that it is unfair to be held hostage by a group of students who are aspiring towards martyrdom or heroism and not a tertiary level qualification."

This student's account is one example among many that shows how the mass meeting is effectively used as a site to silence people as opposed to enabling democratic processes to play out.

Duplicitous student leaders

The politics of spectacle has been accompanied by an astonishing duplicity among some student leaders. Many claimed publicly that the executive management was not willing to meet them, and yet they had personally met with myself and other executives and pleaded for us not to reveal these engagements. Many who interacted with me on a face-to-face basis were utterly charming and respectful, but their personas seemed to change fundamentally on Twitter where they engaged in the most virulent, extreme sort of fashion which was frankly typically of far-right behaviour. One student leader repeatedly made the most scurrilous remarks about myself and my family, but then sent me an SMS to say that he respected me and that his actions were not personal. Another student leader bumped into me at a seaside resort, suggested that her/his actions were not personal and apologised for any discomfort that s/he may have created, and then promptly became even more obnoxious in the months that followed. Some repeatedly criticised the presence of private security and police, but then indicated in personal discussions that they understood why we had the security presence and that they felt safer as a result. A few who had called for a boycott of lectures and examinations privately approached individual executive managers and asked to write their papers in secret so that other students would not see them.

This kind of duplicity should be of particular concern to all of us. It suggests that despite their criticisms of the existing political elite, some of the prominent leaders among this new generation of activists are displaying behavioural traits that are typical of the most venal of the current politicians. And astonishingly, this behaviour has been defended by academics, politically active parents, some lawyers and even civil society activists. One academic, reflecting a popular view among left-leaning academics, suggested that we must understand this kind of behaviour because it is merely the theatre of social movement politics. A politically active parent challenged an executive member and me for holding accountable her/his son who was communicating with management in the rudest and most obnoxious manner. Only when I held firm, insisting that we will only tolerate civil engagements from student leaders, did the parent subtly retreat.

Civil society activists, even notable ones who had demonstrated incredible bravery in the struggle against apartheid, now pandered to the most outrageous behaviour from student activists, while at the same time privately communicating with me about how unacceptable their behaviour was. Most of this was inspired by a mistaken belief that they could earn the trust of student leaders and then slowly encourage them to behave in more acceptable and principled ways. But these activists had forgotten that if left unchecked, these behaviour patterns could generalise themselves across society. One only has to remember how the politics of spectacle in the ANC Youth League, or the corruption and opportunism of Jacob Zuma and his faction, generalised themselves across the ANC, Parliament and other state structures. Left unchecked, this kind of duplicitous politics could lead to the emergence of a new generation of Jacob Zumas, Julius Malemas and Des van Rooyens, and consolidate the tradition of unaccountability that prevails in the South African political system.

Timing of Negotiations

The second lesson to be drawn from this narrative of the events is that a negotiated outcome, even a temporary one, will not come simply as a result of persuasion, but also of a recognition that the alternative path of violence, or in this case institutional shutdown, is no longer on the cards. This is what some of the negotiators and most of the academic left have never truly internalised. Negotiations are as much a reflection of the dynamics of societal or institutional power, and this needs to be understood, managed and even choreographed. This is why the students asked for negotiations only when the option of institutional shutdown had been effectively closed off through the deployment of police and private security and the resumption of the academic programme. Prior to this, all attempts at negotiated outcomes had failed. It is a lesson well understood in the academic literature on political negotiations that needs to be learnt and internalised by left-leaning academics and even the mediators.

Political issues cannot be resolved through security

Third, it is important never to believe one's own propaganda by assuming that a security solution can be sustainable in the long term for what is essentially a political problem. This is a point that is often made by one of our council members elected by the academics, with whom I rarely share any level of agreement. However, recognising this must not lead one, as it does among some, to abrogate one's academic responsibilities. Neither must it lead one to be oblivious of other competing political agendas and to become an unwitting accomplice to these. But the essential message, namely that a security solution can never sustainably resolve a political challenge, is legitimate. This means that ultimately a political and policy solution must be found.

Under normal conditions, the political solution would have to be led by the state. But given the legitimacy crisis of the state, and in particular the President, it is perhaps best led by credible independent individuals with legitimacy among a cross-section of society and political factions. Dikgang Moseneke's initiative for a national convention on the financing of higher education is therefore the best option on the table for such a political process. Essentially called by Moseneke and a number of other individuals, including Malusi Mpulwana, Jay Naidoo, Mary Metcalfe and Yvonne Mokgoro, the convention would enable societal stakeholders, including government, to engage in a negotiation around the trade-offs involved in the call for free education. It is these stakeholders that will bear the brunt of the demand for free education and it is important for them to either accede to this demand or to engage the students and moderate it.

Free education and viable financial models

But what of the policy proposal for free education? Currently the demand of some of the student protesters involves not only free tuition, but also fully subsidised accommodation and subsistence. This would effectively approximate an additional cost of R50-billion per annum. There have been a few proposals suggesting that this is possible. The most substantive was perhaps one authored by a few Wits students in engagement with Khaya Sithole. An initial version of their proposal basically made the case for financing free education through the tax system. Much of the document was thoughtful but its collective proposals were problematic. Essentially, it proposed an increase in a range of taxes, including the skills levy, corporate and income tax, and a wealth tax. The immediate collective tax increase on business would have amounted to more than 10%, which would essentially implode the economy and accelerate tax avoidance.

The essential problem with this version of the proposal, and those of many others advocated by student protesters and other left-leaning academics, is that they do not reflect any understanding of economic consequences and societal trade-offs. Even societies far richer and more developed than us have a more measured approach to the financing of higher education. During a recent visit to Germany, for instance, I was part of an African delegation that was made aware that while university tuition is free, this is not true for accommodation and subsistence. Indeed, accommodation and subsistence costs are born by individual students and their families, and while there is a state financial support system that assists, it is limited to only about 25% of the student population. Moreover, the financial support comprises an equal portion of loan and grant, and once the minimum period of study for the degree is completed, the financial support becomes a full loan scheme.

Given the existing growth rates in the economy, and the multiple social needs in society, it is unlikely that free higher education can be fully realised immediately in South Africa. What is possible, however, is free education for the poor which is widely supported by multiple stakeholders in society. But the protests revealed that the middle classes are also struggling to afford the costs of university education. A plan therefore needs to be made for the missing middle as well. One option for this missing middle that I have been partial to in these circumstances is a loan scheme, and a model for this which is being developed by Sizwe Nxasana in partnership with the banks will be piloted in 2017. The rich should of course continue to pay for higher education at levels slightly higher than inflation so that some cross-subsidisation can occur. One legitimate criticism of this model by protesting students and progressive academics is that the scheme could saddle graduating students with a huge debt which they will have to spend many years repaying. This could lead to a consolidation of inequality in society. One way to obviate this is by tying the progressive financing of higher education to growth rates in the economy and the expansion of the tax base. In this way, higher education will be made progressively freer as the economy strengthens.

The most sophisticated policy expression of this substantive intent is expressed by the latest version of the student-Khaya Sithole financing model. Essentially the model looks towards increasing state subsidy from 38% to 50% of university financing, and is coupled with a private sector funded Capital Infrastructure Fund (in exchange for tax rebates and capital allowances) and an Education Endowment Fund (EEF). The EEF is initially capitalised through state resources including a 1% increase in the skills levy, but is thereafter maintained by a graduate tax that is structured through the payroll. The model does envisage modest corporate and individual tax increases and a phased in development of a new financing of the higher education system. This policy model on the financing of higher education pushes the fiscal boundaries, yet is entirely pragmatic and is worthy of serious consideration.

However, this kind of pragmatic, progressive proposal is unlikely to be realised in one-on-one negotiations between students and management or even students and government. It can only be realised in a national convention where societal stakeholders engage with each other and arrive at a societal consensus on the financing of higher education. This is because societal stakeholders have to live with the consequences of the policy choices and thereby have the incentive to hold each other accountable. This national deliberative conversation can be coupled with institutional political innovations along the lines attempted at Wits with the hosting of a General Assembly in which the executive management, staff and students form an alliance in favour of the progressive realisation of free higher education. Collectively, these national and institutional engagement initiatives can enable a cross-sectoral alliance involving higher education executives, staff, students, societal stakeholders including among

others business, trade unions and civic organisations, and the state to progressively implement an agenda for the progressive realisation of free, fully funded, quality, decolonised higher education. But this alliance is only viable if it is based on three assumptions: a rejection of violence, the immediate development of a road map for the progressive realisation of free, fully funded, quality, decolonised education and a rejection of any strategy that shuts down the academic programme and prevents education from taking place while the new model of university financing is being developed and implemented.

What are the alternatives?

If this agenda to realise a pragmatic, progressive model of financing higher education is not successful, then the consequences for South Africa and its higher education system are dire. If student protesters and their academic and other allies continue to pursue maximalist agendas, two scenarios exist for the future. The first is that the implementation of the maximalist policy agenda implodes the economy like it did in Venezuela and deepens the political and social crisis within the society. The alternative scenario is that like in some countries in the rest of the continent, the government concedes on free education, does not make the concomitant investment in the universities, and the institutions disintegrate as a result. This is of course not the only experience on the continent. In Zimbabwe for instance there has never been free higher education. Instead there existed a fully funded scheme of tuition fees, accommodation and subsistence along the lines of the South African National Students' Financial Aid Scheme, which was successful throughout the 1980s, but then collapsed after the 1990s both with the imposition of structural adjustment policies and the deterioration of the political context. In any case, if the state does not make up in state subsidy what is conceded on the fee front, then the disintegration of South African universities will happen; not overnight, but they will collapse within the decade and the agenda to address inequality in the country will be permanently impaired.

South Africa and the world are at a crossroads. A populist right is resurgent across the globe including in the West. The progressive activists and intelligentsia bemoan this but do not sufficiently recognise their own complicity in enabling these outcomes. It is worth recognising that Reagan would not have emerged in the US without the failure of Carter. Thatcher would not have emerged without the failure of Labour. And Hitler would not have been successful in the Weimar Republic without the strategic blunders of the left. When progressives abandon representing the interests of ordinary people, then the people turn to the right with devastating consequences for society and all humanity. This is the strategic lesson that progressive student activists, academics and their allies need to recognise. Pursuing a maximalist agenda will not realise the outcome that they hope for. In fact, it may very well create a mainstream backlash that allows the right to take power. Societies can only be transformed by policies that are rooted in the realities of the world as it exists, not a world that we wish existed. This is a lesson that progressives have forgotten in the past, and it is urgent that they internalise it today. For without this, South Africa's universities and its society are doomed. **DM**

Photo: Professor Adam Habib, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the Witwatersrand.

**UNIVERSITIES
SOUTH AFRICA**

16 November 2015

STATEMENT ON VIOLENCE AND DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY
AT PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

The recent wanton acts of violence and destruction of property at the University of the Western Cape, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, and some of our other institutions, is unacceptable and must not be tolerated. As the leadership of universities in South Africa, we condemn these senseless acts that are intent on not only destroying our facilities but also denying the right of access to the majority of our students and staff members. We respect the rights of those who wish to protest lawfully but we cannot under any circumstances condone acts of violence and criminality. We have to balance the right of lawful protest with the right of those who want to learn and work.

Following our meetings with President Jacob Zuma, Minister Blade Nzimande and government officials on the issues raised by students, there have been prolonged and concerted efforts to engage with students and work towards reaching agreements on the various issues tabled. Despite our continued engagement to find solutions to these institutional and sectoral challenges, there are still some students who resort to violent and destructive acts that cast not only our universities but the entire higher education system, in a negative light both nationally and globally. We call on our student leadership and other stakeholder groups to act with restraint and to use the opportunities provided to raise and deal with their issues in a non-violent and constructive manner.

For more information please contact:

Dr Oliver Seale – Acting Chief Executive Officer, Universities South Africa

Tel: 012 481 2842 / 072 807 4677

Allowing higher education to collapse over funding will have dire consequences, write A m and A me B w

We are in the throes of an intellectual and political struggle for the soul of South Africa's future. This is not the struggle that is being fought on the campaign trail for the August 3 elections, yet when the dust settles it will probably have a far greater impact on our society than the rough and tumble of choosing mayors and councillors.

It is the struggle around the financing of higher education, and it is being waged in the corridors of our universities, in the flamboyance and rhetoric of student politics, and in submissions to the presidential commission on free education and the ministerial commission on a fee regime.

It can be difficult to make sense of this debate given its rhetorical flair and ideological fervour, but essentially it has three strands.

The first makes the case for free higher education and is perhaps most coherently summarised by Rasigan Maharajh, Enver Motala, Leanne Naidoo and Salim Vally in the online journal The Conversation

> The s uden s achieved more in 10 days han vice-chancellors achieved in 10 years

and in their submission to the presidential commission. Essentially, this view holds that free higher education should be underwritten by a tax on the rich.

This recommendation could be more effective than the one advocated by some vice-chancellors who propose a higher fee on rich students to cross-subsidise students from poor communities. A tax would be a more effective way to get the rich to pay, not only because of its administrative efficiencies, but also because it would capture a wider range of the rich.

But here is the challenge to the free education paradigm. While taxing the rich to underwrite higher education is a far more efficient option in policy terms, is it politically feasible?

First, there is a serious trust deficit in the state, which means that the rich will engage in tax avoidance. Second, we are not sure the state has the political will to implement significant tax increases. Sections of the political elite are concerned that it may chase away investment in a world where capital has never been so mobile. Finally, we do not believe the state can afford a significant tax increase now, when economic growth is almost stagnant and there are multiple other legitimate demands on the public purse.

In this context, should higher education executives not be prudent and have a Plan B? Some bristle at this suggestion for they assume it is a means to deflect from the free education option. They raise the possibility of social mobilisation by students, and remind me of what we

have often said since the protests in October last year that the students achieved more in 10 days than vice-chancellors achieved in 10 years.

This is entirely true and points to the power of social mobilisation. But recognising this power must not lead one to fetishise it.

Protests often succeed when they take the form of short spontaneous bursts, which must then be capitalised upon by astute leaders who drive through sustainable change.

But this requires political nuance and an understanding of trade-offs. What is often not understood about last year's protests is that while students did indeed force the state to make available resources for a freeze on fees, the costs were borne by marginalised communities whose social support programmes were cut.

Unintended consequences can arise from social action. This does not mean action must not be undertaken, but it does require that social mobilisation must not be romanticised. Moreover, it should be accompanied by thoughtful activism.

Here is the danger of a misreading of the political moment or an adventurist display of social action. State elites could very well concede the demand, but as on the rest of the continent, they might fail to make

available the resources for their populist concession. The net effect will be as it has been in other African societies — the immediate collapse of quality higher education.

We are aware that some have suggested we must implode higher education, and only then can we rebuild it from the ashes.

But such individuals have never built anything worth a damn. Moreover, many of these people, who we have cynically called " of the Pol Pot brigade , will not have to pay the costs of the collapse of universities. Often, they already have their degrees, their children are in private schools, and they carry second passports.

The consequences of these choices will ultimately be borne by future generations of students, and society as a whole, because of the entrenchment of inequalities that would likely flow from the collapse of public higher education.

It is the prospect of this outcome

that has galvanised the two other strands in this debate.

The first, advocated largely by government officials and even some associated with the ministerial commission on a fee regime, makes the case for a consumer price index increase in university fees.

They recognise that costs within universities increase beyond CPI. What is referred to as higher education inflation occurs, because a portion of a university s costs library books and journals, high-level research equipment, collaborative research costs is heavily dependent on exchange rates. Estimates from Universities South Africa and even the ministerial commission suggest this inflation is up to 2% higher than CPI.

Despite this, and recognising the adverse economic circumstances we are all embroiled in, these individuals advocate the compromise of a CPI increase.

The hope is that this compromise would avoid a new round of student protests, but this is unlikely.

Social struggles are not a result of rational processes. They are a product of interests and power, and no rational engagement about evidence is going to prevent protests. It should be remembered that the constituency that has led the student protests is essentially the " missing middle " — students whose parents

mostly upper-working class and lower-middle class, earn too much to qualify for state funding. Research modelling the impact of a CPI increase shows it would adversely affect the traditional and comprehensive universities in the metropolitan areas, the very institutions where the missing middle is located.

Just as importantly, many universities decisions to insource vulnerable workers has added 3% to 4% to expenditure, which means that costs in many urban universities are increasing at 12%.

In this context, a simple CPI increase would be about 6% below real cost increases. The research that models the impact of a CPI increase also shows that if insourcing costs are included, 15 out of a sample of 21 universities would be financially worse off — a dramatic blow with severe consequences for the quality of the one functioning higher education system in Africa.

The final strand therefore insists that the fee increase should be higher education inflation at a minimum. This could be done by sharing the obligation, with student fees accounting for a portion and the difference being made up by a separate state grant. But how are students to afford this?

We may have to use the banking system. Sizwe Nxasana, chairman of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme and the previous CEO of FNB, is working on a model to fund primarily the missing middle by using a mixture of government guarantees, social responsibility bonds and other financing mechanisms. This could be adapted with academics Daniel Bradlow and Eddie Webster's ideas of a perpetual bond (which has no maturity date) tied to retirement options which is more cost-effective from the students perspective.

This is not the best scenario for it would entail students graduating with debt. Moreover, it could further consolidate inequality.

But it does address our immediate challenge, which is to enable access to university education for all who qualify.

We are in a moment where we have to choose between unpalatable options. We wish this were not the case, but social change has to happen within its context, and not in an idealised fantasy world. Our responsibility is not to avoid making a decision, but to make the decision that is least offensive. This decision need not be permanent. It can simply be a choice to enable both some progress and the continuation of the greater fight.

This is, after all, how most social change happens. Systemic and societal transformations do not happen in a single moment. If anything, they result from the accumulation of smaller social reforms that then collectively transform our society.

But this requires political nuance and integrity from our leaders. Without these, we risk unintended consequences that could cripple our societies. Some factions of the current cohort of student activists have accused Nelson Mandela and his generation of having sold out and compromised on the principle of socioeconomic inclusion.

Is it not ironic that they risk doing the same by pursuing maximalist demands that could effectively destroy the very foundation of quality higher education in South Africa? Now, more than ever, there is a need for a thoughtful activism.

● Habib and Bawa are chairman and CEO, respectively, of University South Africa

Survival of universities requires realism on fees

Only measure of success in Rio medals

● F m e 13

She also acts fast against threats of illness, like scratchy throats.

Brittain has four rowing sons, including Matthew, a member of the golden lightweight four who retired after London, and Lawrence, in the heavyweight pairs boat with Shaun Keeling.

Lawrence is a cancer survivor. Two years ago, when his form kept dipping, Danielle had an inkling there was a serious underlying problem.

Tests confirmed her worst fears. In late 2014, she and husband, David, a haematologist, sat down in their lounge with Lawrence and told him he had stage-four lymph node cancer, also known as Hodgkin disease.

He responded well to chemotherapy, despite a spell in hospital with pneumonia, and in early 2015 he returned to the rowing squad, overweight and unfit.

Lawrence was allowed to train only lightly and was under strict instructions to keep his heart rate below 120 beats a minute.

The 2016 model is a different animal.

Off-loading the squad's gym equipment of around 800kg of weights, 12 rowing machines and two exercise bikes in Tzaneen, Barrow briefly held two kettlebells weighing a combined 48kg.

Then he shouted to Lawrence: Dagther eriously lift both of these

"Ja"

It s f***ing heavy!

In training later that day, Lawrence swung them as if they were pompoms.

He and the heavyweights eat mountains of food.

The men s and women s lightweights watch their diets they need to boast an average of 70kg and 60kg

pared with four years ago. " ore I respectively in competition.

1 Smit half for a lightweight com

would tell my body to make the weight and then go and eat junk food. Now I ve got to be more thoughtful.

A few days before the Tzaneen camp, Lawrence had knocked his

I m only jus learninae I s teen seven years nowe l ho e l ae ano her our years o u i in o rac ice

rigging, which the oar sits on, against a jetty, pushing it out by 0.4".

Barrow repositioned it. He carries with him a notebook containing the rigging settings from every training session and race.

He and some of the rowers have yet to decide on their futures after Rio, but the coach is confident that

local rowing has a bright future, with the young heavyweights as well as those coming through the under-23 ranks, like many of the current senior squad have done.

But Barrow knows only one measurement will be used to determine the success of his programme these past four years medals in Rio.

Nothing else matters.

UNIVERSITIES SOUTH AFRICA

KEEPING OUR UNIVERSITIES ON AN EVEN KEEL - A CALL TO ACTION

Today, South Africa's universities are standing at a major crossroads. Our system is in unprecedented turmoil, our students not receiving much deserved tuition support, our staff under tremendous stress and a climate of fear, disunity and strife pervading most of our campuses. We are writing to the South African nation to express our deep concerns about the threat of the current crisis in higher education on the sustainability and quality of our universities.

We write also to express our utter commitment and conviction that the 2016 academic project will be completed at each of our universities and that these public institutions will be ready to receive new cohorts of students in 2017.

As vice-chancellors, we are deeply aware of the growing unaffordability of university study for most households in South Africa and support the call by students and the State for fee-free higher education for the poor. We would consider the financial exclusion of young South Africans from higher education as antithetical to the public good purposes and mission of our universities.

We are also acutely aware and deeply concerned that the current crisis is a result of the chronic underfunding of the sector by the State over the last 20 years. We strongly believe that a bold, imaginative and systematic revamping of the entire university funding system is urgently and decisively required.

The academic project of 2016 at South Africa's 26 public universities is at serious risk of internal collapse due to the ongoing disruptive and destructive activities of a small minority of students. It is fair to say that universities today face their most serious crisis in the post-apartheid era in our country.

We wish to remind the nation that South Africa's universities, as a system, with all the challenges they face, perform above their weight class internationally. They represent an enormous national resource that is central to the projects of nation building, social equality, democratization and economic prosperity while still offering students a globally competitive qualification.

A CALL TO ACTION

The 26 vice-chancellors, speaking as one, call on all South Africans to work with our universities towards ensuring that the 2016 academic year is successfully completed in the national interest and in the interest of individual students and their families.

We begin by making a call on our students to take up the challenge of succeeding academically in this deeply fragmented year and to see this as a form of national duty, a contribution to the national project of universities to produce highly skilled individuals for our complex, multilayered society. We call on student political leaders not to sacrifice the academic project on the altar of narrow interests, party political agendas, and to desist from making demands that universities cannot possibly fulfill.

We wish to thank our staff, both academic and support for their professionalism and dedication during difficult times, and further call on them to be resolute in making this yet another successful academic year. You are central to the academic project at our universities. Without you there isn't one. This has been a year of much tension, division, anxiety and even despair. It would be a tragedy of major proportions if we did not get our institutions back on an even keel to complete the academic year and to begin the rightful process of renewal and reconstitution of the place of universities in society.

We thank the faith-based organisations and other community organisations for the gracious role they have played in mediation and in trying to generate sufficient consensuses between the universities, the protesting students and the State. While these may not have always worked they did provide a textured foundation for conversations and engagements that were extremely important. We call on you to remain engaged, together with other sectors of society.

We call our business community to action in supporting and partnering our university system and the State in a more systematic and sustainable manner, given the crucial role it plays in skills development, technological innovation and economic growth. While we acknowledge your support of our sector through the bursaries you grant to our students and your contribution to research at universities, we call on you to engage our sector to determine ways in which resources may be generated to support students who face financial risk in the 2016 and/or 2017 academic years.

While we appreciate the steps taken by the State and especially by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr BE Nzimande, to diffuse the crisis, we do make a call on Government to renew its efforts to decisively, clearly and substantively address the issues raised in the student #FeesMustFall campaign and to provide our universities with the assurance that they will be havens of peace, a condition so fundamental to the academic enterprise.

RIGHTS OF STUDENTS AND STAFF TO PROTEST

Our universities fully embrace the rights of students and staff to participate in protest and to challenge the status quo whenever that is deemed necessary. We see social and personal agency as vital to the flourishing and strengthening of our democracy and in the development of new cohorts of leaders and intellectuals – a project very much at the heart of the purpose of higher education.

What we have witnessed recently, however, is the slippage of this student action into violent forms where a million students find themselves forcibly prevented from participating in their studies. This cannot, under any circumstances, be deemed to be acceptable in a functioning democracy.

Alongside this we have observed the devastating impact of an assault on the infrastructure of our universities, the replacement of which will run into a figure in excess of R1 billion. And this figure is growing daily.

Universities cannot withstand the forms of violent protest we have witnessed in recent weeks. They are necessarily open institutions and accommodate democratic communities based on the free flow of people and competing ideas. Subjecting them even temporarily to heavy policing to cope with violent protest and the violation of the rights of those not in agreement with protests is antithetical to their purpose. And hence we say that notwithstanding the role of these student protests in the emergence of new layers of astute and courageous student leadership, we are deeply concerned by some of these protest strategies. They undermine the very essence of what a university is about.

We are however, united in our duty to protect the rights of the vast majority of our students and staff to exercise their rights to study and to work and to protect the infrastructure of our universities. They are a national resource that must be protected for future generations of students.

IMPACT OF A POSSIBLE SHUTDOWN

Our universities face the real prospect of an early shutdown with very serious consequences. On the one hand the abandonment of the 2016 academic year will delay the entry of more than 180,000 graduates into the workplace. This may not seem important but consider this: our medical schools produce approximately 1,500 medical graduates every year who would normally, in January, be placed as interns in our public hospitals. While these are doctors in the last phase of their training, they are doctors, nonetheless, and they treat patients. They will be absent from the public hospitals for the first half of 2017. The same is true for teachers, engineers, social workers, psychologists and so on. One sees immediately the impact of a closure of the academic programme on social services and the economy, accompanied by the impact on the individual students and families involved. On the other hand the impact of closure on incoming matriculants will be to postpone their entry into university.

THE VICE-CHANCELLORS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S 26 PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES MAKE THIS CALL TO ACTION OF ALL SOUTH AFRICANS SO THAT WE MAY ENSURE THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THE 2016 ACADEMIC YEAR AND SHAPE A DYNAMIC, RELEVANT HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM AS WE LOOK TOWARDS THE FUTURE

STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION CRISIS FORUM (THE FORUM) DELIVERED BY FORMER DEPUTY CHIEF JUSTICE DIKGANG MOSENEKE AT A PRESS CONFERENCE HELD AT THE NELSON MANDELA FOUNDATION AUDITORIUM, 107 CENTRAL ROAD, HOUGHTON, ON 2 FEBRUARY 2017, AT 14:00

The Chairperson of this Press Conference and Co-Convenor of the National

Education Crisis Forum: Mr Sello Hatang;

Co-Convenors of the Forum: Ms Santie Botha, Judge Yvonne Mokgoro, Bishop

Malusi Mpumlwana and Prof Pitika Ntuli, and – in their absence – Mr Jabu

Mabuza, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba,Prof Mary Metcalfe and Mr Jay Naidoo;

Partners of the Forum: the Higher Education Parents Dialogue (HEParD) and the

South African Universities Staff Network for Transformation (SAUSNeT);

The Secretariat of the Forum: Adv. Louisa Zondo and her team;

Ladies and Gentlemen of the media;

Good afternoon.

We gather this afternoon in a press conference, the purpose of which is to:

- Present the National Education Crisis Forum through yourselves, to South

  African society;

- Convey the objectives of the Forum;

Justice Dikgang Moseneke(Convenor), Ms Santie Botha, Mr Sello Hatang, Mr Jabu Mabuza, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, Prof Mary Metcalfe, Justice Yvonne Mokgoro, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, Mr Jay Naidoo and Prof Pitika Ntuli (Co-Convenors)

- Provide feedback on the work that the Forum has been doing in relation to the higher education crisis facing our country;

- To inform about the process towards a national civil society engagement in the form of an education convention; and

- Call for South African society to actively engage with the issue of education and collectively contribute to creating solutions to our education challenges.

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION CRISIS FORUM

The Forum came into existence in the latter part of 2016. I convened the Forum together with nine (9) Co-Convenors, all of whom are prominent members of South African civil society who have been directly involved with education in South Africa at various levels, and specifically engaged with the current crisis unfolding at universities.

REASON FOR THE FORUM'S EXISTENCE

South Africa is on the cusp of a systemic crisis in education. The education crisis affects all levels of education in South Africa – from early childhood development through to tertiary education – and reflects a societal problem produced by policy choices made over various epochs in South African history, including the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. The crisis is evident in the perpetuation of

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inequality, as well as exclusion and marginalisation on various grounds including race, gender, class and a range of others in which dominance is created and normalised and discrimination is meted out to those who, through such prism of dominance, are considered to constitute "the other".

Violence and instability at universities have become key features of the response to the crisis. Responses to violence are characterised by securocratic approaches. The violence and its effects, tend to mask the deeper fundamental issue of the South African education system – and the related broader societal issues of inequality, poverty and exclusion. These are some of the key messages raised by FeesMustFall and by elected student leaders across all of our campuses. At the core is the call for free, quality, decolonised and decommodified education, which catalyses a more fundamental societal review of inequality, poverty and exclusion.

The situation is complex, with differentiated dynamics at each university. The reality, however, is that while South African society needs to contribute to reimagining our education system and to participate in sculpting the system for the education it envisages, resolution of the crisis requires State responsiveness to the vision of education that emerges from civil society. In this regard, we have been in discussion with the State President, his Inter-Ministerial Task Team and

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the Minister of Higher Education and have communicated the constructive role we wish to play in contributing to a resolution of the current crisis. It is our belief that the cohesion deficit in the various efforts that civil society, across the country, brought to bear on the crisis, needed to be remedied. It was in this context and to this end that – in the latter half of 2016 –the Forum came into existence.

Together with our partners –HEParD, who were already partnered with the South African Council of Churches at the time when the Forum was constituted and SAUSNeT, who had initiated processes to coordinate the various organising efforts of support and academic staff at universities, around the higher education crisis – we have been able to engage with a wide range of stakeholders.

We do not take for granted the centrality of trust in the process of meaningfully engaging the range of stakeholders involved in the education crisis – who very often have limited or no alignment of interests and views. In order to retain and develop trust, the independence of the Forum remains one of its most crucial features. It is for this reason that, the Forum holds very high, the principle of independence in all it does. The Forum is therefore not beholden to any of the stakeholders, but, seeks to ensure that the right to education enshrined in the South African Constitution becomes a lived reality for all by facilitating pathways

for the meaningful attainment of this outcome, through engagements with relevant stakeholders who are committed to acting accordingly.

The principled basis on which we will take forward this work includes:

- Peaceful mediation and resolution of disputes with all parties refraining from the use of violence;

- Zero tolerance of racism and gender discrimination;

- Sufficient representation based on constituencies;

- Sufficient consensus building through democratic engagement and respect for divergent perspectives;

- Disciplined collective action through democratic deliberation and mandated leadership;

- Dialogue with state, universities, students and concerned parties.

THE FOCUS OF THE FORUM

As the 2016 academic year drew to a close in the midst of a delicate reprieve in the cycle of heightened violence, it was clear to all who cared to analyse the situation even on a cursory basis that the crisis and the related instability was not likely to abate. It was also clear that the 2017 registration process was likely to trigger instability unless appropriate attention was given to the immediate issues

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and processes were initiated to address structural and policy defects in education. The Forum's terms of reference therefore include: (i) Calling for peace and dialogue and normalising the situation at our universities particularly in the run up to reopening in March 2017; (ii) Facilitating the voice of the range of stakeholders including students, university staff, university authorities and parents; (iii) Convening a national process of conflict resolution and a civil society convention at which stakeholders would secure policy and funding solutions for the medium to long-term; and (iv) Mobilising resources for the Forum's work.

Accordingly, the Forum and its partners set itself a programme of work that sought to: (a) Deepen the Forum's understanding of the education crisis and the range of ideas in this regard; (b) Engage the various stakeholders in education on their views of the crisis; and (c) Propose the notion of civil society engaging with the education crisis in a national convention.

On 3 December 2016 the Forum then held a meeting at which the Convenors and HEParD, exchanged views with Vice-Chancellors on the state of South African education and on possible education funding models, after considering a STATSSA presentation on the state of education and various presentations on possible education funding models. The opportunity was also taken, at this meeting, to engage with the Vice-Chancellors on issues that require immediate

attention to facilitate stability in the 2017 academic year. This exchange of views highlighted the constraints faced by Vice-Chancellors in regard to the challenging issues of fee increases, historic debt, as well as internal disciplinary processes and legal action related to protest action, on the one hand. On the other hand, the opportunities available for the deepening of trust and the creation of peace within respective campuses were also highlighted.

A broader stakeholder engagement was held on 10 - 11 December 2016 and was attended by student representatives from the various universities, VCs and representatives of VC's, HEParD and SAUSNeT representatives, the faith-based community and labour. The participants held engagements on the state of South African education, funding models and a range of issues requiring immediate resolution at respective universities. The immediate issues include: the fee increases in 2017; historic debt; internal disciplinary action against students; and student arrests and criminal cases against students. The impact of these issues on 2017 registration and student access to university education was starkly highlighted. This meeting also confirmed the need for stakeholders to mandate representatives to participate in working groups that would develop the preparatory work towards a Higher Education National Convention on the basis of identified work streams.

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The Forum and its Partners proceeded to hold engagements with a range of stakeholders including, students, University Vice-Chancellors and Chairs of Council, the Minister of Higher Education, Minister Blade Nzimande and the President of the Republic of South Africa, President Jacob Zuma. At such engagements, the Forum sought: to highlight the nature of the education crisis; to seek full contribution of respective role-players in the potential resolution of matters, as well as to inform stakeholders about plans to convene a national civil society engagement on education.

The 2017 university fee increases of up to 8%is one of the issues for immediate attention that various stakeholders considered to pose a threat to stability in the 2017 academic year. The Forum made an effort to engage with government on the conversion of the 8% fee increase into an 8% increase in government subsidy. To date, this proposed approach or other related approaches have not been introduced to address this potential threat to stability in the academic year.

Historic debt is another significant challenge in the registration process at various university campuses. Proposals on government underwriting of historic debt have not yet been taken up. At various universities, students who are not allocated NSFAS funding are currently unable to register for the 2017 academic year on account of historic debt.

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In engagements with Vice-Chancellors and Chairs of Council of various universities, the Forum took note of the significantly challenging financial and legal constraints that confront the leadership of universities in regard to addressing historic debt. In the absence of pronouncements by government on the underwriting of historic debt, respective universities are implementing a range of measures which do not eliminate historic debt as an obstacle to registration. Financial exclusion related to historic debt therefore remains a significant unresolved challenge to the 2017 registration process.

The challenges highlighted in the registration process are symptomatic of the deeper crisis. The crisis calls for South African society to understand the nature of the crisis evident in education and to contribute to the co-creation of solutions.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION NATIONAL CONVENTION TO BE HELD ON 25 – 26 FEBRUARY 2017

Recognising that the challenges facing the education system as a whole, are a societal problem affecting every citizen, the Forum is calling on civil society to raise its voice on the issue of education. This is being done in a manner that fully recognises the struggles of students and university employees as well as the

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major challenges of university leadership and seeks to create meaningful consensus on a vision of the desired South African university.

The Forum will be sending invitations to a broad range of civil society formations to attend and participate in the envisaged Higher Education Convention. The Forum further invites any other civil society formation even though not directly invited to communicate with it with a view to being invited to the Convention.

In preparation for the Higher Education National Convention, therefore, the respective stakeholders are considering various Work Streams with a view to drafting discussion documents which will be distributed in the build-up to the Convention.

Over the next few weeks, the Convenors and Forum partners plan to have provincial engagements at which the Work Streams will receive further consideration.

Below is a list of the Works Streams and a brief description of some of the critical elements to be addressed.

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WORK STREAMS

1. Registration

The 2017 registration period is already under way at many universities. This requires the immediate resolution of issues affecting the peaceful and effective registration of all students.

One of the barriers to entry for students is the cost of registration. For those who are returning students, the issue of historic debt may disallow them to return to complete their studies. The tensions surrounding these issues are heightened by the dichotomy between what the government requires of universities in this context and what the universities say they are legally and financially capable of doing.

2. Funding models

It has become apparent that the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), the public entity that seeks to provide efficient and effective financial aid to poor and working class (missing middle) families through a loan-based scheme, seems to no longer be an effective driver for higher education funding in South Africa. As a result, several funding models have been developed to demonstrate the potential possibility of free, quality education. This workstream, in preparation for the National Convention, focuses on questions of who should

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be funded, how funding should be achieved, the period in which fee-free education should be attained, the quality of education within a fee-free higher education system, financial administration at universities, implementation of funding models and related issues.

3. Peace and Mediation Framework

The 2016 academic year was marred by violent protests, distrust between students and university management and miscommunication between relevant stakeholders. Issues that hinder peace and mediation require immediate resolution to ensure a smooth transition into the 2017 academic year. These include coordinating accused students in disciplinary and criminal proceedings, the securitisation of campuses, and facilitating greater communication to engage with possible solutions and minimise distrust between stakeholders. In order to resolve the higher education crisis, the framework for peace and mediation requires the input of all stakeholders including students, parents, university Councils, Vice Chancellors and staff, and government.

4. Transformation

The transition from a racially oppressive past to a democratic society included a negotiated settlement by stakeholders in various sectors, including education. As a result, issues of a fragmented funding system, massification of the system, and decolonising, de-commodifying and Africanising the curriculum in higher

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education was not resolved. In this context, a framework for the resolution of the higher education crisis must crucially include and address issues of transformation in university structures and systems. This work stream focuses on re-imagining the role of universities in a democratic South Africa.

5. Higher Education Access and Massification

Access to higher education goes beyond the ability to access funding. It speaks to access to institutions through differential fees and access requirements, race and class disparities in patterns of access, access to the resources necessary to participate in learning, and patterns of completion rates relating to race and class. The work stream also addresses the "massification" of post-school education in increasing the numbers of the institutions of higher learning, while standardising the quality of education across all institutions. This speaks to the accessibility and capacity of universities nationally.

6. Student Accommodation

While the primary focus of funding within universities has been the cost of tuition, students have raised as a concern the need for university accommodation that is conducive to learning. Within this context, there is a miscorrelation between the amount of students enrolled at institutions of higher education and the university facilities available to accommodate these students. This raises further concerns

around the security of students in the spaces that accommodate them and the proximity of residences to campuses.

7. Policy and Legislation Amendments

Within the context of re-imagining higher education in a democratic South Africa, is the question of regulation. Changes to the post-school system would require legislative and policy amendments to regulate the transition and transformation of the system nationally and within each institution. This work stream identifies the legislative and policy amendments that are required to resolve the higher education crisis in the long and short term.

The details of the Convention will be provided continuously in the coming weeks through the Forum's website which will be accessible at http://www.necforum.org from 16:00 on Thursday, 2 February 2017.

This a therefore a call for South African society to get engaged and prepare to contribute views towards the realisation of a vision of education that contributes to a just and peaceful South Africa free of poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Justice Dikgang Moseneke

Ms Santie Botha

Justice Dikgang Moseneke(Convenor), Ms Santie Botha, Mr Sello Hatang, Mr Jabu Mabuza, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, Prof Mary Metcalfe, Justice Yvonne Mokgoro, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, Mr Jay Naidoo and Prof Pitika Ntuli (Co-Convenors)

Mr Sello Hatang

Mr Jabu Mabuza

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba

Prof Mary Metcalfe

Justice Yvonne Mokgoro

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