Understanding digital leadership competencies to enhance collaboration in South African Banks

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ABSTRACT

Digitisation is changing the nature of work and transforming the nature of teamwork, it is therefore producing new implications for leadership. Organisations require leaders who can overcome challenges presented by digital transformation and drive collaboration to develop core competencies and competitive advantage.

The purpose of this study was to explore which digital leadership competencies are utilised by leaders to influence and drive collaboration in the banking industry. A qualitative exploratory study was conducted on leaders in the banking sector. The data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews with seventeen participants. The Competing Values Framework formed the basis of the study conducted.

The findings that emerged were five main digital leadership competencies, including (1) Directing and Motivating, (2) Digital Management, (3) Monitoring, (4) Facilitating and Enabling, (5) Adaptability and Forward looking. The Framework of digital leadership competencies for collaboration consolidates these findings and provides a tool for leaders to assess progress and development. The study contributes to the body of knowledge by providing a deeper understanding of how banks can prepare leaders for the digital age. The research emphasises the importance of digital leadership competencies that build flexibility, adaptability and forward-looking ability for the future of work.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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1.1 Introduction

Digitisation is changing the nature of work and transforming the nature of teamwork, it is therefore producing new implications for leadership (Larson & Dechurch, 2019). Due to the high speed with which digitisation and change is taking place, many companies are under pressure to keep up with the pace of change. Digital leadership competencies are in demand and there is a need to train and prepare leaders for the digital age, as digital transformation is expected to continue into the future (Barley, Bechky, & Milliken, 2017; Larson & Dechurch, 2019). Digital leadership competencies refer to the knowledge, skills, specific capabilities and behaviours a leader requires to perform effectively in a digital context resulting in the success of the leader in delivering on expectations (Bartram, 2005; Maduka, Edwards, Greenwood, & Babatunde, 2018). Even though organisations dedicate resources to leadership training and development, the concern remains that these efforts are inadequate to deliver leaders with the capacity to meet the demands of today's organisations (Cullen-Lester, Maupin, & Carter, 2017).

The rapid change in technology has brought a higher level of connectivity which is creating a shift to an Everyone-to-Everyone (E2E) economy, which is demonstrated by hyper-connectedness and collaboration (Berman & Marshall, 2014). According to an IBM study of 1700 Chief Executive Officers (CEO's) and senior public sector leaders, this connected environment is significantly changing how employees and customers engage (Berman & Korsten, 2014). A key finding from this study was that as part of strategy development, CEO's now drive more open cultures, greater collaboration and encourage employees to connect and learn from each other (Berman & Korsten, 2014).

Collaboration can be defined as an evolving process over time and across projects, which involves the inter-connecting and sharing of pertinent information, resources and capabilities to accomplish a mutual purpose across boundaries (Le Pennec & Emmanuel, 2018; Wageman et al., 2012). Collaboration has been long-established as a vital component of organisation success and a driver of company performance (Cha, Kim, Lee, & Bachrach, 2015). According to Kiron (2017), collaboration forms part of the foundation of how digitally advanced organisations establish competitive

advantage and develop value for their customers, however many companies still have a long road to travel in prioritising and driving the focus required for collaboration.

While the benefits of enhanced collaboration, such as efficiencies and innovation are recognised (Cross, Ernst, Assimakopoulos, & Ranta, 2015), minimal research has been conducted from the perspective of the leader, exploring the collaboration mechanisms which are utilised to drive collaboration in the organisation. Excessive and unfocussed collaboration could lead to a slowdown of innovation, increased costs and lack of economies of scale (Cross et al., 2015). Research has been minimal regarding the impact of leaders on inter-team collaboration effectiveness (Cha et al., 2015). This qualitative research aims to gain an understanding on digital leadership competencies which drive collaboration, which are imperative for organisations undergoing digital transformation. Organisations require leaders who can overcome challenges presented by digital transformation and drive collaboration to develop core competencies and competitive advantage for implementation of strategic activities (Thompson, Strickland III, & Gamble, 2008).

1.2 Background to the problem

The future world of work is characterised by the move of individuals working in isolation to working collaboratively in a more digitally connected world. In addition, there is a higher level of flexibility as employees are able to work from various locations and across timeframes which culminates in greater availability of labour at lower costs for organisations (Gratton, 2010). Such changes to ways of working have been magnified in recent months. The unprecedented level of change brought about by the recent Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has the potential to minimise traditional office structures as more companies are challenged to work digitally, resulting in new challenges for leadership working with remote teams (Berger, 2020).

The increase in virtual teams has been evidenced by Microsoft that registered twelve million new users in seven days as businesses moved to working remotely, they also accounted for more than 900 million meetings held daily in the context of COVID-19, revealing the urgent need for remote working and collaboration (Opiah, 2020). In addition, the chances of returning to the former methods of work are unlikely as COVID-19 acted as an accelerator for digital change that was anticipated (Stahl,

2020). While there is a great need for collaboration to solve complex and burning issues (Thompson, Strickland III, & Gamble, 2008), virtual teams pose challenges to collaboration efforts (Gratton & Erickson, 2007) which demands leaders who are equipped for such changes. Virtual teams as defined by Charlier, Stewart, Greco, & Reeves (2016), are groups of workers that are geographically dispersed and who are reliant on different forms of telecommunications and technology to accomplish their duties and the goals of the team. Virtual teams can be made up of individuals who are present locally within a particular companies facilities and dispersed throughout the country (Wakefield & Leidner, 2008).

A common argument is that people working together in close proximity are likely to collaborate easier and find solutions to problems quicker as opposed to when people work apart (Berger, 2020), which makes collaborating in the digital context more challenging but also rife with potential to be uncovered. Inter-team collaboration describes the degree to which a team collaborates with other teams within the organisation, and is distinguished by teams interdependence with each other when operating and pursuing the goals for the organisation (Cha et al., 2015).

According to Gino (2019), while there are several factors which negatively impact collaboration, leaders remain a key influence and leaders who think about collaboration too narrowly, more as a 'value' and not a 'skill' can be limiting to collaboration. Collaboration involves intellectual ability, emotional connection and practising collaboration as a skill, which allows for collaboration to be taken more seriously (Schrage, 2015). Gino (2019), proposed that to overcome this limitation leaders need to drive focus externally on the collective team and away from individual team members.

Other research conducted on high performing organisations found that leaders in such organisations were skilled in harnessing the benefits of collaboration through supporting high quality conversations, relationships and networks (Gratton, 2006). From the literature, it is then possible for the leader to act as an enabler or a boundary to collaborative efforts. It is therefore essential for leaders to understand and be cognisant of which behaviours drive or diminish collaboration in teams so that they can change such behaviours.

Leadership theory suggests that an organisations success is largely dependent on

the quality and success of its leadership (Behrendt, Matz, & Göritz, 2017). However, few organisations feel they have adequate leadership talent who can assist with the organisations changing needs (Detjen & Webber, 2017). Understanding which competencies are required by leaders to drive collaboration and overcome challenges, means that the acquisition of such competencies can be motivated by rewarding or linking it to development efforts in the pursuit of improved collaboration (Rink & Walter, 2018). As suggested by Gentry & Sparks (2012), leadership competencies remains an area to be researched as it is vital to organisational success. Leaders occupy a valuable role as part of the process of driving and improving collaboration capabilities and need to be cognisant of leadership competencies that are beneficial to collaboration (Cha et al., 2015).

1.3   Problem statement

There are two schools of thought that exist with regard to the future of leadership. There are those that propose that leadership at its core does not change over time, and those that advocate that due to the complexity, challenges and uniqueness of digitisation, this requires leaders with a distinctive form of leadership and competencies (Casey, 2010; Kane, Phillips, Copulsky, & Andrus, 2019).

What has been evident to date is that collaboration at a global level requires that leaders have openness, cultural knowledge, emotional strength, transparency and synergy to drive collaboration (Casey, 2010). It would be advantageous to understand whether these factors are also required for collaboration at a team level when working digitally, so that more emphasis may be placed on promoting such attributes. CEO's understand that openness and collaboration have a positive impact on their organisations; they are therefore empowering employees to act on their ideas and promoting open environments. However, what remains unknown and what CEO's are wrestling with is how best to do so, as greater openness also brings in vulnerability to the organisation and increased complexity for leadership (Berman & Korsten, 2014; Lazzarotti, Manzini, & Pellegrini, 2015).

The literature is unclear on the role and influence of leaders in driving collaboration. Studies conducted on collaboration found that trust, mutual relationships and joint decision making processes were key to aiding collaboration efforts, without hierarchical behaviours (Uster, Vashdi, & Beeri, 2019). However, while greater

collaboration is assisting CEO's by allowing them to partner more to drive innovation (Berman & Korsten, 2014), there is also a view that the challenge for executives is to improve communication between groups and teams so that they work together better, but leaders should "stay out of the way" (Lindsey, 2016). A key question raised by Berman and Korsten (2014), is how will leaders create value from collaboration in their organisations and how will they drive the actions of employees to drive performance in the organisation?

1.4   Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore how digital leadership competencies are utilised by leaders to influence and drive collaboration in the banking industry. Increased awareness and understanding of digital leadership competencies will benefit both leaders and organisations, as both could obtain direction as to what to focus on and leaders will be better able to fulfil their roles (Gentry & Sparks, 2012).

Technology and digital tools has had a material impact on how collaboration takes place (Schrage, 2015) and has therefore impacted the role of leaders in collaboration. It would be beneficial to gain insight into what the role of the leader is in collaboration. The research will also add context to the diverse and challenging banking sector in South Africa and will explore the collaboration challenges faced by banks and their leaders in the context of increased digital transformation.

1.5   Scope of the study

The scope of this study is focussed on gaining insights on how digital leadership competencies are leveraged by leaders in the South African banking sector to drive collaboration.

The banking sector has been selected for the study based on the following considerations. The South African banking sector is becoming an industry known for breaking digital boundaries, marked by high levels of innovation in the pursuit of digital strategy implementation (Maritz & Camarate, 2018). A digital business strategy can be described as the utilising of technology and digital tools to generate value for the organisation through gaining advantage over competitors or allowing for differentiation compared to competitors (Bharadwaj, El Sawy, Pavlou, & Venkatraman, 2013). The big four banks in South Africa continue to invest in and

drive large scale digital transformation and as a result, new ways of working (Maritz & Camarate, 2018). Digital transformation refers to the application of novel digital technologies to enable business improvements (Singh & Hess, 2017). The future of banking in South Africa is expected to see several digital initiatives emerge as a means to acquire and sustain competitive advantage (Maritz & Camarate, 2018).

Studies have suggested that for organisations such as banks that operate in dynamic contexts, internal network ties created through collaboration are crucial to the company's ability to adapt (Gratton, 2005). Increased digital transformation necessitates collaboration at a much higher level than organisations operated previously (Kiron, 2017). Due to these factors, it is expected that research conducted on the banking industry is likely to provide valuable insights.

1.6   Relevance of the study

The research proposed is of significance as a result of the unique circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the growth in digital means to execute business functions. The growth in digital has resulted in a greater need for collaboration and leaders who are digitally more competent. Leaders who are unable to execute in the new world of work are unlikely to be successful in execution of successful strategy, which could result in lack of competitive advantage.

Research conducted by Cross et al. (2015) propose that those occupying senior levels in an organisation have on average more contacts, and with greater networks are better positioned for improved collaboration. Leaders are in a position to influence behaviours regarding uptake of advanced technology and can impact how this technology fits into the business environment, through their own behaviour leaders can either legitimise and encourage use of technology or discourage it (Avolio, Sosik, Kahai, & Baker, 2014). Avolio, Sosik, et al. (2014) note that leaders have the opportunity to impact and serve their followers through their ability to share information and aid the collaboration process. Leaders have the capability to drive dynamics that impact collaboration such as fostering openness, information sharing and pursuing novel opportunities which require working together (Gino, 2019). It is therefore evident that collaboration requires the right leader with the right competencies (Kiron, 2017).

The effects of digitalisation in the last decade has significantly impacted the nature of collaboration and there are valuable insights to be gained in researching new methods of collaboration which bring into question traditional boundaries, stability and interdependence of teams (Wageman et al., 2012). Processes are becoming increasingly complex and integrated; strategies are becoming more dependent on the internet of things and requires that organisations are able to create value through greater collaboration (Kiron, 2017).

1.7   Conclusion

Digital transformation has materially impacted the future of work and requires leaders who are able to overcome challenges of digitisation, navigate the digital context and collaborate to unlock value for business. There is minimal research that has been conducted from the perspective of the leader in driving collaboration. The background to the problem was analysed and the business and theoretical need for insight into digital leadership competencies and collaboration were detailed. The subsequent chapter provides an overview of literature in the field of digital leadership competencies and collaboration and includes the relevant theoretical foundation upon which the research is based.

2. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

2.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter included the main constructs of the study and the relevance of the research. The following chapter provides an overview of previous research conducted on the constructs identified and theoretical concepts that exist in the field of digital leadership competencies and collaboration. A review of the literature identified gaps that exist in the body of knowledge and where conflicting views exist in the literature. The constructs are considered in the context of digital transformation. The chapter further includes a discussion of the framework selected which forms the foundation of the study.

2.2 Leadership for a digital age

Digital transformation brings about new challenges for leaders due to the unique business context created, characterised by the speed with which business is conducted, greater productivity levels that are targeted and greater flexibility required (Kane et al., 2019). Digital tools and diverse technologies has influenced the manner in which collaboration takes place in business, and it is expected that technology driven collaboration will become more networked and even more digital (Schrage, 2015).

Challenges experienced by leaders due to digital transformation includes inhibited planning and coordination processes, subdued monitoring activities and the need to build trust and cohesion in the absence of physical and direct contact with teams (Wessel, Curseu, & Schalk, 2008). These challenges therefore have an impact on how business is conducted going forward.

The challenges identified could potentially be overcome by collaboration, which results in greater innovation to meet increased growth targets and efficiencies to bolster speed and flexibility (Le Pennec & Emmanuel, 2018). There is a greater need for team success and performance as work has gradually become more collective and largely dependent on technology (Charlier et al., 2016). However, the foundation for successful collaboration efforts such as cross-organisational structures accompanied with flexible authority roles and ambiguous interdependence, require new forms of leadership that differ to traditional leadership forms (Wageman et al., 2012).

Digital leadership for the context of this study, has been defined with reference to research conducted by Avolio, Sosik, Kahai, & Baker (2014), who defined digital leadership as a process that comprises social influences, brought about by advanced information technology that has the ability to alter the attitudes, feelings, thinking and behaviour of individuals or teams. Specific digital leadership competencies identified in the literature are deliberated below.

2.3 Defining digital leadership competencies

According to research conducted by Kane et al., (2019), there are five imperative competencies identified for leaders to be successful in a digital context. Competencies include the ability to develop transformative vision, to be forward looking, to possess digital literacy skills, ensure adaptability and have a strong leadership style. Each of the competencies and related skills recommended by Kane et al. (2019) are discussed below.

2.3.1 Transformative vision and forward looking

In addition to the requirement for leaders to provide direction and vision (Thompson, Strickland III, & Gamble, 2008a), a digital context requires leaders to possess the skills to create a transformative vision and be forward looking. These competencies are related to the skills needed to solve problems, possess a keen business acumen to foresee new market trends with a considerable focus on the future, all in the context of greater uncertainty posed by the business environment.

An exploration study conducted by Gratton & Johns (2013), placed greater emphasis on the capability of the leader to establish a transformative vision, which involves the ability to establish a strong purpose. This is an essential skill as it results in a reduction of conflicts and change of mind-sets when collaborating (Gratton & Johns, 2013). The study further proposed that the strategic goals along with the key roles and responsibilities of the individuals on the team, should be outlined by the leader at the beginning of the collaboration project. Given that teams are interdependent in a collaboration, it is crucial that the leader provides a collective team goal that is aligned to the performance of the company (Cha et al., 2015). The leader should set out the boundaries and rules of play and then be prepared to give up some of the power to employees (Gratton & Johns, 2013). This perspective focuses on the

operational skills linked to vision creation, that drives clarity and commitment when collaborating.

However, there is also considerable focus in the literature on the link between vision and the leaders ability to create value, which has been commonly acknowledged in the literature as required for collaboration (Le Pennec & Emmanuel, 2018).

Value creation

An empirical study conducted by Le Pennec & Emmanuel (2018), suggested that value creation was both an outcome of collaboration and also an enabler of the value creation process. The study proposes several forms of value creation which result from collaboration, such as improved credibility and reputation from association with others, obtaining new skills, improvement in trust and learning opportunities, the ability to achieve more from working together and the opportunity for new tools and methods of working to gain efficiency (Le Pennec & Emmanuel, 2018). Collaboration creates value by creating the opportunity for both tangible and intangible resources to be combined to deal with various challenges the organisation may need to solve for and therefore creates win-win situations for stakeholders (Le Pennec & Emmanuel, 2018). This view focuses on the strategic acumen of the leader to look ahead and identify value creation opportunities which may result from collaboration.

Processes that support vision

Research conducted by Knight, Cutcher-Gershenfeld, & Mittleman (2015) which studied complex collaborations, proposed that while leaders focus on vision, they commonly fail to include more detailed processes for maintaining integrity of collaboration, maintaining momentum and processes as to how to make decisions regarding where to allocate resources and even which projects to complete. The research suggested that leaders have dedicated and independent structures to ensure that these responsibilities are demonstrated. Various processes to support the vision for collaboration is discussed below.

In assisting with problem solving and dispute resolution processes the leader requires the ability to facilitate, which can be described as the decisions and actions required to best achieve the defined objective, to identify opportunities and promote the implementation and effective execution of collaboration (Behrendt et al., 2017;

Kiron, 2017). This view was supported by Lazzarotti et al. (2015), suggesting that this includes leaders acting as a champion for collaboration and ensuring that any disputes that arise are dealt with and overcome successfully.

Research conducted by Wessel, Curseu, & Schalk (2008) suggest that planning and coordination processes are inhibited in a digital context, which therefore require that leaders set more defined objectives and goals for the team. In addition, there is a greater need for feedback to monitor activities to confirm productivity on the team and to confirm progress made. However, Gratton & Johns (2013) note that measuring performance remains a challenge for leaders in a digital context as they cannot observe their teams and determine whether progress has been made. The research suggests well-articulated performance indicator be established against which to measure performance. However, usefulness and reliability of performance measurement in a digital context is questionable.

Digital leadership competencies are applied to the context of increased uncertainty and instability, and this in turn has an impact on strategic intent which requires leaders steps to deal with working in uncertainty and manage risk. (Reeves, Levin, Harnoss, & Ueda, 2017). Due to the increased interconnectedness and dependencies banks experience, leaders need the ability to detect risks, articulate them and drive stakeholders to manage these risks appropriately (Reeves et al., 2017).

The competency of the leader to establish the vision and be forward looking is not a new requirement (Thompson et al., 2008a). However, in a digital context there is focus on the leader's ability to fulfil the operational aspects of implementing the vision, the focus on strategic value creation and emphasis on processes that support the vision when collaborating. What remains unclear is whether all perspectives are relied on equally to establish the vision and which perspective and skills are most important to drive collaboration, which this research sought to clarify.

2.3.2 Digital literacy

According to Kane et al., (2019), digital literacy necessitates leaders who possess a general overall understanding of technology but does not require leaders to have core technical technology skills. This competency is crucial as it further assists the

leader to develop a greater transformative vision and supports robust informed decision making. However, Bennis (2013) argues that leaders who are incapable of utilising the digital world and the associated digital tools, cannot fully utilise its power to influence relationships with key stakeholders including employees and other executive management and will likely be left behind.

A lack of digital literacy by the leader, could lead to delegation of digital transformation initiatives to other functions such as Information Technology departments. Kane et al. (2019) argue that the extent to which such digital transformation initiatives are driven by the office of the leader or alternatively by other functions is an indication of the digital maturity of the business. A lack of digital maturity would compromise the digital strategy of the organisation, negatively impacting its adaptability and lead to lack of competitive advantage.

General digital literacy fails to capture the various impacts that digital transformation has had on leadership and provides a narrow lens to understand the function and skills of the leader with respect to technology. In the study conducted by Larson & Dechurch (2019), the various perspectives on technology, the underlying assumptions and the related leadership competency was identified. The findings from this research provide a more wholistic view of the implications on leadership and the skills required as a result of digital transformation. These findings are discussed below.

Technology has impacted the context in which leaders operate and teams collaborate. To compensate for this unique context, leaders need to work even harder to ensure there is team cohesion and trust by promoting relationship-building as virtual teams are regarded as more challenging to lead. Non-verbal communication can also be a challenge for leaders, resulting in the need to interpret communication over digital channels and drive positive engagement within the team.

Technology can be seen as socio-material, which relates to the use of different features that technology offers and the ways in which technology is utilised to meet different needs. Leaders have the function of determining how best technologies are utilised to meet requisite needs in organisations. Being able to leverage the functionality offered by technology provides the opportunity to remain adaptive. According to Bennis (2013) this requires that leaders understand the power of

digitisation and keep close to technology developments.

Technology can be seen as a teammate, which refers to the use of intelligent machines and technology which are regarded as members of the team when collaborating. This perspective requires that the leader is able to manage the interface between the humans and technology in the team. Leaders require the skill to manage ethical considerations and the manage the appropriate use of data and technology within defined boundaries. Therefore, leaders should stay up to date with changes in technology and by understanding the strengths and weaknesses of different technology, share this information with teams.

Conflicting views exist in the literature on the level of digital competency required by the leader. While some researchers advocate that leaders require a general understanding of digital other research suggests the leader needs to understand the various perspectives technology, how it may best be utilised and how it impacts collaboration. This study sought to clarify the level of digital expertise required by leaders to drive collaboration.

2.3.3 Adaptability

Adaptability is characterised by leaders who are more open minded, change oriented, willing to learn from failures and mistakes, willing to explore new opportunities and embrace curiosity (Bennis, 2013; Kane et al., 2019; Kiron, 2017; Uhl-bien & Arena, 2018). According to Bennis (2013), adaptability is crucial for leaders to remain up to date with changes in the environment and with technology needs, as technology provides the opportunity for leaders to remain adaptive for collaboration.

Leaders need to be skilled to influence the environment to ensure it is conducive to collaboration taking place, this may mean influencing behaviour norms, adapting elements of culture and changing metrics of performance (Kiron, 2017). A key skill required to remain adaptable is the ability of the leader to quickly and effectively obtain feedback from the environment (Bennis, 2013).

In addition, leaders need to work on frequently balancing the tension of exploring and exploiting, where exploiting would include making use of existing knowledge and skill

to drive collaboration and exploring would include developing new insights and knowledge and introducing risk by experimenting and innovating (Uhl-bien & Arena, 2018). However, greater openness and change also brings in vulnerability to the organisation and increased complexity for leadership (Berman & Korsten, 2014; Lazzarotti et al., 2015). It is therefore arguable whether leaders in the banking sector would introduce risk and vulnerability in the organisation to drive collaboration and it would be advantageous to confirm if adaptability is therefore a key competency to drive collaboration in banking.

2.3.4 Strong leadership

The strong leadership competency refers to the need for decisive and focussed leadership, as it is key that leaders are able to articulate the digital strategy and ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to the strategy (Kane et al., 2019). According to Wakefield & Leidner, (2008), a key indicator of leader effectiveness is the ability to influence others and ultimately develop a deeper and strong commitment to the objectives and purpose, further supporting the transformative vision.

However, the leader has an impact on collaboration, not only through the decisions to drive collaboration but also through their own behaviours and personal leadership traits. Leaders who invest and support relationship building and are collaborative themselves, by setting an example also improve collaboration (Gratton & Erickson, 2007). This was also confirmed by Wakefield & Leidner (2008), who noted that since the leader also forms part of the team, the leader must set the standards for collaboration. While it can be argued that the leaders behaviour is unlikely to be observed by all employees, it is the perceived behaviour of the leader that research suggests forms a vital component to how teams collaborate (Gratton & Erickson, 2007).

However, literature above differed to research conducted by Faraj et al. (2015), that found that digital communities favour a more empowering and relational leadership style as opposed to a directive and task oriented style. This empirical research conducted examined the role of the leader in online working and considered the behavioural and structural antecedents of leadership. The findings suggested that digital leadership is multidimensional, and different to traditional leadership and

therefore empowering employees requires that leaders create an environment where the employee feels that they have the ability to shape their own work context and role. This view was supported by other studies that proposed that empowering staff ensures that they complete their work with greater purpose and can better support individuals on their team (Behrendt et al., 2017; Cha et al., 2015).

Research conducted by Cha, Kim, Lee, & Bachrach (2015) which studied inter-company collaboration in large companies, found that certain transformational leadership behaviours were likely to result in greater teamwork quality and drive more inter-team collaboration. For the purposes of this study transformational leadership behaviours included the ability of leaders to influence followers to look beyond their own interests and work towards collective goals, increase understanding between teams and effectively drive a common vision, resulting in better coordination and less team conflict.

There several conflicting views that exist in the body of knowledge on which leadership styles drive collaboration. A significant component of leadership theory is based on the concept of task oriented or relationship orientated leadership, which formed the foundation of many leadership theories (Behrendt et al., 2017). In the context of collaboration, task-oriented leadership would refer to leaders creating clear goals, setting out responsibilities and roles of teams. The relationship orientated leadership would be focussed on networks, relationships and the leader assisting to reduce possible conflicts. Studies conducted found that the most productive and innovative teams were directed by leaders who possessed both these leaderships styles (Gratton & Erickson, 2007; Wakefield & Leidner, 2008). This study therefore intends to provide clarity as to which leadership styles and to what extent these leadership styles are relied on by leaders to drive collaboration.

2.3.5   Summary of digital leadership competencies

A review of literature in the field of digital leadership competencies exposed several conflicting views that exist in the body of knowledge. It is essential to clarify and gain understanding on which of the digital leadership competencies and associated skills are leveraged to drive collaboration in a digital context and to explore what other digital leadership competencies are required for driving collaboration. It would be of significance to confirm if these digital leadership competencies are as relevant in the

South African banking sector and in context of COVID-19, as the pandemic presented unique challenges to leaders as banks were forced to work digitally. An overview of literature in the field of collaboration is completed in the subsequent section.

2.4 Collaboration for competitive advantage

Collaboration can be defined as an evolving process over time and across projects, which involves the inter-connecting and sharing of pertinent information, resources and capabilities to accomplish a mutual purpose across boundaries (Le Pennec & Emmanuel, 2018; Wageman et al., 2012). Prior to the peak of digitisation, the strategic benefits of collaboration were efficiencies such as improved processes, economies of scale, improved decision making, innovation, the opportunity to solve previously unsolvable business problems and stay relevant (Cross et al., 2015; Kwan, 2019). Lazzarotti et al. (2015) proposed that innovation is fundamentally a collaboration activity and successful collaboration requires changes in leadership practices to create a context which is conducive to sharing knowledge and communicating. Collaboration consequently provides a mechanism for organisations to be successful, competitive and survive the new challenges posed to business (Kwan, 2019).

Collaboration is dependent on the existence of network ties in an organisation; the extent of the existence and strength of these network ties determines whether knowledge sharing takes place, ideas and insights are shared and teams remain adaptive and fluid to organisational requirements (Gratton, 2005). Nevertheless, when collaboration is excessive and unfocussed it can also lead to negative consequences. According to Cross et al. (2015), it may lead to a slowdown in innovation and productivity. While a lack of collaboration would result in duplicated processes, increased costs and the inability to achieve economies of scale within the organisation, each function within the organisation is also likely to pursue their own digital priorities and projects (Thompson et al., 2008a).

There are several business factors which serve as a hinderance to collaborative efforts within an organisation. Teams that have a history of conflict and hostility when working together, leaders and individuals who have strong egos, leaders who have difficulty sharing relationships, where goals are misaligned between stakeholders

and where there is a lack of trust, will likely hinder collaboration (Kiron, 2017). According to the research conducted by Kiron (2017), alterations to the above business factors requires fundamental changes to the culture of the company and change to the type of leaders who are required in the future.

One of the many challenges faced by leaders in the digital context is how to lead across horizontal boundaries, which is becoming more common and to ensure that the outcomes of collaboration are a source of competitive advantage (Gratton, 2005). The ability of the leader to drive collaboration to realise benefits of competitive advantage remains priority for leaders in banking and are further discussed below.

2.4.1   Role of the leader in collaboration

The effectiveness of collaboration is largely dependent on the leader's ability to lead the collaboration, and the leader therefore plays a critical role in driving effective collaboration. According to Kwan (2019), leaders are aware and understand the critical central role that they play in cross-collaboration. The traditional work context previously entailed the leader driving collaboration by setting the tone for collaboration, by planning working groups, providing milestone reports and driving various committee decisions (Bernstein, Shore, & Lazer, 2019). However, the role of the leader in the digital context is unclear as organisations especially banks have grown increasingly complex and have an array of digital tools available to them for collaboration (Bernstein et al., 2019).

Findings from research conducted with 53 companies where collaboration efforts were failing, found that a common problem was that leaders in these companies focused mainly on the logistics of collaboration which included the processes, incentives and outcomes, which proved ineffective (Kwan, 2019). The role of the leader is to also decide on the tools, data and business policies and procedures that are required to influence and drive collaboration in a digital context (Bernstein et al., 2019). It was found that the role of the leader in cross-collaboration should rather be focussed on ensuring a sense of security for the teams involved in the collaboration (Kwan, 2019) and involved the following skills discussed below.

The leader needs to drive group control to allow teams to understand how they can make a meaningful change, leaders need to understand if there are any threats

teams may feel exposed to during collaboration, such as losing their resources or responsibilities (Kwan, 2019). In addition, the leader needs to consider if the team's autonomy or ability to make decisions has been altered or threatened in any way and increase the team's autonomy where needed, this includes the reaffirming of the different team's legitimacy by public recognition and acknowledging the different teams' efforts in the collaboration (Kwan, 2019).

According to Zhou & George (2003), leader play a critical role in how they enable, support and encourage creativity of employees in the organisation to drive collaboration. Leaders can impact the creativity needed for collaboration directly through encouraging risk taking and exploring, and through monitoring and supervising behaviours (Zhou & George, 2003). Leaders emotional intelligence can also impact creativity of employees, as per the findings of this study as it allows leaders to vary their behaviours as required. Emotional intelligence is "the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion, the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought, the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions" (Zhou & George, 2003, p552).

However, research conducted by Bernstein et al.(2019) found that effective collaboration requires successful problem solving of the team, and emphasised that such problem solving can only be achieved by alternation. The role of the leader is to set the example and provide the opportunity for teams to alternate between interacting and being connected and being isolated with time to work without any interaction. This study noted that more leadership is required to ensure alternation takes place.

The role of the leader in collaboration is complex, as there is a fine balance which needs to exist. Research suggests that while too little communication leads to lack of synergy and knowledge sharing, too much communication causes group think and reduces creative and diverse solutions (Bernstein et al., 2019). The role of the leader is therefore to influence the conditions within which collaboration takes **place** using different collaboration levers, which is discussed in the following section.

2.4.2 Levers for effective collaboration

Research conducted by Gratton (2005) proposes four levers which can be adopted by leaders for effective collaboration. These levers centre around the use of proximity management, time allocation to collaboration activities identified, creating motivation for people to work together and harnessing a culture with deep roots in trust and respect (Gratton, 2005). This research aims to gain further insights on the four levers of collaboration and understand if they are as relevant in a digital context as compared to the traditional workplace.

2.4.2.1 Proximity and time lever

In making use of the proximity and time lever, leaders would consider if people or teams in the organisation, who need to work together, have access to each other and are able to meet frequently and without boundaries (Gratton, 2005). While proximity may be key in a traditional work environment, it may not be relevant in the digital context as individuals can meet across geographical distance and time. Wageman et al., (2012) argue that the strongest driver of collaboration is structural interdependence between teams which has a greater impact than use of team rewards, the need to collaborate and even quality of relationships among members. Consequently, the role of the leader in providing interdependent structures will be key to drive collaboration, even more so in a virtual place of work. Where prior difficulty may have been experienced, now through digitisation people are able to be structurally interdependent and have a higher probability of finding collaborators with similar purpose (Wageman et al., 2012).

2.4.2.2 Motivation lever

As noted by Gratton (2005), the key question informing the motivation lever is whether people are driven by clear objectives and a vision which enages them and requires them to gravitate to working together in a meaningful way. The ability to generate a compelling, robust vision and be forward looking are key digital leadership competencies which has been noted under section 2.3.1. It is anticipated that the motivation lever would therefore remain key under a digital work context as it is in a traditional work place.

2.4.2.3 Culture lever

Culture relates to the organisations ability to have deep value and its roots established in trust and respect and give thought to making collaboration simpler and

more effective (Gratton, 2005; Schrage, 2015). Literature in the field of collaboration spans further to include various factors that impact culture, such as networks and relationships, alignment and the influence that the leaders themselves have on culture. Digital culture has a greater focus on leadership structures, work styles, level of adaptability and risk appetite of the company (Buckley, Kane, Kiron, Palmer, & Phillips, 2016). There is therefore minimal overlap between traditional culture factors and digital culture factors as seen above. This may be ascribed to different levels of digital maturity. In the study conducted by Buckley et al. (2016), it was found that organisations in early stages of digital maturity were associated with low risk appetites, silo work structures, and decisions which were not founded and driven by data, which may not be conducive to collaboration taking place.

To leverage culture for effective collaboration, leaders need to invest in long term and short term measures to reinforce the organisations ability to collaborate (Gratton & Erickson, 2007). Long term measures may include creating a culture in which senior leadership are key role models displaying collaborative and co-operative behaviours and through relationships build trust, while short term measures would include review and alignment of individuals roles, team structures and processes, and to ensure strategic goals are well defined (Gratton & Erickson, 2007).

Networks and relationships

Collaboration is largely dependent on the quality and range of relationships within the organisation and can be referred to as the social capital of the organisation (Gratton, 2005). Social capital also refers to the ability of the leader to be relatable and build legitimacy, to encourage engagement and participation of individuals and teams and promote social communication (Faraj et al., 2015). Other researchers, however argue that networks and relationships are mostly impacted by the structures of the company usually determined by the decision making and power structures as well as the ease with which teams are created (Wageman et al., 2012).

Through a mixed methods study which investigated the antecedents of innovative performance, it was found that social capital is impacted by two factors namely, structural dimensions and relational dimensions (Lazzarotti et al., 2015). Structural dimensions refers to networks and who individuals may be in contact with, while relational dimensions refers to the quality of these relationships (Lazzarotti et al., 2015). The findings propose that the relational dimension impacts social capital to a

greater extent than the structural dimension.

However, this is in dissimilar to research conducted on pre-existing relationships. While it is essential that teams capitalise on pre-existing relationships, these pre-exiting relationships can also act as a barrier to collaboration if not managed as this increases the formation of sub-groups and increases the probability of conflict, thereby acting as a barrier to collaboration (Gratton & Erickson, 2007). Since networks and relationships form a key part of collaboration, it would be essential to gain clarity on which factors impact collaboration in a digital context as there are several inconsistent views in the body of knowledge.

Trust

The unique and paradoxical nature of trust, was explained by research conducted by Larson & Dechurch, (2019). Trust was found to be essential to virtual teams, however the ability of the leader to build trust is extremely challenging in the digital context and leaders who are able to increase communication in terms of quantity and quality can build trust in the team (Larson & Dechurch, 2019). The frequency and quantity of communication plays a vital role in building trust either directly or informally (Cha et al., 2015; Charlier et al., 2016).

According to Charlier et al. (2016), there are three distinct types of communication that is relevant between leaders and teams, (1) Transition communication refers to objective formulation and planning, strategy formulation and determining specific goals, (2) Action communication refers to the different monitoring that takes place of progress, systems and co-ordination processes and (3) Relationship focussed communication centres around interpersonal processes such as conflict resolution, motivation of others and confidence development. Studies have also found that organisations that communicate internally are more flexible and share knowledge and information to a greater extent (Charlier et al., 2016; Lazzarotti et al., 2015). Increased interaction also affords teams a greater opportunity to feedback to each other, the leader has more opportunity for monitoring, overall there is a better understanding of what work is being carried out and the different skills and resources that are available on the team (Wessel et al., 2008). However, research conducted by Wakefield & Leidner (2008), suggests that when communication is mediated by technology it is more difficult to share information and to ensure conflicts are resolved

appropriately.

All three forms of communication stated above are expected to be impacted by digital working. It would be of interest to understand which communication type is relied on by leaders in the digital context for driving collaboration and to what extent. Virtual communication does not include all the advantages of face-to-face working and is seen to lack the social context cues and the ease of finding similarities and common ground between individuals, this may have consequences on collaboration (Faraj et al., 2015). Digital communication methods such as emails, chats and calls could be open to misinterpretation which has negative consequences such as impacting staff engagement and morale, decreased productivity or even result in costs for the organisation (Dhawan & Chamorro, 2018).

Consequently, leaders need to focus on better more effective ways to communicate such as establishing team building methods that drive interactions between team members, ensuring that all communication is clearly articulated and ensuring there is no abuse of access to individuals causing discomfort and harassment when working digitally (Dhawan & Chamorro, 2018). Ultimately new guiding principles need to be established for digital working with reference to individuals preferred response times, tones, tolerance for informality and personal etiquette by paying particular attention to data that could be missed in remote working (Dhawan & Chamorro, 2018). Leaders ability to proactively create and manage structures for communication and coordination of the team and the tasks is essential (Wakefield & Leidner, 2008).

Alignment

The importance of the leader clarifying the roles and tasks of the individual team members and setting a clear and well-articulated approach to achieve the goals were noted as essential skills for collaboration, as unclear roles often lead to discontent (Gratton & Erickson, 2007; Wakefield & Leidner, 2008). According to Gratton & Erickson (2007), the clarity of individuals roles on the team is of greater significance than the teams goal and increases collaboration as individuals understand what is required of them and what they can do independently, they therefore feel a greater sense of belonging. This assessment was also confirmed by Wessel et al. (2008), who noted that role indistinctness is likely to have a negative impact on the team's ability to integrate information and therefore collaborate.

The importance of alignment was further highlighted by Knight et al. (2015), including internal alignment which refers to the extent stakeholders have accepted and bought into the strategic intent, and lateral alignment which refers to the extent diverse individuals from across the bank buy into the strategic intent. It would be beneficial to understand if alignment is still relevant to collaboration in the digital context.

2.4.2.4 Summary of levers for collaboration

Dhawan & Chamorro (2018) suggest that the role of the leader in collaboration is to pay attention to affinity distance, by building trust and interdependency, thereby confirming the importance of inter-dependency by Wageman et al., (2012). Notwithstanding the importance of inter-dependency to collaboration, performance and incentive systems rarely encourage employees to assist staff in other teams of functions (Cross et al., 2015; Gratton & Erickson, 2007). In addition to the levers of collaboration, the importance of the ability of the leader to influence the long term and short-term measures of culture was emphasised.

2.4.3   A psychological approach to collaboration

The models and theory presented above aptly include how the leader may influence either physical, operational or affinity elements to improve collaboration. However, they do not include how the leader may influence the psychology of the employees to improve collaboration. Research conducted by Gino (2019) argues that while the factors above may yield progress, they do not result in sustainable and robust collaboration.

This view is aligned with research by Hoegl & Georg (2001), who suggested a methodology to measure collaboration in teams which focuses less on physical and operational elements. The findings from this study propose the Teamwork Quality measure (TWQ), which includes six factors that determine quantity of collaboration including, the communication and coordination of the team, the distribution of contribution received from individuals on the team, the level of support and effort among the team and the extent of cohesion within which the team operates (Hoegl & Georg, 2001). The TWQ measure includes both task related and relational aspects which influence the quality of collaboration (Cha et al., 2015), which may indicate that collaboration is dependent on a combination of both physical and operational

elements and the psychological elements. In order to ensure sustained collaboration, Gino (2019) argues that six psychological factors are required to be overcome and the task is for leaders to drive these outward looking factors which act as barriers to collaboration. Each of the factors are supportive of each other and therefore balance is required by the leader in applying them.

The first factor is to ensure listening skills are promoted, this reduces the possibility of conflicts and ensures more people are heard thereby improving team cohesion. Secondly, it is essential to practice empathy. Empathy has also been a key competency highlighted for collaboration in studies of the most digitally advanced companies (Kiron, 2017). This refers to the ability to seek to understand the differences that exist so that there is openness and the ability to be receptive to views that may not agree to one's own view (Kiron, 2017). It also shifts the focus from purely what others are saying and allows one to pay attention to the unspoken and spoken, resulting in a better overall outcome for the team and better collaboration (Kiron, 2017). In a theoretical study, researchers considered whether emotional intelligence was actually required for leadership and why it matters (Antonakis, Ashkanasy, & Dasborough, 2009). The study argued that leaders require emotional intelligence to understand follower differences and concluded that leaders need to be sensitive to followers and be able to manage emotions of themselves and of others appropriately (Antonakis et al., 2009).

Thirdly, the need for leaders to encourage an environment of consistent feedback and coaching, which further promotes open discussion and teamwork. The fourth factor focusses of the ability to flex between leader and follower behaviours which requires that control is shared and at times ceded to employees. This factor allows for more developing and growth in others for the longer term.

The fifth factor is the need to clearly draw a path forward, to understand when the discussion should end, confusion should be removed, and clear direction provided. Lastly, the need to develop the skill to encourage win-win interactions and this entails being transparent and honest about personal interests, and to explore the different views of winning resulting in more successful collaboration as more opportunities are found in the presentation of different views.

2.4.4 Summary of collaboration

The literature reviewed identifies the need for leaders to balance several components for effective collaboration, highlighting the complexity of the leader's role in the context of digitisation. While the leader should inform proximity management and develop inter-dependent structures to facilitate collaboration, there is also a need to ensure social intricacies such as culture, trust and networks are managed. From the literature reviewed it is evident that levers to enhance and drive collaboration in the traditional work context may not be as relevant in the digital context. There is a need to understand where the differences exist so that leaders in the banking sector may focus efforts accordingly. Where virtual teams are able to harness their strengths, they are expected to supersede the performance of traditional teams (Dhawan & Chamorro, 2018). The leader's ability to harness these strengths for collaboration are critical to the future of organisations that are becoming increasingly more complex.

2.5 Competing Values Framework

The Competing Values Framework (CVF) was selected to inform the foundation of the study. The section below includes a review of the model and the motive for selection for the research conducted. This section also discusses the key assumptions and critiques of the model.

The original CVF was published by Quinn in 1988 and has been used in literature by several researchers to inform several studies in the field of leadership (Hooiberg & Choi, 2000; Kula-Semos, 2014; Wakefield & Leidner, 2008). The underlying assumption of the CVF is that leaders and managers have functions and roles which are in conflict with each other if they had to be considered separately, they would be unable to maintain the demands of each function or role they are required to perform (Kula-Semos, 2014). The framework therefore proposes that the leader needs to blend the different functions and integrate the processes to perform successfully (Kula-Semos, 2014). This view is consistent with other research which proposes that effective leaders are those that make use of several leadership roles and behaviours in specific circumstances and also recognise when certain leadership behaviours and roles should not be applied (Wakefield & Leidner, 2008). The framework therefore adequately depicts the complexity of leadership and will assist to explore digital leadership competencies and understand the complexity and tasks that

leaders have in the future of world of work.

FLEXIBILITY

People leadership · *Mentor* · *Innovator* · Adaptive leadership

Facilitator · *Broker*

INTERNAL FOCUS · **EXTERNAL FOCUS**

Monitor · *Producer*

Stability leadership · *Coordinator* · *Director* · Task leadership

CONTROL
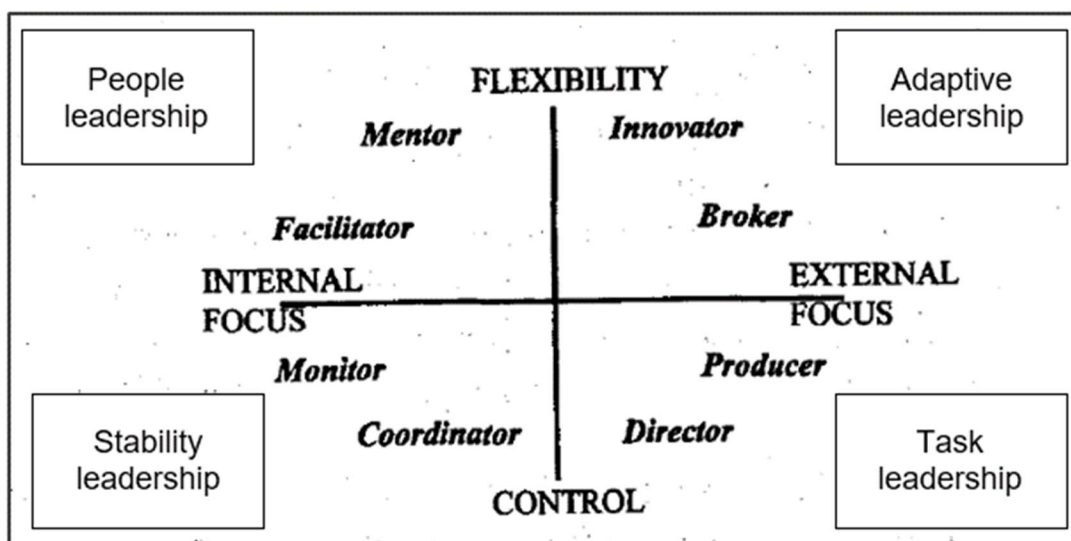
Figure 1: The Competing Values Framework (Source: Adapted from Hooiberg & Choi (2000).

As per research conducted by Hooiberg & Choi (2000), the CVF differentiates eight leadership roles, which are placed over two dimensions. The framework represents the differences in the roles from each other over four quadrants, by using the dimensions of flexibility against control and internal compared to external focus and highlights the different requirements organisations necessitate from leaders. The four quadrants and their respective roles and functions are grouped together under the task leadership, stability leadership, people leadership and adaptive leadership quadrants. Each of these four quadrants are discussed below.

Task leadership

The **producer and director** roles refer to the leader's ability to set and achieve goals established. The producer role focuses on motivating others to achieve goals. The director role focuses on clarifying what is expected and the different objectives, providing instructions as to how to achieve expectations and goals, defining problems that exist, assisting to generate rules and policies that may be required. Based on the functions above, the task leadership quadrant has a greater external focus and focuses on greater control.

Stability leadership

The stability leadership quadrant has a greater focus on control and includes the

monitor and coordinator roles. A leader performing a coordinator role would ensure that structures and flows of systems are well maintained and ensure that all operational requirements of the organisation are coordinated. The coordinator role also encourages interactivity, robust debating and analysis to ensure that team outputs are improved (Wakefield & Leidner, 2008). The coordinator role is regarded as more challenging to perform in the digital context as teams pursue independent work tasks, therefore the more independent the members are from each other the more difficult and the longer it takes to establish team norms and methods of working (Wakefield & Leidner, 2008). Monitoring requires that the leader frequently monitor key aspects of the company to ensure the expectations and compliance requirements are being met.

People leadership

The people leadership quadrant which includes the **mentor and facilitator roles** and focuses on the role of the leader in facilitating processes internally and providing mentorship to subordinates. The facilitator role is the ability of the leader to drive cohesion, teamwork, collective effort and manage interpersonal relationships and disputes. The mentoring role includes the ability of the leader to provide empathetic leadership by being more approachable, sensitive and open. The people leadership quadrant has a more flexible orientation.

Adaptive leadership

The adaptive leadership quadrant includes an external focus and flexibility and centres around the securing of resources and innovative and creative methods to conduct and drive business. This quadrant includes the **innovator and broker** roles. To fulfil the innovator role, leaders need to constantly assess the environment for changes taking place and ensure that they enable adaptation to these changes identified. As a broker the leader leans on their capability to network and shape relationships with others outside their unit of business and in so doing, secure resources for their business unit.

The CVF provides a base to understand the research questions better and provide insight to this study which will explore digital leadership competencies that are useful to drive collaboration. The framework is consistent with previous leadership models in literature which highlight task and performance related attributes (Bartram, 2005; Behrendt et al., 2017). However, the original model is based on leadership theory

and organisational behaviour from which the 1998 CVF was developed. It is arguable whether such theory would be as relevant to the volatile and uncertain business environment that leaders find themselves in today. The model makes reference to leaders who are able to meet the requirements of all four quadrants and integrate all roles as a "master manager" (Kula-Semos, 2014, p33), which is improbable and should typically be associated with leader effectiveness.

The advantage of the model is that is provides a clear set of competencies to better understand roles and abilities of the leader and provides a mechanism for combining and integrating measures. It is for this reason that the framework has been widely used by practitioners in practice and across various functions as it makes use of behaviours that are frequently associated with leadership roles (Hooiberg & Choi, 2000).

2.6 Conclusion of Chapter 2

This chapter included a review of literature in the field of digital leadership competencies and collaboration. The review identified gaps that exist in the body of knowledge and where there was a lack of clarity and conflicting views exist. Digital leadership competencies are closely aligned to the levers that are required by leaders to drive collaboration.

There are two approaches to the leader's role to encourage collaboration, being the physical and operational factors that the leader influences or the psychological factors which encourage an outward looking focus. In addition, leaders need to invest in long term and short-term measures for driving collaboration. It was found that certain factors such as networks and relationships are paradoxical, as when managed well could increase collaboration however if poorly managed has the capacity to be a hindrance to collaboration.

Based on the literature reviewed and the gaps and inconsistencies that were identified, the research questions have been developed to address these items. The research questions are presented and discussed in the following chapter.

3. CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1 Introduction

Digitisation has resulted in several changes to how business is conducted and has materially changed the way collaboration takes place (Schrage, 2015). Many of the challenges of digitisation can be overcome through collaboration and leaders who have the requisite skills to drive the collaboration. There is therefore a need for strong leaders who are able to build digital matuarity within the business (Kane et al., 2019) to assist their organisations to thrive. This research aims to explore the role played by leaders in driving collaboration and to better understand the digital leadership competencies that are used to drive collaboration in banking. The research questions were formulated based on the literature review completed in Chapter 2 and the Competing Values Framework presented in Section 2.5.

3.2 Main research questions

The research questions to be explored in the study are presented and discussed below.

Research Question 1

What is the role of the business leader in driving collaboration in the context of a digital workplace in the bank?

The leader plays a critical role in initiating and driving collaboration, however this role has become increasingly complex and is unclear given the reliance on digital tools and changes to proximity factors in the bank (Bernstein et al., 2019). There is emphasis for leaders to pay less attention to the logistics of collaboration and to rather focus on ensuring a sense of security of teams (Kwan, 2019). However, research conducted by Zhou & George (2003) propose the leaders role is to encourage creativity of employees and to influence the environment in which collaboration occurs. There are various conflicting views that exist in the body of knowledge. The aim of research question 1 is to clarify the role of the leader to improve collaboration in the bank. It would also be useful to understand how the role of the leader was impacted with the move to digital working.

Research Question 2

Which of the digital leadership competencies are perceived by business leaders to

drive collaboration internal to the organisation?

Through review of the literature, several digital leadership competencies were identified for leaders to be effective in collaboration. As per Kane et al. (2019), the main competencies were for the leader to create transformative vision, to be forward looking, to possess digital literacy skills, ensure adaptability and have a strong leadership style. However, there were various contradictory views to the above competencies, skills identified and the level of expertise required by the leader (Gratton & Johns, 2013; Larson & Dechurch, 2019; Le Pennec & Emmanuel, 2018). The aim of research question 2 is to explore which digital leadership competencies are used to drive collaboration and to also understand what additional digital leadership competencies leaders may be reliant on in business to drive collaboration. It would also be useful to gain insight as to whether all competencies are equally important.

Research Question 3
In a digital workplace, what perceived behaviours and competencies are regarded as ineffective in driving collaboration?

Due to the contradictions found in the literature on the competencies required and due to the complexity of the leaders role in driving collaboration, it is possible that the leader could act as an enabler or a boundary to collaboration (Gratton, 2005; Kiron, 2017). The aim of research question 3 is to understand and identify behaviours, traits or skills of the leader that may negatively impact collaboration. It is crucial for leaders to understand and be cognisant of such behaviours that diminish collaboration in teams so that they can alter such behaviours.

Research Question 4
Given the business leaders experience with collaboration, which of the digital leadership competencies were at play in the context of COVID-19?

COVID-19 was of significance to this study due to the unique circumstances created by the pandemic and the growth in digital working that was experienced by the banks. The challenges posed to leaders were unique and the need to collaborate digitally was of utmost importance. Research question 4 is an extension of research question

two and aims to explore the extent to which different digital leadership competencies were relied upon by leaders and if all competencies were equally relevant in the context of the pandemic.

3.3 Conclusion

In the chapter above, literature in the field of collaboration and digital leadership competencies were highlighted and areas for clarity and gaps in the body of knowledge were identified, which forms the basis for the research questions developed.

While collaboration is a key lever that could assist leaders to overcome various challenges brought about by digital transformation, it was unclear which digital competencies should be focused on to drive collaboration. The research questions presented were aimed at providing insights into the constructs and thereby adding to the body of knowledge. The research conducted was based on carefully selected research methodology and design to meet the research need, as documented in the following chapter.

4. CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four discusses the research methods selected and the rationale as to why these methods are the most suitable for the research conducted. A description of the data gathering process that was implemented, the instruments used for data collection and the methods of analysis are detailed below. The chapter also comprises methods that were used to ensure validity and accuracy of data and concludes with limitations identified.

4.2 Selected research methodology and design

This qualitative research sought to obtain depth of understanding in the field of collaboration from the leader's viewpoint, therefore an interpretivist philosophy was applied. Interpretivist research provides the opportunity for rich data through which insights and the experience of the participants can be accessed (Leitch, Hill, & Harrison, 2010). Qualitative research that has been well executed, has provided several insightful findings, provided depth of understanding and also challenged thinking in fields such as collaboration, organisations and leadership (Brooks & Normore, 2015; Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The more flexible research methodology permissible by qualitative research, assists the researcher to better understand the complexity of the problem and potentially discover new insights (Herrero, Armellini, & Solar-Pelletier, 2020).

A review of literature conducted by Parry, Mumford, Bower, & Watts (2014), over a period of twenty five years of The Leadership Quarterly Journal, confirmed that over time there has been an increase in qualitative studies conducted and qualitative research has resulted in progress in the field of leadership. The study further highlighted the following advantages of completing qualitative research in the field of leadership (Parry et al., 2014):

- It allows the researcher flexibility to explore processes and unexpected ideas which present itself in completing the research;
- It allows the researcher the opportunity to be sensitive to contextual factors;
- It provides an opportunity for in-depth exploration;
- It results in research of more relevance and can therefore be of more value and interest to business leaders.

Over time certain norms have been established in conducting qualitative research, which allow for a better quality of research (Brooks & Normore, 2015). Particular attention was paid by the researcher to defining the design of the research, the methods that will be used to collect and analyse data and the rigor applied throughout the research.

To obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomena researched, methods from literature were used to move to broader generalisations in the study. An inductive method of theory development was used to understand which digital leadership competencies drive collaboration in banking. Patterns were sought from the data and was organised through the use of categories and themes from the bottom up (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A mono method was selected to conduct the study. While there are drawbacks to a single method chosen, these weaknesses were mitigated by ensuring that particular attention was paid to the quality controls which were implemented. Guidelines to ensure effective design and implementation were followed in developing and making use of the sampling instrument to result in more trustworthy data collected (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). In addition, aspects of data collection were varied, as the sample was selected from across different banks in South Africa, consisting of leaders from various functions within the bank and included different levels of leadership in the sample (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

An exploratory research design was conducted as new insights were sought in the field of leadership and collaboration through the lens of digitisation (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The research conducted was not bound by pre-determined questions or assumptions, which allowed the topics to be researched in depth and resulted in greater potential for data to be collected (Smith & Bowers-Brown, 2015). Data collected from respondents was based on their experience with collaboration and years of tenure in the banking industry.

A cross-sectional study was conducted as the researcher sought to collect data using once off interviews conducted over a short time frame to provide the present attitudes, opinions and experiences of the respondents (Creswell, 2002). In addition, the limited time and resource constraints of the researcher, warranted a cross-sectional study.

Semi structured interviews were used as a means of data collection. While the interviewer did have a set of open ended questions and themes, they followed a flexible and non-linear structure as suggested by Davies (2015).

4.3 Population

For the purpose of this study, leaders are defined as individuals who influence the behaviours and attitudes of individuals on a team. They also possess the capacity to influence goals, vision and culture within and between groups (Charlier et al., 2016; Maduka et al., 2018). Consequently, the sample of leaders selected to interview were relevant to the study and they were able to provide pertinent, viable answers to the questions.

The scope of this research was limited to leaders from the banking industry in South Africa. The banking sector and in particular the big four banks in South Africa have pursued large scale digital transformation programs and new methods of working, and have been able to keep up with the pace of change by launching new features every three to six months (Maritz & Camarate, 2018). According to the Annual SITEisfaction Report, all four of the big four banks feature as the top digital banks in South Africa and have been ranked as possessing the best digital offerings in the country (Venter, 2020). Consequently, the banks are likely to employ leaders who are the most suitable candidates for this study based on their experience of digitisation in the banking sector.

4.4 Unit of analysis

Creswell (2002) defines the unit of analysis as the group or individuals to be studied that would provide answers to the qualitative research questions. The unit of analysis used in this study was at the individual manager level and included a sample that comprised of senior managers and executive leaders who had experience in collaboration and leadership based on their role in the bank. This assisted the researcher to understand the individual leadership roles and competencies deeper. It also assisted to analyse unique methods and concepts used by each leader in relation to their experience in banking, years employed within the bank and their experience with digital transformation.

4.5 Sampling method and size

The definition of a business leader is broad and not consistently applied, therefore a complete population of all banking leaders in South Africa was not attainable for completion of the study, hence non-probability sampling was applied. A business leader for purposes of this study included all individuals in a leadership role within a bank, who managed a department, had the ability to influence the goals and drive deliverables of those departments, including mandate to provide inputs and influence into other departments, and had the ability to influence motivating behaviours and group culture (Charlier et al., 2016; Maduka et al., 2018). In addition, these leaders had experience in working with projects that required cross boundary teamwork. It was vital that the leaders had experience in working across departments to shed light and provide valuable insights on their experiences with cross team collaboration. Therefore, leaders were selected based on those who had experience in excess of five years within the banking sector.

Since the researcher applied judgement in choosing respondents for the study, and each respondent was chosen based on their ability to answer the interview questions and meet the objective of the study, a purposive sampling method was used in the study (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Such sampling methods are appropriate for instances when the sample selected is small in size and the study is of a qualitative nature (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

A sample of eighteen leaders were selected, however 17 interviews were conducted as one participant did not meet the sampling criteria set out. The sample size was justified given consideration of the saturation point and the time and resources of the study. According to Guest, Bunce, & Johnson (2006), studies conducted with relatively homogenous samples are expected to reach saturation earlier and a minimum sample of twelve is sufficient to accomplish the research objectives. Given that the leaders chosen for the study were all selected from the banking sector there was some homogeneity expected in the sample. Saturation was reached by the twelfth interview; however, the remaining interviews were conducted to confirm the point of saturation. A table including a description of the 17 participants is presented in Section 5.2, Table 1.

Although the sample of leaders selected were from banking institutions, the leaders were selected from different functions within the bank and from functions that were

most applicable to the study. The respondents were selected by the researcher through use of networks in the banking industry. To ensure trustworthiness of data collected, particular care was placed by the researcher in selecting the sample of interviewees, ensuring that they possessed sufficient knowledge based on experience to answer questions credibly (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

4.6 Measurement instrument

Semi structured interview schedules, which included open questions, were used to conduct the interviews with respondents (Roulston, 2010). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with use of the digital platform, Microsoft Teams. Leaders had the opportunity to provide their opinion and experiences regarding the subject of collaboration and digital leadership competencies (Tracy, 2013), and were able to articulate and share their ideas comfortably, therefore digital face-to-face interviews was an appropriate means to collect data (Creswell, 2002). Additionally, the researcher had the opportunity to probe further through the use of follow up questions and could clarify and interpret responses from respondents throughout the interview, which improved the quality of the interview and the data collected (Roulston, 2010).

The researcher ensured that questions included in the interview were not mis-interpreted and was easily understood by the respondents, therefore providing relevant and rich responses (Roulston, 2010; Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Researchers should be precise with use of words and not assume that others understand (Ellis & Levy, 2008). The researcher conducted pilot interviews to ensure that any questions that were not clear, not relevant or ambiguous were corrected or removed prior to the interviews. This sought to deliver a better-quality interview and ensure that content validity was maintained, and data collected was reliable. The interview schedule used to conduct the interviews has been included in Appendix D.

4.7 Data gathering process

Semi structured interviews were conducted with seventeen respondents. Good practice of conducting interviews was adhered to by ensuring that interviews were scheduled for a convenient and comfortable setting for the respondent so that sufficient time and effort was dedicated to involvement in the interview (Roulston, 2010). The interviews conducted were recorded for transcription purposes and were further confirmed by the field notes that were taken by the researcher during the

interviews and post interview notes that were documented by the researcher after each interview. The researcher was careful to hold a neutral role while conducting the interview to improve validity of the findings (Roulston, 2010). During the interview, the researcher made use of probing questions and requested for examples and personal insights of the interviewee which allowed for richer insights to be generated from the interview (Brooks & Normore, 2015).

The invitation to participate in the study was sent to prospective participants through email, and the confirmation of agreement to participate was also re-confirmed at the beginning of each interview with the participant. Data gathering took place over a period of four weeks in the month of September. The data collected from each interview was transcribed as each interview was completed, this assisted the researcher to determine when saturation was reached. It also assisted the researcher to identify any issues with the interview schedule and such issues were addressed by amending the interview schedule for future interviews.

Trustworthiness demonstrates the qualitative rigour through the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Morse et al., 2002). To ensure trustworthiness of data collected, the researcher made use of an audit trail and peer checks when coding data collected (Morse et al., 2002). An audit trail required that the researcher document the research process and the various decisions taken in a careful and chronological method (Lub, 2015). The researcher also made use of the ability to clarify and summarise data during the interview and remained open minded when conducting the interview, ensuring adaptability and sensitivity to the interviewee (Morse et al., 2002).

4.8 Method of analysis and storage

Transcriptions were completed by the researcher from recordings of interviews. The data was transcribed and input into Atlas.ti. Coding is the process of categorising the data and labelling the text to form broad categories, which forms a foundation for summarising data into a few themes (Creswell, 2002). The code list generated has been included in Appendix E. The use of thematic codes was used to translate data collected.

To ensure rigour of the data, once the coding process was completed on every three

transcripts a process of reviewing the codes was completed, this was to ensure that there were minimal duplication of codes and that codes created were clearly articulated. Where similar codes were identified, such codes were re-grouped. The frequency with which codes were used were also used as an indication of whether codes required to be split further.

Interview recordings were safely stored on a USB storage device to which only the researcher has access. The data was stored using coded labels in password protected files and will be stored for a minimum period of ten years by the researcher.

4.9 Quality assurance

As suggested by Roulston (2010), it is important that the quality of research conducted is commensurate with the assumptions that have been made in conducting interviews, this will ensure that data collected is consistent with the underlying theoretical bases of the study. Quality in performing interviews was upheld by ensuring that the researcher minimised biases through taking a neutral role (Roulston, 2010). The researcher did have work experience in the banking industry and ensured that a neutral role was maintained by testing the data findings with other independent researchers and ensuring interview questions were reviewed independently to ensure minimal bias, this was in line with a neo-positivist view of an interview (Roulston, 2010).

To ensure quality of data collected, the researcher ensured rigor was applied in collection of data and in the process of data analysis. Rigor was essential to the research conducted as without rigor the study loses credibility and loses its usefulness (Morse et al., 2002). As suggested by Tracy (2013), the writing of fieldnotes when conducting interviews was practiced beforehand and pilot interviews were conducted. The researcher ensured adequate data was collected to support the findings of the research (Tracy, 2013). Throughout the research the goal of rigour aimed to ensure validity, reliability and objectivity which is pertinent to qualitative research (Morse et al., 2002).

The researcher ensured that there was transparency in the research process. If there were any issues that arose in completing the research, this would be highlighted and would also include how the researcher endeavoured to overcome these issues in the research process (Tracy, 2013).

4.10 Confidentiality

The details of the respondents were known by the researcher therefore confidentiality was sought by implementing the following measures and controls. Data collected from the interviews conducted was stored without identifiers. The findings from the research was reported without names and details of the respondents and does not refer to the organisations at which the respondents were employed.

Prior to the interviews being conducted the respondents were requested to sign the consent statement presented in Appendix B. If the respondent chose not to sign the consent statement an interview would not have been conducted. The consent letter could be signed electronically, or an email consent was obtained from the respondent. In addition, at the beginning of the interview the researcher set out to verbally confirm with the respondent that consent had been obtained to conduct the interview.

4.11 Limitations

Potential limitations of the research conducted include that the research was conducted on the banking sector, therefore the applicability and transferability to other industries may be limited (Leitch et al., 2010) . The method of sample selection was subjective and could exclude the views of other leaders more proficient to answer interview questions. The researcher was employed by a bank at the time of conducting the research and could have introduced bias into the interview process and the data analysis performed (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Data collection was planned and executed at a point in time and may not capture the views and perceptions of the leaders in general.

4.12 Conclusion

A qualitative exploratory methodology was completed based on participants in the banking sector. The researcher ensured careful consideration of how quality of the research may be demonstrated in the methodology design, the collection of data and the manner in which data is analysed and reported (Roulston, 2010). Participants were selected based on the sampling criteria of experienced leaders who have the ability to influence more than one department and have a tenure of greater than five years in the bank. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews to afford an

in depth understanding of the constructs. A thematic analysis was conducted to provide valuable insights and findings to add to the body of knowledge in the field of leadership and collaboration. Chapter 5 includes the results of the interviews that were conducted and the data that was collected.

5. CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents the findings from interviews that were completed with seventeen business leaders in the South African banking sector. The data was collected in terms of the methodology and design set out in Chapter 4. Through thematic analysis, data was utilised to provide insights and understanding into the digital leadership competencies that were relied upon by business leaders to drive collaboration in banks. The presentation of this chapter has been constructed on the five key themes that emerged from the data collected, to answer the research questions presented in Chapter 3. Consequently, data which was collected in response to each of the four research questions was grouped under the main themes identified.

Chapter 5 includes a description of the sample on which in-depth interviews were conducted, key findings for each theme and research question respectively and a summary of key findings.

5.2 Description of the sample

The sample selected included eighteen senior managers and executive leaders in the banking sector. One participant was excluded from the findings as it was identified that the participant did not satisfy the sampling criteria set out in Chapter 4. In addition to holding greater than five years of experience in the banking sector, the business leaders were selected based on their leadership role which would be indicative of their responsibility to provide input into strategy and the opportunity to influence more than one department in the bank. The sample therefore satisfied the unit of analysis which was at the individual manager level and assisted the researcher to explore digital leadership competencies in detail at the individual business leader level and better understand how competencies were used to drive collaboration.

Saturation was obtained around the twelfth interview and minimal insights were gained thereafter, however the remaining interviews were conducted to confirm results obtained. The description of the participants role, number of years in banking, duration of interview and function of business area have been included in the table below in order of interviews conducted. As stated in Section 4.2, to introduce variation in the sample selected, participants were selected from different functions,

including the sales and client facing teams (frontline), as well as the back office and support teams, to obtain a balanced perspective of the topic. Multi-functional roles refer to roles that include a combination of frontline and back office responsibilities.

Table 1: Description of the sample

Number	Role in Bank	Years in Banking	Duration of interview	Function
1	CFO Support Segment	8 years	31.12 minutes	Central and Support
2	Head of Coverage - Financial Institutions	15 years	45.19 minutes	Frontline
3	Chief Information Officer	15 years	41.07 minutes	Central and Support
4	Chief Executive Officer	37 years	44.20 minutes	Multi-functional
5	Head of Business Intelligence Unit	16 years	33.18 minutes	Central and Support
6	Executive Assistant - Africa	8 years	39.33 minutes	Central and Support
7	Product Head and Head of Business Initiatives	31 years	33.22 minutes	Multi-functional
8	Provincial Head	21 years	28.56 minutes	Multi-functional
9	Head Business Process Improvement	15 years	22.14 minutes	Central and Support
10	Product Head	7 years	42.50 minutes	Multi-functional
11	Chief Information Officer	25 years	37.36 minutes	Central and Support
12	Head of Sales	30 years	40.20 minutes	Frontline
13	Product Head	30 years	33.49 minutes	Frontline
14	Chief Imagineer	16 years	45.42 minutes	Central and Support
15	Head of Digital and Innovation	25 years	31.18 minutes	Central and Support
16	Regional Head	30 years	39.40 minutes	Frontline
17	Head of Development	15 years	39.17 minutes	Multi-functional

Table 2: Sample statistics

Description	Outcome
Number of interviews	18
Number of interviews used for findings	17
Longest interview	45.42 minutes
Shortest interview	22.14 minutes
Average time of interviews	36.87 minutes
Lowest years of experience	7 years
Highest years of experience	37 years

The average years of experience of the participants was around twenty years in the banking sector and this ensured that data collected was from experienced and knowledgeable leaders who could best provide rich insights to the topic.

5.3 Presentation of findings

The section below includes the findings from qualitative data collected for each of the four research questions by the key themes identified. The research questions presented in Chapter 3 sought to clarify the role of the business leader in improving collaboration and to understand how the roles were impacted by the change in environment between traditional working and digital working. The research questions aimed to explore the main digital leadership competencies that drive collaboration and gain insight as to which of these competencies were most at play in the context of COVID-19. Lastly, the research questions sought to understand which perceived competencies were regarded as ineffective in driving collaboration.

The five key themes that emerged in the study related to the main digital leadership competencies identified from the data and are depicted below. Key quotes and frequencies supporting the theme from each research question are included in sections below to provide further context to the findings.

Figure 2: Digital leadership competencies (Source: Authors own creation)

5.3.1 General findings

The general view from interviews conducted with participants was that collaboration was imperative to the banking sector. Many participants offered the challenging banking environment, the entrance of new competitors and need for innovation as main reasons for the need for collaboration. Participant 8 identified the banking environment as the main reason for collaboration, stating that "it became evident that banks have got no choice but to begin to collaborate", "it is becoming necessitated by the environment the banks are in."

Participant 16 alleged that while digital innovation and banking technology was

previously regarded as an order winner, they were now merely order qualifiers as all banks possessed similar digital functionality. Consequently, Particpant 16 suggested that collaboration was now regarded as an order winner, which banks could not do without. Participants considered collaboration to involve participation, improved communication, openness and leveraging of different skills so that the outcome results in a win for all parties. A summary of key findings obtained for each research question is presented below. These findings are then unpacked further in the chapter.

Summary of key findings by research question

Research Question 1

The aim of Research Question 1 was to clarify the role of the leader in driving collaboration within a digital context in the bank. In response to Research Question 1, participants provided comprehensive descriptions of recent collaborative projects undertaken, the role they fulfilled to execute and influence collaboration, and they explained how their role had been impacted when working in a digital context. Through aggregation of the codes created, the following themes emerged relating to the role of the leader in driving collaboration: (1) Director and Motivator, (2) Digital Management, (3) Monitor, (4) Facilitator and Enabler and (5) Adaptable and Forward Looking.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 sought to understand which digital leadership competencies were relied on by business leaders to drive collaboration in a digital setting. Five key digital leadership competencies emerged from the data, including the associated skills for each competency. Additional antecedent factors which impact collaboration were also identified and are presented below.

Research Question 3

The purpose of Research Question 3 was to identify the leadership competencies and behaviours that are perceived to hinder collaboration and to further confirm whether these hindrances to collaboration are similar in the traditional and digital context. Participants acknowledged leadership behaviours and traits as the main hindrances to collaboration. These behaviours were responsible for ineffective collaboration in the traditional and digital context.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 sought to understand how leaders could better equip themselves for collaborating in a digital context. The question focussed on which particular digital leadership competencies were at play in the context of COVID-19 and which competencies were relied on by leaders. It was evident that the pandemic was a challenging time for many leaders and several participants conveyed the level of uncertainty and the need for balancing of tasks that was required during this period.

5.4 Presentation of findings by theme

5.4.1 Theme 1: Directing and Motivating

Research Question 1: Role of Director and Motivator

In exploring the role of the business leader in collaboration, many participants mentioned the importance of direction setting. Participants described this role to include having oversight of the collaboration, providing instructions to teams and individuals and being responsible for the delivery and implementation of business objectives within agreed upon timelines. There were 7 participants who clarified the importance of the leader to provide such direction. Participant 1 and 15 corroborated the role as:

*1:1 "the role that I'm playing in the project will be more of a **guardian**."*

*15:2 "to give **direction** and to maintain **focus** and remove impediments."*

Participants highlighted the role of the leader to develop the vision, mission and objectives to inform the collaboration, this included the need to understand stakeholder requirements and ensure that they also bought into and supported the strategic intent. The development of the strategic vision for collaboration was noted as vital by several respondents. The strategic intent required clear understandable objectives of what was required to be created, as articulated by Participants 7 and 14 below;

*7:8 " to **understand** exactly what it is we wanted before we went to the development team."*

*14:4 "And to be **very clear** about where it is, we want to go right."*

A key component associated with providing direction and strategic intent, was the role of the leader to motivate employees and acknowledge their contribution of work as part of the collaboration. Participants were adamant that this role was of greater importance when working digitally. Motivation was emphasised by 10 participants who clarified the role as the duty to motivate employees in the form of reward, achievement and recognition as depicted by qualitative data below:

*3:22 " I placed a huge amount of emphasis on **recognition** both from the stage, in the formal sense of the word and on an ongoing basis. Really just encouraging and supporting and **acknowledging everyone's contribution**, down to the micro-task level."*

*16:21 "keeping them **motivated and energized** to see the end goal, even though you're going to have a lot of obstacles."*

The data above provides insight into the role of the leader in collaboration, in response to Research Question 1. A key role of the leader in collaboration is providing direction to employees to achieve the goals set out, providing a clear strategic vision and supporting and acknowledging employee contributions through motivation.

Research Question 2 and 4: Competencies of Director and Motivator

In exploring which digital leadership competencies were most relied on by business leaders, participants mentioned the importance of communicating clear and understandable direction and instructions to employees. Through their personal accounts, participants explained that the challenge when providing direction digitally was that few resources were available to do so, compared to the traditional work environment where they would have access to boards, charts and the environment itself. Participant 15 proposed that:

*15:10 " having and giving very **clear direction** without the aid of visual stimuli."*

Closely associated with the ability to provide clear directions, participants highlighted that it was essential to ensure alignment of direction and strategic vision between all

stakeholders of the collaboration and the greater organisation. This was emphasised by participants given the large size of the banks and the various business units that exist within the bank resulting in a greater need for alignment.

*14:2 "my role is to try and understand, and rather **to align,** to assist leaders in **aligning themselves** with strategy and then to also help them **align that strategy** to their particular business unit."*

Several participants highlighted that the purpose of collaboration was value creation for the organisation and for its customers. The ability of the leader to drive value creation was explained as being as important in the traditional work context and digital context. In the digital context, participants explained value creation was mainly focussed on cost savings, improved performance, new opportunities for the business unit, innovation, and ease of operations. Participant 17 expressed that value creation was closely linked to the strategic purpose developed and was critical to the success of the leader:

*16:10 " if you don't have purpose and if you don't have some tangible success about your role and what you are creating, you know we're living in this world now where it's **about [value] creation**."*

Participants expressed that with greater challenges experienced while working digitally, a greater amount of their time was dedicated to assisting teams to overcome challenges and solve problems encountered. In providing this assistance, leaders provide support to their teams in collaborating. Participant 6 explained;

*16:14 " a team needs to have that sponsor or that coach that is going to open that path that makes life **easier for them**."*

In response to research question four, additional competencies and skills highlighted by participants included the need for leaders who can see the bigger picture of collaboration and how the organisation would be impacted from the decisions taken. Participants suggested that to be successful in collaboration, leaders needed to consider the impact beyond their own area of influence and consider the bank as a whole. The ability of the leader to possess in-depth business knowledge and business experience was identified as more important in the digital context than

previously required and this was linked to problem solving ability.

*7:24 " it's very important to be able to see the **bigger picture."***

*12:22 "if ever there was a time that leadership needs to **understand the business**, and **what people do**, and the **functions** of the business [its now]."*

The digital leadership competencies that were emphasised by participants was the ability of the leader to communicate clear and understandable instructions to employees, to ensure there is alignment of strategic vision and direction between all stakeholders involved in the collaboration, to drive value creation, to assist employees with problem solving, to see the bigger picture when collaborating and possess an in-depth business knowledge which would further assist with problem solving. Based on majority of the competencies above it is inferred that competencies related to leader's ability to direct and lead are important to collaboration.

Research Question 3: Hindrances to Directing and Motivating

Research question 3 sought to clarify which leadership competencies are ineffective to collaboration. Participants referred to personal experience to provide context of leadership behaviours that negatively impacted collaboration. Leaders who were considered egotistical, who sought to retain power and whose primary focus was on their expanses of responsibility, negatively impacted collaboration. A greater number of participants alleged that the need to retain power was more detrimental to collaboration than egotistical leaders. Participants also proposed that these traits would be as detrimental in a digital context as they are to the traditional working context.

*10:42 " some leaders would have an **autocratic style** where nothing gets done without me knowing about it."*

*14:45 "So if leaders don't share because they trying to **secure their position** it becomes a challenge because then you can't grow and the people around you can't grow on your knowledge."*

A key hindrance to collaboration is therefore where leaders act to retain power, are focussed on self-promotion and their own team's success. This data provides insight

into the leadership behaviours that are ineffective in driving collaboration.

5.4.2   Theme 2: Digital Management

Research Question 1: Role of Digital Management

Participants provided several insights into the role of the leader specifically in the digital context. 9 Participants explained the importance of making decisions related to technology. Participant 14 encapsulated the role by remarking;

*14:26 " I think digital savviness is just kind of one. Your ability to **engage with technology** and to **be comfortable** with technology is I think quite important, especially if you're trying to disseminate the use of technology in that organisation."*

The role extended beyond digital literacy and participants explicated that the role extended to leaders acting as a data steward, ensuring that data is appropriately used, correct insights are generated from data and there is security of data for the bank. Most of the participants conveyed the importance that data played in their roles and referred to it as the new digital currency.

*14:17 "So the collation to get that data and to ensure that the data is **used effectively** requires collaboration."*

*17:10 " it has to be **safe and it's protected**, and you can rely on it."*

Based on the data above, digital management which includes data management and ensuring digital effectiveness is a key role of business leaders in driving collaboration. Dominant codes that emerged focussed on the importance of digital literacy of the leader.

Research Question 2 and 4: Competencies of Digital Management

The capability to work and lead digitally, was an important point that a majority of participants felt was critical for leaders. 9 Participants explained the need for leaders to embrace technology, adopt different technology platforms and overcome the challenges posed by systems when collaborating digitally. Participants thought this to be a mandatory competency going forward and leaders needed to understand enough about technology to make decisions given its impact on the bank. The

importance of leaders being able to have the appropriate language and keep up to date with technology, were key attributes noted by participants:

*4:20 " the first thing that I think the leaders of tomorrow have to do is they have to **embrace full technology**. All the platforms that are available."*

*8:22 "digital does not necessarily mean that it's a **language** that needs to be spoken by people in the in the IT department."*

Associated closely with the competencies above, was the importance of leaders possessing the ability to leverage functionality of different tools and technology available, to improve productivity, increase engagement of the teams and the ease of collaboration. The leader's decisions regarding which platforms to use and socialise employees to, directly impacted the collaboration efforts of teams and leaders needed to be sufficiently skilled to make these decisions.

*4:20 " the first thing that I think the leaders of tomorrow have to do is they have to **embrace full technology. All the platforms** that are available. You can't just say I don't want to, I'm gonna work on Teams. OK, I've got Teams, I've got Zoom, I've got House Party."*

13 Participants provided insights as to how this competency acted as an enabler for successful collaboration for leaders in the digital context. Participants 14 and 15 clearly described this competency:

*14:42 "you've got lots of **tools available** to leaders to help them understand things a lot better, to make a lot more informed decisions, but I think **to engage** with their people a lot more as well."*

*15:14 " you know then it's about using **the right tool** for the right purpose and understanding which tools fit when and how to get the most out of them."*

Participants recognised that leaders required very specific skills related to data. Several participants explained the importance of data to execute their roles and that these skills related to being able to effectively use data for collaboration, generate greater insights from data, possess an overall deeper knowledge of data as noted

below:

*9:2 " you need better preparation and **better insights** based on data points and so on."*

*14:41 " the fact **that data is more readily available**, I don't believe leaders have **an excuse not to** engage with the different technologies that gives them that the ability to be a lot more effective and efficient in what they do."*

In response to research question 4 and in the context of COVID-19, participants noted that while there was a significant amount of data available in banks, not all data was equally useful and the leader's ability to decipher the usefulness of data was explained by participants to be a key competency along with the need for ensuring security of the data collected.

*2:32 " being able to decipher between what is news and what is fake news for the benefit of your team"… there's a **lot of information** that's flying around your **ability to guide** the team or steer the team."*

According to participants, the ability for leaders to embrace technology and have the language needed to communicate digitally was mandatory for leaders. The ability to leverage technology appropriately acted as an enabler for leaders to be more effective. Leaders need skills to gain insights from data, to ensure appropriate use and security of data. These are new competencies related to leaders in a digital context that requires a more digitally skilled and attuned leader. Leaders can no longer delegate certain duties away and need to be closer to data related tasks.

Research Question 3: Hindrances to Digital Management

Participants were adamant that a key hindrance to collaboration was the inability of a leader to drive the strategic vision due to a lack of digital competencies. It was suggested that a leader who does not possess the competencies to work and collaborate digitally, not only slows down collaboration but would be unsuccessful in leading in a digital context. Participant 14 articulated this inability as:

*14:37 " a leader that's **not able to disseminate** and understand, the amount of*

*information and **data** that comes and how we **can leverage** some of those things, will also find themselves in a big challenge."*

A lack of digital competencies by leaders therefore acts to disenable collaboration.

5.4.3 Theme 3: Monitoring

Research Question 1: Role of Monitor

Several participants highlighted the need for greater monitoring in a digital context. This increased monitoring comprised the role of the leader to independently validate various outputs from teams and ensure that processes were being adhered to, given that leaders could not physically monitor teams. Not only was there a challenge noted based on the lack of physical presence but also due to collaborating across teams. Monitoring would be required over teams which do not directly report to the leader. The importance and role of monitoring was noted by Participant 1 and 9 below:

*1:8 "with a step further away from the detail, you can then **independently and objectively** be able to scrutinise."*

*9:11 "and [check] that **they actually understand** what they're working on, because you can't walk over and ask you know what you're doing."*

The banking sector is highly regulated therefore participants noted that an important component of the monitoring role was the responsibility of the leader to appropriately respond to risk and compliance matters**.** Throughout the collaboration effort it was important to assess and identify risks and ensure they were mitigated. Participant 10 commented:

*10:4 "How are we **exposing ourselves** from a bank point of view? And then how will we cover all those risks."*

Based on the role of monitor explained above, leaders need to independently and objectively validate outputs generated by the team and ensure that all processes are followed, and risk and compliance requirements are met.

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Research Question 2 and 4: Competencies of monitoring

A key challenge articulated by several participants was the ability of the leader to assess progress made by employees and teams in collaborating digitally. It was evident from the participants that there were two approaches for overcoming this challenge. Participants explained the ability of the leader to be able to manage deadlines more stringently as one approach to increase monitoring.

*9:10 " setting **weekly priorities, weekly goals** because that's the only way that you can know whether the people are actually working."*

The second approach related to the ability of the leader to create an environment of greater more consistent feedback between individuals and teams.

*16:20 " constantly **advising of progress** and having that **catch up** with your team."*

Support and back office participants were more supportive of more stringent managed deadlines while frontline participants seemed to focus on increased feedback for monitoring. While participants acknowledged the need for increased monitoring, they also noted the negative consequences that resulted from doing so, such as micro-manager behaviours, cluttering employees diaries and duplicating effort which was evident in the context of COVID-19. Participant 5 explained:

*5:33 "people are **so busy** as it is, having meetings already, you don't need to **clutter their diary** up with a 10-minute call asking for stuff that's going to be delivered in 2 three days' time."*

Leaders require the competencies to monitor and assess progress when collaborating, they need to obtain feedback and manage deadlines to a greater extent in the digital context due to the lack of physical presence of employees. This remains a challenge for leaders and participants noted conflicting views on methods to overcome the challenge.

Research Question 3: Hindrances to Monitoring

A crucial hindrance to collaboration that was elucidated by several participants was leaders who relied on older methods of assessing performance and who were inflexible to changing aspects of performance management. Performance

management was a key process that 6 participants noted, however due to the flexibility now required and lack of tangible outcomes, there was change required to the performance methodology. Participants noted that the existing method of balanced scorecards was not able to keep up with digital working and a shift to a results-based approach was evident.

*4:54 "The manager or the supervisor sits at the desk and all the staff sit out there, and you able to walk around and touch them on the shoulder and say how you doing, those kind of things. And at the end of the day, **because everybody's been sitting working**. You **think everybody's being productive**?"*

*4:55 "if you haven't put the work in and you've you lazed around for the year is that's going to be an **outcome at the test**, and I think that's the new working environment."*

Frontline participants found performance management more of a hindrance than back office and support participants and more data was collected from frontline participants in this regard, suggesting that they were impacted to a greater extent by inappropriate performance management.

Incorrect and outdated forms of performance management therefore act as a key hindrance to collaboration.

5.4.4   Theme 4: Facilitating and Enabling

Research Question 1: Role of Facilitator and Enabler

Several participants introduced the role of the leader to ensure that collaboration is more seamless. Six participants explained that if there were any obstacles and limitations imposed on collaboration, it was essential that attempts were made by the leader to remove them. The leader also negotiated with stakeholders and influenced the environment in which collaboration took place. This also extended to identifying the benefits to different stakeholders and communicating these benefits to obtain buy-in and support for the collaboration. Participants articulated the role below:

*4:5 "number one is enablement. And when I say **enablement**, it is about allowing the teams to flourish in the right environment. Um and allowing them to colour outside the lines."*

*8:33 " you don't have to have the answers by the way. To solve the problem, you need to **identify who has the answers** and collaborate with the person."*

The data provides insight into the role of the leader as a facilitator and enabler which refers to the enablement of teams for collaboration and influencing the environment to ensure it is conducive to collaboration.

Research Question 2 and 4: Competencies of Facilitating and Enabling

Research Question 2 and 4 sought to understand which digital leadership competencies are used by business leaders to drive collaboration in banking and in the context of COVID-19. The section below provides the data on competencies elucidated by participants to be of significance.

Several participants explained that the digital context required that leaders were more decisive. Participants explained that the increased engagement with teams and consistent feedback, supported the ability to be decisive which was needed for collaboration and providing direction. This competency was noted as particularly important in the context of COVID-19, as participants noted, the business environment required quick and focussed decisions. In support of the above, participants explained:

*4:44 "people around you are **looking to the leader** to make a decision. And I think you have got to **be decisive**."*

*10:29 "because of constant engagement it is easy for us to go and make **decisions quickly**."*

Linked to decisiveness, participants stressed the importance of the leader to facilitate and ensure a single cohesive team with similar understanding on what is required from collaborating. Participants referred to this competency as a preliminary requirement for collaboration:

*9:20 "but to get a **meeting of minds** on core things."*

*15:29 " again that **clarity of direction**, is the ability to share and provide context and*

55

direction to employees and colleagues also became much more important."

Many competencies discussed by participants related to people and teams. Nine participants indicated that the ability to empower staff when collaborating was crucial. This involved the teams being collectively accountable for the collaboration, ensuring the team is involved with setting the agenda and direction of the collaboration, and the team also has the requisite power to challenge views that they may not agree with and be involved in the process to overcome such challenges. Participants noted the following in support of empowering teams:

*10:18 " How do **I empower them** to make sure that they do the right things?"*

*3:7 "also bring a team with me who felt that **they owned it** and that they ran it themselves."*

A unique view provided by Participant 3 was that the leader also needed to frequently distance themselves from the team to allow for more ownership and creativity between the teams to take place.

*3:29 "And then more often than not, **getting out of the way** ends up in a far better result than I could have engineered or controlled by managing it too tightly."*

There was consensus among participants regarding the importance of the leader's ability to manage and allocate resources for successful collaboration. Participants further explained that cross collaboration required management of resources of both the leader's direct team and indirect teams.

*5:5 "So, we've done it at the **resource level**, whether resources are within my team or **outside of the team**."*

In addition to the above, participants further clarified the type of resources that were applicable to the digital context, such as the management of capacity, data and systems. A novel view offered with regard to management of resources for collaboration was that resources should be seen as a collective resource of the bank, and not of individual functions within the bank. Participants believed that this view was not common in the bank, even though it was necessary.

*14:14 "Whatever skill sets that an organisation has, have got to be used where they're needed within the organisation. I think we're **moving away** from this; you know **you own a resource**."*

In response to research question four, further competencies were identified with regards to people and teams. Participants unanimously agreed that a higher level of emotional intelligence was required by leaders in a digital context, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as Participant 16 noted:

*16:39 "You need a **lot of EQ** to deal with multiple stakeholders and different people."*

Participants clarified that the need for greater emotional intelligence was required due to the lack of body language that leaders would have available to them as a source of information in a traditional office context. Without this data point during the pandemic, participants agreed that this was a challenge and a key disadvantage to working remotely and collaborating. Each of these impacts and associated competencies are discussed further below.

Engagement and participation

Ten of the participants agreed that the ability to drive engagement and participation was a key digital competency that leaders required, and that deliberate action was needed. It was noted that one-on-one meetings with employees proved more effective to ensure personal connection and engagement, however when meetings comprised a large number of individuals it was more challenging for leaders to drive engagement and participation. Participants suggested that personal interactions needed to be prioritised as teams where engagement was high, were seen to cope better which impacted performance.

*5:39 "If you have a team session with all 30 of them you try and get **them all to interact**."*

In contrast to the views noted, Participant 3 illuminated the unintended negative consequences of high digital engagement, which requires leaders to consider a level of balance and ensure that both work and social aspects were being addressed digitally.

*3:31 "I think there is **digital fatigue** that people can have when spending too much of time on the screen and too much artificial type of engagement."*

*5:40 "You still have your staff engaged. You still have them **interacting.** You still ensuring that there's a balance between work and play."*

Guidelines for engagement

Given that virtual working and collaborating was relatively new to many leaders, the need for the leader to be forward looking in their approach towards use of technology was key. Nine participants noted that leaders need to establish guidelines for engagement to ensure that collaboration did take place within boundaries and stated that the recent move to working remotely did result in a challenge in this regard.

*4:21 " I think you have to lead by example around the **rules of engagement**. So, I'm finding that management or certain leaders set up a meeting at 7:00 o'clock in the morning."*

*12:11 "from a people perspective, we got to respect **people's boundaries.**"*

Importance of empathy

Interestingly, 6 participants noted the importance of leaders being skilled in being able to empathise with staff during the pandemic, as individuals may have been impacted differently by the crises.

*1:35 "It's **connecting** with your people knowing how they're doing, how their feeling, being empathetic, because you are not with them."*

Non-verbal communication

Nine participants mentioned that leaders need to be skilled in assessing non-verbal signals to engage better and assess the well-being of individuals and teams. They also expressed the uncertain and uneasy feeling that the lack of non-verbal signals had created as a key 'sense' was now missing, as Participant 3 and 14 explained:

*3:33 " leadership for me has always been for me very much a 360 degree, 5 senses. When I sit with somebody and I have a conversation, you get a **sense of body language**, you get a sense of their reaction to you, and how well they are responding*

or not responding."

*14:23 " you also **miss out on interpreting body language** in meetings and such, so where you've got people that are generally introverted and you able to kind of solicit their inputs and such because you can see that they want to say something."*

The competencies discussed in the section above, highlighted the importance of the leader to be decisive and be able to provide a single cohesive team. Leaders need to possess the ability and skill to empower staff, manage and allocate various resources and possess a high emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence in the context of COVID-19 related to competencies of driving engagement and participation, defining guidelines for engagements pro-actively, being empathetic and being able to assess non-verbal signals.

Research Question 3: Hindrances to Facilitating and Enabling

Collaboration, as explained by several participants involved the sharing of resources and expertise, it also involved all stakeholders benefiting from the collaboration. Inward focussed leaders who acted independently for their own benefit, were noted by Participant 7 and 13 to be a characteristic that is not conducive to collaboration. Inward focussed leadership attributes would be associated with a silo approach and would support greater boundaries between teams, and not act as an enabler to teams collaborating.

*7:21 "only concerned about your **own little patch**, then it seriously hinders and impacts collaboration."*

*13:18 "You **can't do it alone**. If you think you can, it is going to be the route to failure."*

Leaders who therefore possess more inward focussed attitudes and who drive independent working, are likely ineffective in driving collaboration.

5.4.5   Theme 5: Adaptability and Forward-Looking

Research Question 1: Role of Adaptable and Forward-Looking leaders

10 Participants acknowledged the role of leaders to be agile, flexible and adaptable due to the fast pace at which change occurs, to ensure that their skills remain relevant and to be better equipped to deal with the new challenges that are

experienced in the banking sector. The need for adaptability was captured by Participant 1, who explained that;

*1:22 " You know things are changing at such a **significant pace** that if you're not flexible, if you're not agile, if you are not adaptable, you'll definitely be left behind."*

*1:23 "So what got you here will definitely not get you there and at the pace that the world is moving and corporate is changing, **flexibility, agility, adaptability**, have become so critical to who we are in terms of how we operate, in terms of how we execute, in terms of how we see the world."*

Participants indicated that leaders are required to be forward looking in their role and approach to collaboration, as it is important to understand the impact decisions taken may have on the organisation. Participant 14 articulated the role by explaining;

*14:58 "its leaders that need to be thinking **ahead of the curve** in understanding the impact of all these digital initiatives and what they will have on their employees."*

From the data above, the role of the leader is one that needs to be adaptable and tolerant to change. As a leader, being forward looking means thinking ahead and understanding the different impacts that result from decisions made.

Research Question 2 and 4: Competencies for Adaptability and Forward Looking

Nine participants indicated that a key attribute was the leader's ability to be open minded, which participants explained as the ability to suspend judgment and think outside the normal ways of conducting business and being receptive of new ideas. This was related to the ability of the leader to be willing to experiment with new methods in collaborating and take risks where required. Even though the bank is structured by several business units and functions, participants noted the importance of the ability to think beyond ones' direct area of responsibility and influence and to reflect on other functions with potential to provide valuable input and offer novel approaches to problem solving or unique expertise. Participants confirmed that being open minded was of greater relevance in the digital context than in the traditional work setting.

*3:21 "We think **broader than** just our team, broader than just our department,*

broader than our own individual segment."

*4:33 " leadership have to start **opening up their minds**. I think in the organisation, to say that there are parts of the bank that can do things much better than you could possibly do it in your business. Go collaborate with them."*

*15:16 "**suspend your judgement** in order to hear other points of view and other perspectives."*

Ability to work within uncertainty

The willingness to experiment and take risks was noted by participants as a necessary component of collaboration. This involved that leaders creating an environment where learning and making mistakes was accepted as part of the process. Interesting views were noted by Participant 3, who suggested that collaboration entailed the leader working within uncertainty and the leader accepting that they do not possess all the answers. The challenge emphasised by Participant 16 was that often teams and leaders within the bank were perceived to be risk averse, suggesting that this could negatively impact collaboration within the bank.

*3:53 " I get asked maybe once a week to facilitate workshops, which I'm also **making it up** as I go along."*

*16:29 " I think we sometimes in the bank are **so risk averse** that we are scared of making mistakes that we are not trying anything new."*

In response to research question four, participants explained that while business conditions remained uncertain and changing in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability of the leader to direct and lead amid the crises was critical. The ability to work within uncertainty and provide direction was heightened during the period of COVID-19 as expressed by participants:

*11:30 "the characteristic or the trait to develop is one where you are just **open to** not knowing what is going to happen."*

*14:34 " this ability to be comfortable with **being uncomfortable**."*

Keeping up with trends

In order to remain adaptable and forward looking, participants cited the importance of keeping up with trends. Given the pace of change and that new data is generated continuously, participants explained that leaders required the ability to keep up with evolving trends in the business environment, be committed to lifelong learning and obtain training were needed. Several participants provided insights to methods utilised to keep up to date, such as discussions with other leaders, to work with industry experts and personally researching market trends and technology changes taking place. Participant 16 was particularly candid in expressing that without learning, one cannot teach, consequently their leadership ability would be compromised as employees look to the leader as a source of data and clarity.

*4:46 " the one thing is understanding and reading a lot and **staying up to date**, because things change so quickly."*

*16:36 "You have to have that **growth mindset**. Which means you constantly learning, you constantly looking for new stuff and the lifelong learning."*

*16:38 " if you're **not reading**, if you're **not learning**, how are you teaching? How are you leading?"*

Competencies identified in the section above included the leader being open minded, having the ability to work within uncertain conditions, and the ability to stay up to date and continuously developing. All competencies identified were thought to be of more relevance and importance in the digital context and especially in the context of COVID-19.

Research Question 3: Hindrances to Adaptability and being Forward-Looking

Research Question 3 sought to identify leadership competencies that act as hindrances to collaboration. Participants explained that leaders who were not willing to make changes and did not embrace new ways of working, who still relied on outdated performance monitoring and who were unwilling to learn, created obstacles to collaboration. These behaviours acted as hindrances in the digital context as much as the traditional work context. It was key that leaders acknowledged that business methods and processes that previously led to success, were unlikely to result in a similar result going forward, therefore necessitating adaptability by the leader.

*1:31 " If you are **not open minded**. You will not collaborate well. If you have a fixed mindset and not a growth mindset, you will never collaborate well."*

*8:25 "The hindrance would be for people who would say this is how we used to do business in the past, and I **will continue the same** way".*

As per the discussion above, it is evident that leaders who have who have a fixed mindset and who are unable to easily adapt, act as obstacles to collaboration.

5.5 Other Findings

The findings below include a discussion of additional factors that were found to impact collaboration from the data collected. Several participants emphasised the need for a greater level of trust, the existence of networks and relationships and the culture within the bank that influences collaboration. Each of these findings are discussed below.

5.5.1 Trust

The importance of the leader's ability to build and maintain **trust** in a digital context was highlighted by seven participants. Due to the lack of physical presence, the leader must trust that employees will deliver on work commitments. Participant 15 suggested that the level of trust in the team was related to the level of engagement within the team.

*15:24 "If there's not a high level of trust then I think there will be a lot of second guessing, there will also be an **unwillingness to participate** if there's low trust as well."*

Various levels of trust emerged from the data. In addition to the level of trust that the leader has with their team, trust is required when collaborating with other teams. Leaders therefore must trust indirect reports to deliver as required for effective cross collaboration. The level of trust that employees have in the leader to lead and direct was also noted as critical to collaboration. Participant 4 explained:

*4:42 "the crew on the ship and the passengers, they **want to know** that there's a clearing over there and **the captain knows how to get there**."*

Several participants explained that in order to build the trust within teams, it was vital that the leader had the ability to improve communication and personal connection with their teams and with stakeholders. Participants provided their examples of deliberate actions taken to improve quality and frequency of communication. Participant 1 emphasised:

*1:19 "Whether you socialise face to face, in person or digitally, that collaboration or **interaction is still critical**. So, when we are engaging on projects that collaboration, it's still as tangible as perhaps it would have been face to face."*

5.5.2 Networks and relationships

The importance of networks and relationships for collaboration was noted by 12 of the 17 participants. Participant 8 stated that networks and relationships are the greatest tool at a leader's disposal for driving collaboration:

*8:34 "interpersonal relationships would still **remain the biggest tool** that winners have. People who win, are people that will be able to still maintain their relationship."*

It was found that the impact of pre-existing networks and relationships was noted as a key success factor when working virtually and collaborating and the lack of such networks posed a severe challenge to collaboration, especially to the frontline participants.

*3:46 "Digital actually works well when there is a **pre-existing relationship** in the team."*

*4:14 "Where I think the challenge is, is **when you don't know the network**. So how can you collaborate if you don't know which door to knock on."*

The mere size and scale of the big four banks, was noted as a main reason for strong networks and relationships needed between leaders and employees as without them, collaboration would be more challenging.

*2:10 "so it would have been difficult because generally, in a bank, the **bank is huge** so you wouldn't know who you're going to work with."*

5.5.3 Culture

Culture was noted as a key driver of collaboration as it provided the environment within which collaboration could thrive. Participants noted that when employees across different functions were accepting of a collaborative culture, there were less obstacles encountered and it was easier to obtain the assistance and buy-in required from stakeholders. However, there was uncertainty noted by participants, of how culture might be influenced in a digital context as participants felt that they were less likely to influence a digital culture.

*12:31 " How do you measure that going forward or **what do you do to build** that sort of culture?"*

Additional factors identified which influence collaboration include trust, pre-existing networks and relationships and a culture that is supportive of collaboration. Participants noted that the most important factor to drive collaboration in banking was pre-existing networks and relationships.

5.6 Summary of key findings

5.6.1 Findings for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 sought to clarify the role of the leader in driving collaboration within a digital context. From the data collected, five key roles emerged which provides insight into the various roles and responsibilities of leaders.

The role of **Director and Motivator** refers to the responsibilities of the leader with respect to providing direction to employees to achieve the goals set out, providing a clear strategic vision and supporting and acknowledging employee contribution through motivation.

The role of **Digital Management** placed importance of digital literacy and data in collaborating in a digital context. The role further includes ensuring digital effectiveness of leaders in driving collaboration through their own digital literacy.

The role of **Monitor** relays the responsibility of the leader to independently and objectively validate outputs generated by the team and ensure that all processes are followed, and risk and compliance requirements are met.

The role of the leader as a **Facilitator and Enabler** focused on the leader's role to ensure the enablement of teams for collaboration and influencing the environment to ensure it is conducive to collaboration.

The need for leaders to **Adaptable and Forward Looking** in their role and approach to collaboration refers to the leader's agility and preparedness for the future. The role of the leader is one that needs to be adaptable and tolerant to change and understanding of the different impacts that result from decisions made.

For each of the roles identified, it is important that leaders recognise and are mindful of the competencies required to effectively fulfil these roles. These competencies are further discussed in subsequent research questions.

5.6.2   Findings for Research Question 2

Research question 2 sought to understand which digital leadership competencies are used by leaders to drive collaboration in a digital context. Several competencies were articulated by participants from their experience in banking and from their recent experience with working digitally. The following main competencies emerged from the data.

Directing includes providing clear and understandable instructions, ensuring there is alignment of strategic vision and direction, the ability to drive value creation and assist employees with problem solving. The leader's ability to direct and lead are important to collaboration.

Leaders need to embrace technology, including the language needed to communicate digitally. They require the ability to leverage technology, to gain insights from data, and to ensure appropriate use and security of data. These are new competencies related to leaders in a digital context that requires a more skilled and digitally attuned leader.

Monitoring competencies relate to the ability to assess progress when collaborating, obtaining feedback and managing deadlines. Monitoring remains a challenge for leaders and participants noted conflicting views on methods to overcome the challenge.

Facilitating and enabling competencies were explained as being decisive and ensuring that the team functions as a single cohesive unit. Leaders need to possess the ability and skill to empower staff, manage and allocate various forms of resources and possess a high emotional intelligence.

Being open minded, having the ability to work within uncertain conditions, and the ability to stay up to date and continuously developing related to the competency of being adaptable and forward looking.

A review of key competencies identified above, confirms that there are more competencies related to the theme of facilitating and enabling and the theme of adaptability and forward looking. The digital leadership competencies found to drive collaboration were closely associated with roles identified in Research Question 1.

5.6.3 Findings for Research Question 3

The aim of Research Question 3 was to better understand which leadership competencies act as hindrances to collaboration taking place in the banking sector. The question also sought to confirm if these competencies were similar in the traditional and digital context.

The perceived leadership competencies that hinder collaboration mainly referred to personal behaviours and traits of the leader. It was found that egocentric behaviours, power retention, being inwardly focussed, the inability of a leader to drive the strategic vision due to a lack of digital competencies, leaders who are inflexible and rely on outdated monitoring processes and leaders who have a fixed mindset are not conducive to collaboration taking place.

Behaviours and leadership traits identified above were found to negatively impact collaboration in the traditional and digital context. Many of the hindrances to collaboration were related to competencies that positively influenced collaboration, and in some instances were opposite to the competencies identified in Research Question 2.

5.6.4 Findings for Research Question 4

Research question 4 sought to understand which digital leadership competencies

were most relied on by leaders in the context of COVID-19. Participants expressed the importance of leaders relying on greater emotional intelligence during the period of COVID-19. This involved leader's being more empathetic, providing guidelines for collaborating digitally, being able to work within uncertainty and being able to utilise nonverbal communication effectively. The leader's ability to drive increased engagement and participation from teams was necessary to overcome the challenges of digital working. Overall, participants relied on the Facilitating and Enabling competencies and the Adaptability and Forward-looking competencies more in the context of COVID-19.

5.7 Conclusion

Chapter 5 comprises the arrangement of research findings from qualitative data collected according to methodology presented in Chapter 4. The purpose of the study was to explore how digital leadership competencies are utilised by leaders to influence and drive collaboration in the banking sector.

Five key digital leadership competencies emerged from the data that are used by leaders to drive collaboration. The findings also provided context to the challenging banking sector in South Africa. Leadership competencies that were perceived to hinder collaboration were also recognised by participants. The leadership competencies associated with Facilitating and Enabling and being Adaptable and Forward-Looking were relied on more by leaders in the context of COVID-19.

Other findings included the importance and pervasive impact that trust, networks and relationships and culture have in driving collaboration. The emergent themes and the comparison to literature reviewed in Chapter 2 are further analysed in Chapter 6.

6.   CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter included the findings from interviews conducted with leaders in the banking sector to explore which digital leadership competencies are used to drive collaboration. A detailed analysis and discussion of these findings are presented in Chapter 6. The discussion of results has been framed against the literature review completed in Chapter 2.

The main themes presented in Chapter 5 and the research questions articulated in Chapter 3, respectively form the framework for discussion in this chapter. The research findings and results contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of digital leadership competencies and collaboration, as literature reviewed identified various conflicting perspectives and was in instances unclear. The outcome of the research conducted culminated in a framework that could be applied by management in the banking sector to drive collaboration.

6.2 Discussion of findings

6.2.1   Role of the leader in driving collaboration

The literature reviewed and presented in Chapter 2, highlighted the complexity of the leader's role in the context of digitisation and driving collaboration. Leaders interviewed were cognisant of the important role they played in driving collaboration in the organisation, which supported views proposed by Kwan (2019). Collaboration is driven by the following key roles which emerged from the findings.

The findings from the study conducted identified the role of leader to **direct and motivate** followers. The role was found to include functions such as to provide direction to employees and ensure a strong purposeful vision is established for collaboration. It is important that the vision is clear and understood by all stakeholders. This finding supports the view of the role of the leader which focused on direction setting and driving decisions which is similar to the traditional work context (Bernstein et al., 2019). This indicates that competencies relating to directing and motivating already developed by the leader in a traditional work context, can be useful in a digital context.

The direction provided by the leader was key to ensure focus and assistance was provided to employees as they incur challenges. The role includes the function of the

leader as a motivator of employees and one who is able to inspire using various types of motivation such as power, recognition and reward. The need for various forms of motivation extends the literature which mostly emphasised the need to acknowledge contributions from different teams (Kwan, 2019). Given that different forms of motivation are still relevant in a digital context, leaders need to be more cognisant of the performance rewards that are used going forward and how they could promote greater collaboration between teams.

The second role identified from the findings was that of **digital management**. The role includes the responsibility of the leader to understand and leverage technology and digital tools better to enable collaboration. The role comprises the duty to ensure that data is extracted, used appropriately for insight, shared and kept secure. This finding conflicts with literature that suggested that the leader should not focus on the logistics of collaboration (Kwan, 2019). However, what can be inferred from the finding is that while the logistics related to the traditional work context may no longer be key for the leader to manage, the logistics related to the digital context are crucial for leaders to manage such as data and technology (Bernstein et al., 2019). This may have further implications for leaders who need to ensure there is proper governance and policies to manage data and technology.

The role of the leader to perform a **monitoring role** was identified in the study. The role was explained by participants as involving the independent and objective validation of progress made against the objectives set out. This involved accurate reporting, assessing performance of individuals and teams, and consideration of risk and compliance matters. This finding builds on the literature which noted the role of leader to ensure group control (Kwan, 2019).

The **facilitator and enabler** role identified, focussed on the role of the leader to ensure that collaboration is more seamless for all stakeholders. While the literature did include the critical role that leaders play to support, encourage and enable collaboration it was found to be general and high level (Zhou & George, 2003). The findings provided further clarity that facilitating also entails identifying the correct stakeholders to assist with collaboration, to assist with problem solving and ensuring that the benefits associated with successful collaboration are presented to stakeholders. The leaders involvement in the building of mutual relationships and the leaders role to impact joint decision making with stakeholders was highlighted in the

literature (Lindsey, 2016; Uster et al., 2019). However, it was the identification of key stakeholders that was particularly important in the digital context.

Successful collaboration efforts which are underpinned by cross-boundary teams and structures, require flexible authority roles (Wageman et al., 2012). Such roles are likely to differ to traditional leadership roles which are structured and more focussed. The findings in support of the literature confirmed that the role of the leader in a digital context is founded on **flexibility,** agility and dependent on a leader who is forward looking and considerate of impacts of decisions (Zhou & George, 2003). The flexibility required from leaders suggest that collaboration requires leaders who are open to being involved with their teams to problem solve and who are open to serving as both a leader and a follower at times (Gino, 2019).

The findings from the study confirmed the leader's role to direct and motivate, to facilitate and enable and to be adaptable per the literature. Additional roles identified was that of monitor and digital manager which are related to the digital context. The findings did not confirm the role of the leader with regard to facilitating creativity through the use of emotional intelligence (Zhou & George, 2003), however emotional intelligence was noted as a key digital leadership competency and discussed in a later section.

6.2.2 Relevance of the role of leaders in collaboration

Five main roles were identified from qualitative data analysis conducted. The findings clarify that the leader does have an integral role to play as part of collaboration process in banking. This role is not applicable at a point in time but rather throughout the collaboration process. The relevance of these findings is that leaders can recognise which roles are being adequately completed and those that require greater focus and attention. In developing employees to take on leadership roles in the future, current leaders can ensure that future leaders have had sufficient experience in specific roles and are effective collaboration leaders.

A key assumption as proposed by the Competing Values Framework, in Chapter 2, is that the leader needs to be able to move between the roles and blend the responsibilities to balance the roles to perform well (Kula-Semos, 2014). The framework assists to clarify that none of the roles discussed above can exist and be

carried out by the leader in isolation. The roles are connected to each other and require that the leader move between roles to drive collaboration, which was evidenced by participants who shared the experience of the many roles they performed in relation to a single collaborative project.

6.3 Digital Leadership Competencies

The aim of the study was to confirm which of the digital leadership competencies are leveraged to drive collaboration in a digital context and if there were additional competencies utilised by leaders for driving collaboration in banking. It was important to confirm the associated skills of the competencies identified and determine if these competencies were as relevant in the banking sector. Participants alleged that while the impacts of digital transformation in banking were substantial, several competencies that were applicable in the traditional working environment were equally or even more important in the digital context. Each of the key digital leadership competencies are discussed below.

6.3.1 Directing and Motivating

Developing a strong purpose and strategic vision is an essential aspect of providing direction to followers (Gratton & Johns, 2013; Kane et al., 2019). These assertions were confirmed by participants who clarified that the ability of the leader to set the strategic intent including the vision, mission and objectives of collaboration are essential. The need for a clear understandable vision was found to be necessary to drive the purpose and commitment in teams toward the achievement of the vision. While the need for leaders to provide direction and vision is similar to the traditional work environment (Kane et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2008a), the dissemination of the vision and the means of providing direction is a key challenge in the digital context which requires leaders to possess greater digital acumen and is connected to the digital management competency. Based on the findings, there was a greater focus on strategic aspects to develop the vision and the processes that supported the vision and less focus on the operational aspects (Cha et al., 2015; Gratton & Johns, 2013), as discussed below.

Value creation

Value creation was identified as a key component of the strategic vision and collaboration should result in win-win scenarios for stakeholders thereby creating

value (Le Pennec & Emmanuel, 2018). Forms of value creation confirmed by participants were possible cost savings, efficiency gains, more effective use of resources and competitive edge due to new business opportunities and innovation. The findings therefore confirm both tangible and intangible resources were established as elements of value creation in the bank (Le Pennec & Emmanuel, 2018). There was less focus by participants on value creation to obtain new skills and to improve trust and leaders would need to think broader about obtaining all benefits of value creation especially as the banks continue to focus on digital transformation initiatives in an increasingly competitive environment.

The findings are consistent with the research by Cross et al. (2015), which identified the strategic benefits of collaboration and Berman and Korsten (2014), who noted the importance of leaders who derive value from collaborating in their organisations and drive performance. However, value creation was found to be more an outcome of collaboration rather than an enabler, which is contrary to the views suggested by Le Pennec & Emmanuel (2018). The findings therefore clarify and extend literature on value creation which is a key skill for collaboration. This finding may suggest that to drive greater collaboration in the bank, leaders need to share the benefits and expected value from collaboration with a broader network who are likely to be attracted to such benefits and more open to collaborate.

Alignment

Due to the large size of the banks, alignment was highlighted by participants as a key factor for collaboration and it was confirmed that there was a need for internal alignment and lateral alignment especially when collaborating digitally (Knight et al., 2015). The findings affirmed the literature on the importance of the leader to ensure that there is alignment of strategic vision and direction for collaboration (Gratton & Erickson, 2007; Knight et al., 2015).

It was found that it was of greater significance that the leader ensured alignment of the team goals and the strategic vision than it was to ensure clear roles of the individuals. The findings are therefore in conflict with the literature which suggested that individual role clarity is more important than team goal clarity (Gratton & Erickson, 2007; Wakefield & Leidner, 2008), however since an exploratory study was being conducted it could not be evidenced whether this had a negative effect on the

team's ability to integrate information (Wessel et al., 2008). This finding supports the view that leaders need to drive focus externally on the collective team and less on individual members on the team (Gino, 2019). However, with leaders focusing more on the collective, they need to be aware of employees who may not be aligned with the overall objectives of the collaboration and who may need greater assistance or support.

Providing motivation

The ability to motivate employees was a key competency identified in the literature for driving collaboration, and is dependent on the setting of clear objectives and strategic vision (Gratton, 2005). The findings confirmed that motivation is a key competency for leaders, including motivation in the form of recognition, reward and achievement to motivate teams. Leaders also provided more opportunities to staff for growth, responsibility and autonomy. The finding also confirms the expectation that motivation is a key lever in the digital context as it is in the traditional workplace, as noted by Gratton (2005). Leaders need to be aware of how performance measures are strcutured and ensure that they drive the behaviors of teams that are conducive to collaboration, and are not counter-productive.

Problem solving ability

The ability to solve problems was explained and supported by participants as the ability to identify where obstacles to collaboration may exist and further assist to remove or minimise them. Problem solving also included the identification of the correct stakeholders who could assist with resolution of problems encountered. The leader's ability to solve problems was linked to having in-depth business understanding. This finding confirmed the need for leaders to be skilled in problem solving and dispute resolution (Behrendt et al., 2017; Kane et al., 2019; Kiron, 2017).

In exploring the competencies that were at play during COVID-19, participants explained the extent to which decisions made to problem solve had to be well coordinated in the bank. Functions could not work in isolation and it was imperative that leaders were able to see beyond their own areas of influence and understand the impacts for the bank as a whole, ensuring that they see the bigger picture.

Given the competency of the leader to provide direction, strategic vision, provide

alignment and motivation to the teams for effective collaboration, it can be inferred that collaboration is an intentional action taken by the leader. The digital context requires greater consideration of how teams will be motivated, and strategy executed and there is a high level of oversight required by the leader. The competency to motivate employees and assist with problem solving while collaborating is related to the ability of the leader to act as an enabler for effective collaboration. From the above, the findings build on the literature and clarify the competency required of the leader to direct and motivate and provides insight that the competency is equally important in a traditional and digital context and remains a foundation of leadership.

6.3.2 Digital Management

Digital literacy

Digital literacy refers to the leaders general understanding of technology which was an essential competency for leading digitally (Kane et al., 2019). The findings of the research confirm that digital literacy is a critical competency for leaders, however, the findings extended the literature by noting the importance of embracing various platforms and understanding the language regarding technology. There was an acknowledgement by leaders that digital acumen was no longer a language left for the Information Technology (IT) functions of the bank.

Leveraging technology

It was found that leaders require the ability to leverage the most appropriate technology for the purpose of refining efficiency, improving productivity and drive better engagement with teams. This is in line with the perspective of technology as socio-material, which suggests the importance of leaders to ensure that technology is utilised in a manner that allows it to best meet different business needs (Larson & Dechurch, 2019). The findings conveyed that there was an amount of focus and dedication to mastery of digital tools which leaders needed to undertake to drive collaboration. This competency was not only centred on leaders acquiring the skills but also leading the way on adoption of tools and helping others in the organisation do the same. This is aligned with the perspective of Bennis (2013), that argues that leaders who are incapable of utilising the digital world and the associated digital tools, cannot fully utilise its power. This finding however, conflicts with the view that a general understanding of technology is sufficient for leaders to collaborate effectively (Kane et al., 2019), as there is a level of acquired skill, focus and mastery required

by leaders. This finding has important implications for leaders who can no longer delegate technology related decisions to other functions and should be sufficiently skilled to make them these decisions.

Data Management

The importance of data and how it is used from a leader's perspective were prevalent across the interviews conducted. Participants were adamant that the digital context required specific competencies of leaders regarding data. Leaders need to have the ability to ensure appropriate use of data and ensure appropriate management of data (Larson & Dechurch, 2019). The findings extend the literature by providing further clarity on the skills required. As explained by participants, the lack of physical mechanisms that would be used to convey a message in a traditional work context, are no longer available therefore the ability of a leader to use data to validate messages and communication to teams was frequently relied upon. There was a higher reliance on better high-quality data, and the need for more readily available data sources which the leader needed to drive. This enabled better communication and collaboration in a digital context. It allowed for engagements to be more structured when working together.

In the context of COVID-19, many participants highlighted the importance that data played during this period. There was a need for leaders to obtain greater insights from the data, they needed to understand the data more deeply, they were required to ensure that data was used effectively and there that there were security measures put in place regarding data. Data was available but the need to identify the key elements and use them appropriately to steer and provide direction to the team was imperative.

The findings reflect that the competency of the leader with regards to technology, extends beyond the general understanding of technology and confirms the view by Bennis (2013) that leaders need to understand the power of digitisation and keep close to technology. There were conflicting views identified in the literature regarding the level of digital expertise required by the leader which has been clarified by the findings of this study. Leaders are expected to be competent with the tools, embrace the various forms of technology, be able to articulate and use the language related to technology and be able to leverage technology to better fulfil collaboration. This is underpinned by the leader who needs to be sufficiently skilled to use data

appropriately. Overall, a greater level of digital related skill is required of the leader, and a more digitally attuned leader is required to drive collaboration, this competency is therefore summarised as digital management and extends the body of knowledge. This finding provides clarity on the level of digital expertise required by the leader, identified in Chapter 2. This competency is also related to the competency of the leader to be adaptable.

6.3.3 Monitoring

Due to the unique challenges that digital working places on teams and leaders in collaborating, there is a greater dependency on improved monitoring to ensure progress and productivity (Wessel et al., 2008). The findings echo the literature as many participants revealed the need for increased monitoring of progress when working digitally compared to traditional office working.

Additionally, the participants clarified that the ability to assess progress of the objectives set out was more challenging as the leader needed to ensure that there was sufficient contribution by the stakeholders and needed to assess the ability to meet compliance and risk considerations of the bank. Compliance and risk form an important characteristic of the banking sector, and it was important that leaders ensured there was adequate focus on compliance and risk even when collaborating. This confirms extant literature which mentions the need for the leader to manage risk and integrity of the collaboration given the uncertain business environment, including detection, assessment and mitigation of risks (Knight et al., 2015; Reeves et al., 2017).

Participants consistently agreed that while monitoring was imperative, it was more difficult to assess progress while working digitally. This confirmed literature that alluded to the importance of supervision which contributed to the overall decision making and momentum of the collaboration (Knight et al., 2015). The findings shed light on the challenges related to performance management processes and methods of physical monitoring. Interestingly, frontline participants were more impacted by the use of outdated methods of performance management and expressed the need for other mechanisms to assess performance going forward. It was found that leaders in general may not feel adequately prepared for the digital context as the tools to conduct business may not support the new ways of collaborating.

The ability to set and manage deadlines and ensure constant feedback with teams allowed the leaders the ability to assess and monitor progress and performance. The findings confirm the literature which includes the ability of the leader to ensure teams have the opportunity for greater feedback which ensures that there is a better understanding of work completed on the team and further promotes collaboration, open discussion and team work (Gino, 2019; Wessel et al., 2008). Monitoring and supervision is mentioned in the literature as more of a skill (Knight et al., 2015; Reeves et al., 2017), however based on the findings, the importance of monitoring in a digital context and the expertise that leaders need to execute monitoring, supports the notion that it is more of a competency which has several skills related to it.

The monitoring competency is linked to the directing competency which required clearer and defined strategic intent when collaborating. Leaders rely to a greater extent on feedback they receive from their teams to monitor, manage risks and manage deadlines. Leaders therefore need to be more attentive to work taking place on the team and it can be inferred that leaders need to be more intentional about being closer to the work taking place in collaborating, no longer are they able to lead from a distance. The risk leaders face is that while increased monitoring is required, this may be perceived as a lack of trust in the ability of the teams and individuals involved in the collaboration. Therefore, the leader needs to balance monitoring activities in collaborating.

6.3.4 Facilitating and enabling

Decisive and focussed leadership

Leaders require the ability to act decisively and offer focussed attuned leadership to employees by removing confusion that may exist and providing a clear way forward (Gino, 2019; Kane et al., 2019). The ability to make quick decisions and the ability to provide strong focussed leadership was confirmed by participants, who further contextualised that the faster decision-making process was enabled by the higher engagement that leaders had with followers when working digitally. The ability to be decisive was also linked to the ability to provide direction.

Single voice and clear direction

Participants emphasised the need for the leader to communicate a clear and single direction, which was paramount during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ability of teams and leaders to speak the same language was noted and one participant described this as a 'meeting of the minds' which took place, which further aided team cohesion.

Empower staff

The finding confirmed that the empowering of staff was an important skill for leaders who needed to share power with the team to enable better collaboration (Behrendt et al., 2017; Cha et al., 2015; Gratton & Johns, 2013; Kane et al., 2019). Empowered staff assisted with collaboration as not all decision making had to go through the leader. However, empowering staff requires balancing by the leader as to the extent to which they should then be involved and it was noted by participants that by 'staying out of the way' leaders allow for a better result at times, this is consistent with the view suggested by Lindsey (2016).

According to Gino (2019), the leader shifts between leader and follower behaviours which allows for greater growth and development in the team. However, from the findings there was greater evidence to suggest that leaders empower others to drive collective accountability and therefore power is shared so that teams can be involved in the decision-making process and are more committed to the collaboration which they own. The finding therefore is in conflict with the literature. The finding clarifies that growth and development of teams may therefore be an indirect consequence of leaders empowering staff.

Allocation of resources

Collaboration requires leaders who are capable of adequately allocating resources for effective collaboration (Kane et al., 2019; Knight et al., 2015). Participants considered the adequacy of resources a vital component of collaboration as this meant ensuring resources are managed for one's direct team, but also indirect teams' collaboration is taking place with. A digital context required the adequacy of resources to be considered beyond the human capital and included access to data and systems. Given the need for greater cross-collaboration, a unique view presented was that resources should be seen as a resource of the bank, and not the resource of a particular team or business unit within the bank. This will allow for a

more collective view of resources which would lead to better management and prioritisation of resources, which could be enabled by leaders. This view is consistent with research conducted in the field (Le Pennec & Emmanuel, 2018; Wageman et al., 2012), which stated that collaboration involved the sharing of pertinent information, resources and capabilities to accomplish a mutual purpose across boundaries.

Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the ability of the leader to be sensitive to the needs of followers and manage emotions (Antonakis et al., 2009). While the importance of emotional intelligence was confirmed in the findings, further context and insight was obtained as to application in the digital context. Many participants described the need for a higher degree of emotional intelligence that was required of them given the digital context that was unique and brought unique challenges.

The importance of greater emotional intelligence was pronounced under the following competencies; the ability to drive engagement and participation, establishing the guidelines for engagement in a digital context, the need for greater empathy and the ability to work with non-verbal communication. Each of these competencies are discussed below.

The ability to drive engagement and participation

A majority of participants confirmed that deliberate action was required by leaders to drive engagement and participation of the employees on digital platforms, to improve collaboration. Greater participation meant that there were more diverse views included in problem solving process and various solutions were considered. Increased engagement allowed the leader to balance work with social aspects on the team which aided better collaboration as the team had frequent engagement with each other and were able to establish interpersonal relationships. This finding aligns with the perspective of the leader to build legitimacy which necessitates the ability to encourage engagement and participation (Faraj et al., 2015).

Establishing the guidelines for engagement

Many participants conveyed the need for leaders to assist and encourage the establishing of new guidelines for working and collaborating digitally due to the

rapidly changing digital context and working conditions. While the finding confirmed that new guiding principles are required for working digitally (Dhawan & Chamorro, 2018), the findings further clarified how leaders could influence better work environments beyond the logistical factors such as time. Various challenges were highlighted by participants and related to working and managing meetings outside of work hours, the need to respect employees boundaries while work is conducted from their homes, and also to ensure that even though meetings are digital, that full attention and focus is solicited from all those involved. Ultimately, these guidelines once adopted and practiced by leaders would encourage healthier and more successful collaboration. The findings suggest that while the proximity factors of the traditional work context may not be relevant in the digital context, new guidelines and proximity factors would need to be developed going forward, related to the digital context (Gratton, 2005).

In the context of COVID-19, the most important competencies highlighted by participants was the ability to provide a clear single voice of direction to teams, the need for leaders to practice greater empathy and the ability to interpret non-verbal communication in a digital context.

Need for empathy

In the context of COVID-19, many participants felt strongly that empathy was one of the most important capabilities that was required of leaders. Empathy was one of the psychological factors of collaboration as presented by Gino (2019), which was required for more sustainable collaboration. Participants explained that empathy included the leader's ability to understand what different employees may be experiencing and accommodate the different challenges as best they could, which demonstrated more sincere and empathetic leadership which confirmed the literature. Due to the lack of physical contact, leaders relied extensively on more frequent contact sessions digitally to understand the extent of individuals being impacted. The findings confirmed the literature stating that the focus shifts from concentrating only on the spoken to include the unspoken elements of communication (Gino, 2019). This would suggest that the ability of the leader to empathise when working digitally is related to the ability of the leader to interpret non-verbal communication of employees (Gino, 2019). This may be an indication of the move to more connected leadership, where leaders are closer, more supportive and

more relational with followers.

Non-verbal communication

Even though more frequent contact sessions were utilised, participants unanimously agreed that a key skill required was the ability to be aware and trained on non-verbal communication. This finding confirmed the literature which identified non-verbal communication as a challenge when working in a digital context (Larson & Dechurch, 2019). A view that was shared by the participants was that leadership was a five-sense task and collaborating digitally meant that one of these five senses was removed leading to much uneasiness for leaders.

Digital communication is open is misinterpretation (Dhawan & Chamorro, 2018). Participants provided context of chat functions and the ease with which they can be misinterpreted which can create obstacles for leaders when attempting to obtain buy-in or influence the teams when collaborating. Leaders need to therefore be skilled in using such digital functions or should refrain from using them to prevent miscommunication.

Based on the findings above, the competency of the leader to facilitate and enable, relies on a greater extent on the psychological factors required for sustainable and effective collaboration (Gino, 2019), such as empathy, feedback and decisive decision making. There is greater need for emotional intelligence, driving engagement and empowering staff. There is however less reliance on leader's ability to influence the operational and physical factors of collaboration. The digital context therefore requires leaders who are more skilled in influencing the psychology of followers and who are more emotionally connected and aware of followers, as the physical factors of collaboration may no longer be relevant in a digital context. The facilitating and enabling competency is highly supportive of a relational oriented leadership style (Faraj et al., 2015) and the findings provide clarity on the inconsistencies identified on leadership styles in Chapter 2.

6.3.5 Adaptability and Forward Looking

Participants considered adaptability and being forward looking as critical for collaboration, with a majority of participants referring to the ability to be open minded, being able to deal with the fast pace with which change occurs, being willing to

experiment and anticipate what lay ahead. This finding confirmed literature which highlighted the need for leaders to remain adaptable and future focussed (Bennis, 2013; Kane et al., 2019; Kiron, 2017).

Unexpectedly, participants mentioned the severe negative consequences that result when leaders are unable to adapt citing that 'they would be left behind', or 'adapt or die'. The importance of agility, flexibility and adaptability was also conveyed by leaders explaining that these skills impacted all aspects of the business, including the operations, execution and the leaders view of the world.

Open mindedness

Open mindedness in the context of collaboration was contextualised as the ability to suspend judgement and think outside the normal way of working and in doing so, to consider how other areas within the bank may be able to better service business needs. Being innovative and open minded did mean taking risk and working in a considerable amount of uncertainty. This confirms the literature, that in being adaptable leaders have to be open to making mistakes and overcoming failures (Bennis, 2013). However, conflicting findings emerged in this regard. While the need and importance for adaptability was highlighted, the challenge raised by participants was that the banks, from their own experience, can be risk averse and may not be as open to trying new methods, which could impact the ability to be adaptable. This is consistent with the literature which noted that with greater openness, there is also vulnerability brought into the organisation (Berman & Korsten, 2014).

In confirming the importance of being forward looking, participants noted that this competency allows the leader to be a few steps ahead of the followers, which assists the leader in directing and leading. Being forward looking also related to the inclusion of the most appropriate stakeholders who would be able to provide diverse views and context when problem solving. Leaders need to be willing to also discover new stakeholders that they have not collaborated with previously to extend boundaries of collaboration within the bank. Interestingly, in seeking out further collaborators, the skills of being open minded would continue to be further developed by the leader, which further propels collaboration.

Working within uncertainty

In addition to the competencies above, participants noted the ability to work in uncertainty, to keep up to date with trends and stay flexible as additional competencies. It was also important to anticipate what may lay ahead. Participants highlighted the importance of being able to work in uncertain conditions while still providing direction to teams. The competency was described by one participant as 'being comfortable with being uncomfortable'.

Consistent with existing research (Berman & Korsten, 2014; Kane et al., 2019), the methods that were identified by participants to assist in being adaptable was to keep up with trends, as the rate at which change occurs is high. Leaders also require constant learning, reading and questioning of what may be occurring digitally and in the business environment.

Notwithstanding the increased risk brought about by openness and change, the findings confirm that leaders in the banking sector continue to rely extensively on being adaptable and forward looking to collaborate, and therefore addresses the gap that was identified in the literature. Adaptability and forward looking is a key competency to drive collaboration.

6.3.6 Relevance of digital leadership competencies

COVID-19 required the banking sector to pivot to virtual working and the need for virtual collaboration was enhanced during this period, as leaders urgently sought to ensure safety of staff and clients and ensure impacts of COVID-19 on the business were minimised. The findings confirm that through digital working and in the context of COVID-19, five main digital leadership competencies were relied on by leaders to drive collaboration. However, not all of them were utilised to the same extent. More reliance was placed on competencies related to Facilitating and Enabling and Adaptability and Forward Looking which are more relational-oriented. Less reliance was placed on control-oriented competencies such as Directing and Motivating, Digital Management and Monitoring.

The findings suggest that for leaders to be successful in driving collaboration, they require both task oriented and relationship oriented leadership competencies as suggested by various researchers (Gratton & Erickson, 2007; Wakefield & Leidner,

2008). There is less reliance on leader's ability to influence the operational and physical factors of collaboration. The digital context therefore necessitates leaders who are more skilled in influencing the psychology of followers and who are more emotionally connected and aware of followers.

6.4 Hindrances to collaboration

This study sought to understand which competencies were perceived by leaders to hinder collaboration in the digital context. As noted by Dhawan & Chamorro (2018), leaders who are able to harness the strengths of virtual teams have the potential to outperform traditional teams. A key challenge noted from the literature was the ability for leaders to lead across horizontal boundaries which was cited as a hindrance to collaboration (Gratton, 2005).

From the research conducted, the three main attributes that hinder collaboration were found to be leaders who are egocentric, leaders who have the need to retain power and who are internally focused. This finding supported the view proposed by Kiron (2017). Leadership attributes identified above were found to be opposite to the psychological factors that leaders relied on to drive collaboration (Gino, 2019). It was also found that a lack of skills, such as, the inability of a leader to drive the strategic vision due to a lack of digital competencies, leaders who are inflexible to changing aspects of performance management, who have a fixed mindset and lack of listening skills also results in ineffective collaboration. This further supported the literature that leaders are required to be adaptable and need to influence change and agility in order to drive collaboration (Kiron, 2017). Interestingly, participants thought that the hindrances identified would be as detrimental to collaboration in a digital context, as they are in a traditional work context.

Leaders that were described as having fixed mindsets and who rely heavily on past methods of conducting business found it more difficult to drive collaboration. Majority of respondents believed that the current performance management methodology was outdated for the banks to perform well in a digital context. Where physical monitoring and progress of productivity was used, a more results-based approach was needed for the future. This would require a higher accountability with staff and more trust required between leaders and staff. Based on the above, it could be argued that performance systems remain inflexible to encourage staff to drive

collaboration, thereby confirming literature by Cross et al. (2015). Current scorecard measures were regarded as inappropriate to account for the current situational challenges. Participants thought that the scorecard created a short-term approach to performance measurement.

Interestingly, there were contrasting views between the interviews conducted with frontline leaders and the support and central leaders. The respondents in frontline functions were more prepared to work and collaborate digitally. They expressed that they experienced minimal changes taking place when they were forced to work remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, they held a greater sense of preparedness and experienced less hindrances to collaborating and working in a digital context, compared to support and central leaders.

6.4.1 Relevance of results of hindrances

The findings are valuable to leaders who are driving collaboration as they would be able to ensure that they are aware of and refrain from such behaviours or competencies that could hinder collaborative efforts. The banking sector requires leaders who can overcome challenges posed to collaboration to provide competitive advantage.

The leadership traits that hinder collaboration were found to be contrary of competencies which are required by leaders to drive collaboration. These findings highlight and confirm the complexity that leaders face in driving collaboration as competencies which leaders perform well in can also provide negative impacts to collaboration. Many competencies are also inter-related and therefore need to be prudently balanced by the leader in executing collaboration.

6.5 Antecedents to collaboration

The following items were identified as antecedents to collaboration and are aspects over which leaders have influence over, even though they are not digital leadership competencies themselves. Such items were the ability to build trust, the need for networks and relationships and the impact of culture on collaboration.

Trust

Given the challenges leaders face when leading and collaborating digitally,

considerable effort needs to be given to building trust which assists to overcome such challenges (Larson & Dechurch, 2019). A majority of the participants confirmed that greater trust was required in a digital context, including trust that the leader has in employees, trust in indirect reports in other teams and the trust that staff have in the leader to direct and lead. From the descriptions and detail provided by the participants it was found that the various levels of trust were equally important and are required for successful collaboration.

Participants noted the importance of the relationship between communication and trust (Larson & Dechurch, 2019). The importance of frequency and quality of communication was noted and confirmed the literature which stated that communication is key in building relationships and developing trust (Charlier et al., 2016). It was evident that participants relied on action communication and relationship focussed communication as a key driver when working digitally.

However, the higher monitoring which was needed in a digital context may be perceived as a lack of trust in the ability of the team to achieve work required. Therefore the increased opportunity for feedback and monitoring through communication does not always result in improved trust, which conflicts with views by Wessel et al. (2008). A balance needs to be achieved by the leader when building trust, so that the leader does not hinder collaboration. According to Wakefield & Leidner (2008), communication mediated by technology makes it more difficult for the leader to provide effective conflict resolution however this was not evident from the findings and could not be confirmed.

Networks and relationships

Networks and relationships are not just imperative for collaboration but they are known to form the basis of effective collaboration in a traditional work context (Gratton, 2005). The findings were found to confirm the literature but also clarified that networks and relationships are even more important in a digital work context. Participants elucidated the importance of the quality of relationships that was relied on more in a digital context. This provides further clarity as structural dimensions were found to impact traditional working greater that relational dimensions (Lazzarotti et al., 2015).

The findings provided further clarity and understanding that the impact of having pre-existing networks and relationships before working in the digital context was essential. Participants agreed that where these networks did not already exist in the bank it was much more challenging to collaborate 'as you did know which door to knock on' given the large size of the banks. This finding supports the literature that pre-existing networks and relationships allow for easier and more successful collaboration (Gratton & Erickson, 2007).

Participants provided their experiences with employees that were hired into existing teams or teams that were put together during the pandemic, they expressed the difficulty that these teams have in creating team cohesion and successfully functioning together. The findings confirmed that leaders with better networks and relationships have an opportunity to collaborate better in a digital context. It is suggested that leaders spend sufficient time ensuring that engagement and participation is high to mitigate such challenges with a new team.

Digital culture

Culture was mentioned by many participants as a key influencing factor of collaboration. This confirms the literature which considers culture a lever of collaboration, which requires several long and short term initiatives to be driven by the leader (Gratton & Erickson, 2007). Surprisingly while participants noted that culture in a digital context played an even bigger role, they found it to also be one of the more difficult aspects to influence digitally and conveyed the level of uncertainty this posed and that there were still many unknowns in this instance to be answered. The participants suggested that the traditional culture of the bank required to be tailored for the new way of working and very few made mention of an established digital culture. The literature proposed that specific focus was needed on the digital culture to drive collaboration (Buckley et al., 2016). This may suggest that banks in South Africa are not as digitally mature (Buckley et al., 2016).

From the above, trust, pre-existing networks and relationships and culture form the basis for collaboration in a digital context and require further focus in the banking sector. Overall, both task and relational aspects were confirmed as important to driving collaboration.

6.6 Framework of digital leadership competencies for collaboration

The findings in Chapter 6 confirmed the digital leadership competencies that were found in the literature, namely the Directing and Motivating, the Facilitating and Enabling and the Adaptability and Forward-Looking competencies. In addition, the study added to the body of knowledge by adding and highlighting the importance of the Digital Management and the Monitoring competencies which are also relied on by leaders in banking to drive collaboration. A key finding from the study was that while all five competencies are relied on by leaders, they are not all utilised to the same extent. The competencies that are relational-oriented and more flexible are relied on more by leaders, and the task-oriented and control competencies are relied on to a lesser degree.

A key finding from the study conducted, provided insight into how the various digital leadership competencies are all related to each other. None of the competencies exist in isolation and each are supportive of the other competencies. The leader is required to balance and blend the roles and competencies depending on the business context.

The *Framework of Digital Leadership Competencies for Collaboration* has been developed based on the findings above and assists to consolidate and assimilate the theoretical findings from the research conducted of the main roles, the digital leadership competencies and associated skills that drive collaboration in banking.

The competencies are associated with the roles of the leader and are presented in order of flexibility, from least flexible in the centre, moving outward to the most flexible on the exterior of the Venn diagram. The framework has been founded on the CVF framework presented in Chapter 2.
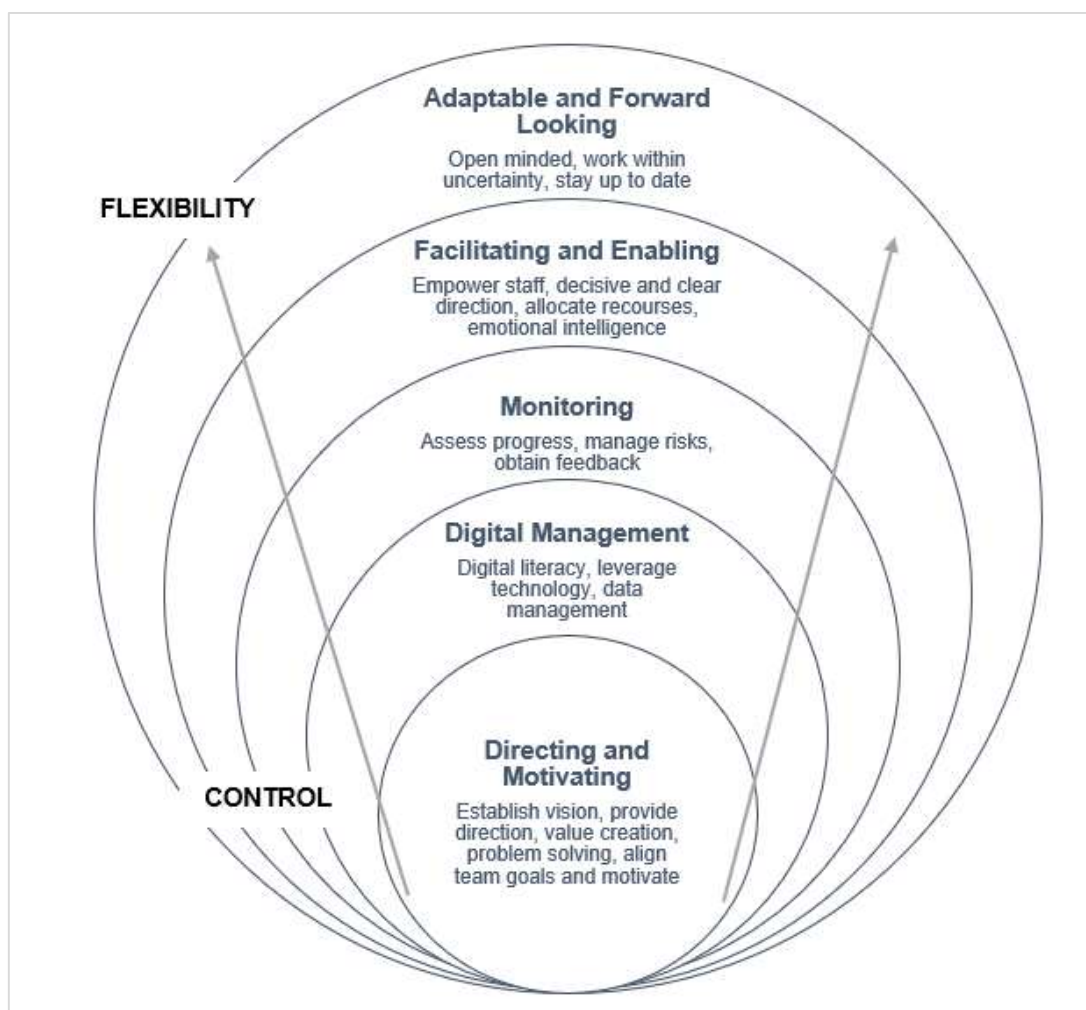
Figure 3: Framework of Digital Leadership Competencies for Collaboration (Source: Authors own creation)

6.7 Conclusion of results

Chapter 6 included a detail discussion of findings which were the outcome of data collected by semi-structured interviews completed with leaders in the banking sector. The general assumption held by participants was that digital leadership competencies are developed, and leaders need to decisively prepare themselves for the future world of work, the challenges and the associated benefits. Preparation is key and therefore leaders need to embrace continuous learning and development.

Five key digital leadership competencies were confirmed from the findings and its relevance in the context of COVID-19 was confirmed. The behaviours and traits that were not conducive to collaboration were also clarified. It was evident that competencies to drive collaboration in a digital context are complex and the need for balance exists as they too are in conflict with each other. The importance of the

antecedents for collaboration in a digital context were identified as trust, networks and relationships and culture.

There was a greater need for competencies related to flexibility compared to competencies related to control to drive collaboration. This was highlighted in the context of COVID-19. Overall, there was a need for leaders to adjust and blend the different roles and competencies required to drive collaboration and many of these competencies and roles can be in conflict with each other. The competencies therefore do not exist in isolation but are linked to each other. There is a constant need for balancing and shifting of competencies and roles to successfully execute collaboration. The factors of collaboration most relied on were the psychological factors, and to a lesser extent the operational or physical factors of collaboration.

Overall, a greater amount of skill is required by leaders given the change to digital working. There is a shift in the relationship that is taking place between leaders and followers (Gratton, 2016). The following chapter presents the implications of the findings for management, the conclusion of the research and areas of further research are discussed in Chapter 7.

7. CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The unprecedented level of change and increase in digital transformation has posed significant challenges to banks and its leaders alike. There are new implications for management resulting from greater digital connectedness, a higher level of openness and need for competitive advantage. Collaboration provides the means for banks to overcome many of these challenges (Kwan, 2019), however, to do so requires leaders with the requisite skills to drive collaboration. There has been minimal research on the impact of leaders on collaboration and the mechanisms leaders rely on to drive collaboration (Cha et al., 2015). The purpose of this study was to explore digital leadership competencies that are used by leaders to drive collaboration in banking and to gain insights into the role of leaders in driving collaboration. The research also sought to add context to the diverse and challenging banking sector in South Africa.

Extant literature reviewed recognised the need for leaders to balance several competencies and roles and highlighted the complexity of the leader's role in the context of collaboration. While the leader must provide the strategic direction, purpose, inform proximity management and develop inter-dependent structures to facilitate collaboration, there was also a need to ensure adaptability, and social intricacies such as culture, trust and motivation (Bernstein et al., 2019; Kane et al., 2019; Kwan, 2019; Zhou & George, 2003). It was crucial that the digital leadership competencies were clarified as they were found to be paradoxical, as when they are soundly managed they could improve collaboration however if poorly managed, they had the capacity to be a hindrance to collaboration (Gratton, 2005; Kiron, 2017). The theoretical foundation for this study was the Competing Values Framework.

Chapter 7 concludes on the research conducted by offering a consolidation of the main findings of the research conducted and comprises implications for management in the banking sector. The limitations of the research have been documented and areas for future research included. The aim of the following chapter is to provide a summation of findings and theoretical impacts.

7.2 Principal findings

The exploratory research was conducted through use of semi-structured in-depth

interviews with seventeen leaders in the banking sector. Thematic analysis was conducted to provide rich insights on digital leadership competencies and collaboration, and the following findings emerged from the data collected and analysed.

There were five main digital leadership competencies identified which were indicative of the roles required of the leader to drive collaboration. The research provided further clarity by confirming the skills associated with each of the competencies for leaders to drive more effective collaboration. The roles and competencies confirmed from the literature was that of Director and Motivator, Facilitator and Enabler, Adaptable and Forward Looking, and the additional roles and competencies identified in this study was the Digital Manager and Monitor role. There was a substantial focus placed on the ability of leaders to manage data and digital tools effectively. It was concluded that the role of the leader in driving collaboration is based on the concept of a flexible authority role (Wageman et al., 2012). It was found that there was greater reliance placed on the Facilitating and Enabling and Adaptability and Forward-Looking competencies to drive collaboration. Therefore, while all competencies are needed, they are not relied on to the same extent.

Further insight was gained in understanding which competencies and leadership characteristics hindered collaboration. It was found that the need to retain power, being inwardly focussed, the lack of digital skills, leaders that are inflexible and those that have a fixed mindset act as boundaries to collaboration.

In the context of COVID-19, it was found that leaders relied on competencies that resulted in greater flexibility and adaptability and being forward looking, and they relied less on competencies that drove control. The psychological factors of collaboration were more important than the physical and operational levers of collaboration. It was therefore concluded that there was a greater need for relational-oriented leadership behaviours in a digital context. The digital context requires leaders who are more emotionally connected to followers and can better influence their psychology.

Leaders need to constantly balance and blend the roles and the competencies based on different business requirements and none of the competencies or roles can exist in isolation. All competencies are dependent on each other for the leader to be

effective in driving collaboration and at times may even conflict with each other.

The research conducted culminated in the *Framework of digital leadership competencies for collaboration*, presented in Section 6.6. The framework captures the various competencies and associated skills required by leadership to drive collaboration and provides a tool for leaders in banking to assess their progress and address areas that require greater focus and development.

The study contributed to the body of knowledge by providing a deeper understanding of how banks can prepare leaders for the digital age by ensuring that they possess the correct digital leadership competencies. Open cultures and collaboration can be driven with less concern on the risk it poses to the future of business as leaders are more equipped to deal with conflicting priorities and can better overcome challenges of increased digitisation.

7.3 Implications for management

The challenges posed by virtual working and digitisation requires leaders who are able to thrive under these conditions. The study has the following implications for management.

Management need to be highly aware of ineffective behaviours and leadership traits identified in this study, as they not only slow down collaboration but also may be setting a precedent given that remote working is relatively new. Norms and methods established during this period is therefore likely to have lasting business impacts.

It is imperative that leaders understand the important role that they play in the collaboration process. The role is far extending and does not only apply to one point in time of the collaboration but is pervasive and ongoing, requiring commitment from leaders.

Competencies and skills that leaders have learnt and acquired in the traditional working context can be transferred and will be useful in the digital working environment. It is however important that leaders differentiate between which competencies are equally important and transferrable to the digital context, and which competencies are not.

Based on the digital leadership competencies that are required, both performance

management and hiring practices should be updated to include the competencies. Since work is progressively becoming more collective focussed and technology intensive, the need for leaders to consider the need for team based performance incentives becomes more contextually relevant (Charlier et al., 2016).

Training programs available to leaders should be updated to include all required competencies and provide leaders the ability to monitor and drive their own progress in competency development as different leaders are likely to have different competencies. The digital leadership competencies will allow banks to focus on areas of development that may be of importance to them also. This increased awareness of the competencies and training can assist leaders better fulfil their roles.

Business policies need to be updated to reflect the nature of shared and collective resources. This will encourage teams to work together more as this provides safety of their resources, it will further remove obstacles to collaboration and allow leaders to consistently focus strategic decisions on the bank as a whole rather than the looking at benefits to departments in isolation.

7.4 Limitations of the study

Limitations of the research conducted included the below:

- The research was conducted specifically on the big four banks, therefore the applicability and transferability of the findings to smaller banks, the banking sector and other industries may be limited.
- Qualitative research allows for more flexible methodology (Herrero et al., 2020), and the method of sample selection was subjective and may have therefore excluded the views of other leaders who were more adept to answer interview questions.
- The sample size was small, and this may impact the transferability of findings.
- The researcher was employed by a bank and this could have introduced bias into the process of data analysis and findings.
- Data collection took place was planned at a point in time and may not capture the views of the leaders in general.

7.5 Suggestions for future studies

The need for leaders to be able to keep up with changing business and digitisation is critical as more companies move to working digitally. The area of digital leadership

is fairly new and further research is required as leaders continue to deal with new challenges and demands. The following are further areas of research that were identified to further add to the body of knowledge.

Research completed on leadership profiles and personality traits have been more extensive in the field of leadership studies. Further qualitative research is suggested to explore whether the digital leadership competencies are linked to particular leadership personalities. This could further extend the literature in the field of leadership.

The research found that there was a difference in preparedness and competencies when collaborating and working digitally, between leaders in different functions. Leaders who were in sales and client facing functions were found to be more digitally prepared than support and central leaders. It would be useful to quantify extent and the level of preparedness for digital working between different business functions.

It was evident from the research conducted that different areas in the bank were at different levels of digital maturity. It would be useful to understand if there is a relationship between digital maturity and the level of collaboration that takes place in a business unit or function. By determining if digital maturity is a factor driving collaboration, leaders would be able to further influence and drive effective collaboration.

7.6 Conclusion

While uncertainty exists over the role leaders will play as technology continues to change banking, what is more clear is that more skilled leaders will be required (Gratton, 2016). While digital working has significant benefits to organisations, these benefits will not be realised without effective leaders who possess digital leadership competencies to successfully drive collaboration. The challenges and difficulties of technology and remote working could outweigh the benefits if leaders are inadequately prepared (Wessel et al., 2008).

This research focussed on understanding how collaboration is enabled in the digital workplace and which digital leadership competencies are relied on most to achieve effective collaboration. The future of better collaboration is founded in better technology, while the future of successful companies and better technology is

centered on better collaboration (Schrage, 2015). The importance of digital leadership competencies that build flexibility, adaptability and forward-looking ability is crucial. Emphasis must be placed on equipping leaders with the skills and requisite competencies for the future.

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APPENDIX A – ETHICAL CLEARANCE

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance
Approved**

Dear Andrea Pillay,

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.
We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Ethical Clearance Form

Kind Regards

APPENDIX B – CONSENT LETTER

Title: Understanding digital leadership competencies to enhance collaboration in South African Banks

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My name is Andrea Pillay, and I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research to better understand and identify digital leadership competencies that are required to enhance and influence collaboration within the Banking Sector. Digitisation is changing the nature of work and transforming the nature of teamwork, it is therefore creating new implications for leadership. The future world of work is characterised by the move of individuals working in isolation to now working collaboratively in a more digitally connected world. Organisations require leaders who can overcome challenges presented by digital transformation and drive collaboration to develop core competencies and competitive advantage for implementation of strategic objectives. This research seeks to understand the mechanisms that leaders may use to enable collaboration within the organisation in a digital context.

Our interview is expected to last about an hour and will assist in understanding and gathering insights into digital leadership competencies and collaboration. Your permission is requested for recording of the interview to ensure accurate capture of data gathered.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be kept confidential and will be reported without identifiers. Kindly confirm your willingness to participate in this research by signing the consent below. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or myself. Our details are provided below.

	Researcher	Research Supervisor
Name:	Andrea Pillay	Navlika Ratangee
Email:		

APPENDIX C – CONSISTENCY MATRIX

Research Questions	Sections in literature review	Data collection tools	Analysis Technique
Research question 1 What is the role of the business leader in driving collaboration in the context of a digital workplace in the bank?	Bernstein et al. (2019), Kwan (2019), Zhou & George (2003)	Semi-structured interviews. Question: 1, 2, 3, 4	Thematic analysis of data gathered through open ended, semi structured questions
Research Question 2 Which of the digital leadership competencies are perceived by business leaders to drive collaboration internal to the organisation?	Kane et al. (2019), Gratton & Johns (2013), Le Pennec & Emmanuel (2018), Larson & Dechurch (2019), Dhawan & Chamorro (2018)	Semi-structured interviews. Question: 5, 6, 7, 8	Thematic analysis of data gathered through open ended, semi structured questions
Research Question 3 In a digital workplace, what perceived behaviours and competencies are regarded as ineffective in driving collaboration?	Kiron (2017), Gratton (2005)	Semi-structured interviews. Question: 9, 10	Thematic analysis of data gathered through open ended, semi structured questions
Research Question 4 Given the business leaders experience with collaboration, which of the digital leadership competencies were at play in the context of COVID-19?	Kane et al., 2019 Gratton & Johns (2013), Le Pennec & Emmanuel (2018), Larson & Dechurch (2019), Dhawan & Chamorro (2018)	Semi-structured interviews. Question: 11, 12	Thematic analysis of data gathered through open ended, semi structured questions

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APPENDIX D – DRAFT DISCUSSION GUIDE: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Preliminary Interview Questions

1. Have you been involved in cross functional projects?

2. Are you in a position of boundary spanning control, where your input is provided into greater than one team?

Key Interview Questions

Research Question 1

What is the role of the business leader in driving collaboration in the context of a digital workplace in the bank?

1	Can you tell me about a project your team may be busy with or has completed that required collaborative effort?
2	How would you describe the role or function you played in this project?
3	Do you think your role or function as explained in question 2 would change in a digital context? How or why?
4	How do you perceive collaboration taking place in a digital context?

Research Question 2

Which of the digital leadership competencies are perceived by business leaders to drive collaboration internal to the organisation?

5	Can you tell me about how your digital literacy helped or hindered you during the move to working remotely?
6	Can you tell me about how your ability to adapt and be flexible assisted you with collaborative efforts when working remotely?
7	How do you think having a transformative vision and be forward looking impacts collaborative efforts?
8	In your experience, do you think having a strong leadership (decisive and more focussed) has an impact on collaboration?

Research Question 3

In a digital workplace, what perceived behaviours and competencies are regarded as ineffective in driving collaboration?

9	What leadership skills, behaviours or traits would hinder the ability to collaborate?

10	Do you believe these competencies would also form a hindrance in a digital context, and how?

Research Question 4

Given the business leaders experience with collaboration, which of the digital leadership competencies were at play in the context of COVID-19?

11	In navigating the context of COVID-19, are there any other leadership competencies you have come across that you have found useful in driving digital leadership?
12	In your view, what are best practice guidelines for how leaders can build digital leadership competencies?

APPENDIX E – ATLAS.TI CODING

Code

AD_Dealing with pace of change

AD_Need for adaptability

AD_Open mindedness

AD_Willing to experiment and take risk

CI_Importance of trust

CI_Manage for negative impacts of digital

CI_Methods of effective communication

CI_need and role of communication

CI_need for authenticity

CI_need for greater EQ

CI_need for personal connection

COV AD_Ability to stay flexible

COV AD_Ability to work in uncertainty

COV AD_Change of performance management

COV AD_continuous learning and development

COV AD_identifying and hiring right skills

COV AD_Keep up with trends

COV EQ_Importance of empathy

COV EQ_Need for engagement

COV EQ_Need for resilience

COV EQ_Need for trust and accountability

COV EQ_Non-verbal communication

COV EQ_Vulnerability

COV FL_Ability to anticipate what is ahead

COV FL_Ability to decipher data usefulness

COV FL_See the bigger picture

COV FL_Unlearn irrelevant leadership practices

COV LS_Analytical and critical thinking

COV LS_Follower behaviours

COV LS_Inclusive approach

COV LS_Increased supervision

COV LS_Industry and role experience

COV LS_Providing single voice and clear direction

COV LS_Quick decision making

COV LS_Reinforce core values

COV LS_Role of facilitator

Data_effective usage of data

Data_importance of data

Data_importance of deeper understanding

Data_need for attention to detail

Data_need for insights from data

Data_security around data

Deficiencies_Fixed Mindset

Deficiencies_Listening skills

Deficiencies_Networking skills

Deficiencies_Transactional working

Director_Acknowledgement of contributions

Director_Allocate roles and responsibilities

Director_Allocation and management of recourses

Director_Develop the vision, mission and objectives

Director_Ensure there is alignment

Director_Obtain buy in

Director_Oversight

Director_Possess in-depth knowledge

Director_Provide direction to others

Director_Provide motivation

Director_Responsible for delivery and implementation

Director_Understanding stakeholder requirements

Director_Value creation

DL_Importance of digital literacy

DL_Tools and technology as an enabler

Enabler_Adapt existing methods

Enabler_Identify benefits to stakeholders

Enabler_Importance of feedback

Enabler_Influence others and the environment

Enabler_New methods

Enabler_Remove obstacles

Enabler_Stakeholder identification

Environment_ Silo structures and hierarchy

Environment_ team or company culture

Environment_Understand the challenges

FL_Collaboration an outcome of innovation

FL_Collaboration is emergent

FL_Conscious Intention to collaborate

FL_Creating a strong purpose which drives commitment

FL_Creating a vision

FL_Developing the rules of engagement

FL_Need for diverse views

LS_Ability to drive engagement and participation

LS_Balancing work and social

LS_Need for decisiveness

LS_Softer less directive style

Monitor_Accurate reporting

Monitor_Assess compliance and risk

Monitor_Assess level of contribution

Monitor_Assess progress to end goal

Monitor_Budget management

Monitor_Independant validation of output

People_Culture of collaboration

People_Empower teams and individuals
People_Identify dependencies that exist
People_Managing expectations of stakeholders
People_Managing relationship of stakeholders
People_Need for credibility
People_Need for networks and relationships
People_Team cohesion
People_Team maturity
Personal_Egocentric
Personal_Inward focussed
Personal_Need to retain power
Personal_Social awareness and etiquette

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APPENDIX F – THEMES AND CODES

Research Questions	Code Theme	Code
RQ1: What is the role of the business leader in driving collaboration in the context of a digital workplace in the bank?	Role of director	Director_Oversight
		Director_Responsible for delivery and implementation
		Director_Allocation and management of recourses
		Director_Develop the vision, mission and objectives
		Director_Allocate roles and responsibilities
		Director_Value creation
		Director_Provide direction to others
		Director_Acknowledgement of contributions
		Director_Provide motivation
		Director_Understanding stakeholder requirements
		Director_Possess in-depth knowledge
		Director_Obtain buy in
		Director_Ensure there is alignment
	Monitoring and assessing	Monitor_Accurate reporting
		Monitor_Independant validation of output
		Monitor_Budget management
		Monitor_Assess compliance and risk
		Monitor_Assess progress to end goal
		Monitor_Assess level of contribution
	People focussed	People_Empower teams and individuals
		People_Team maturity
		People_Managing expectations of stakeholders
		People_Managing relationship of stakeholders
		People_Team cohesion
		People_Culture of collaboration
		People_Need for networks and relationships
		People_Identify dependencies that exist
		People_Need for credibility

RQ1: What is the role of the business leader in driving collaboration in the context of a digital workplace in the bank?	Enabler	Enabler_Remove obstacles
		Enabler_Influence others and the environment
		Enabler_Importance of feedback
		Enabler_New methods
		Enabler_Adapt existing methods
		Enabler_Identify benefits to stakeholders
		Enabler_Stakeholder identification
	Data Steward	Data_effective usage of data
		Data_need for insights from data
		Data_importance of deeper understanding
		Data_importance of data
		Data_security around data
		Data_need for attention to detail

Research Questions	Code Theme	Code
RQ2: Which of the digital leadership competencies are perceived by business leaders to drive collaboration internal to the organisation?	Digital Dexterity	DL_Importance of digital literacy
		DL_Tools and technology as an enabler
	Adaptability	AD_Need for adaptability
		AD_Open mindedness
		AD_Dealing with pace of change
		AD_Willing to experiment and take risk
	Forward looking	FL_Need for diverse views
		FL_Creating a vision
		FL_Developing the rules of engagement
		FL_Creating a strong purpose which drives comittment
		FL_Conscious Intention to collaborate
		FL_Collaboration is emergent
		FL_Collaboration an outcome of innovation
	Contextual Intelligence	CI_importance of trust
		CI_need for personal connection
		CI_Methods of effective communication
		CI_need and role of communication
		CI_need for authenticity
		CI_need for greater EQ
		CI_Manage for negative impacts of digital
	Leadership styles	LS_Ability to drive engagement and participation
		LS_Need for decisiveness
		LS_Balancing work and social
		LS_Softer less directive style

Research Questions	Code Theme	Code
RQ3: In a digital workplace, what perceived leadership behaviours and competencies are regarded as ineffective in driving collaboration?	Personal traits	Personal_Egocentric
		Personal_Need to retain power
		Personal_Social awareness and etiquette
		Personal_Inward focussed
	Associated Factors	Environment_ team or company culture
		Environment_ Silo structures and hierachy
		Environment_Understand the challenges
	Deficiencies	Deficiencies_Fixed Mindset
		Deficiencies_Networking skills
		Deficiencies_Listening skills
		Deficiencies_Transactional working

Research Questions	Code Theme	Code
RQ4: Given the business leaders experience with collaboration, which of the digital leadership competencies were at play in the context of COVID-19?	Emotional intelligence	COV EQ_Importance of empathy
		COV EQ_Non verbal cues
		COV EQ_Vulnerability
		COV EQ_Need for resilience
		COV EQ_Need for trust and accountability
		COV EQ_Need for engagement
	Agility	COV AD_Keep up with trends
		COV AD_continuous learning and development
		COV AD_Ability to stay flexible
		COV AD_Ability to work in uncertainty
		COV AD_Change of performance management
		COV AD_identifying and hiring right skills
	Forward thinking	COV FL_Ability to decipher data usefulness
		COV FL_Ability to anticipate what is ahead
		COV FL_See the bigger picture
		COV FL_Unlearn irrelevant leadership practices
	Leadership characteristics	COV LS_Role of facilitator
		COV LS_Providing single voice and clear direction
		COV LS_Inclusive approach
		COV LS_Reinforce core values
		COV LS_Increased supervision
		COV LS_Analytical and critical thinking
		COV LS_Follower behaviors
		COV LS_Quick decision making
		COV LS_Industry and role experience