Gordon Institute of Business Science
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The Role of C-suite Level Strategic Leaders In Enabling Adaptive Strategy Implementation

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A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Corporate Strategy

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Abstract

The failure of strategies does not happen at the formulation phase but the implementation phase. The failure of strategy implementation is accounted for by lack of adaptation in implementation. The C-suite level strategic leaders have a role to play to play in drive successful strategy implementation through the phenomenon of adaptive strategy implementation. This study has explored the role of C-suite level strategic leaders through looking at the functions of strategic leaders, attributes they need to enable adaptation and the tools they could use to enable adaptation. This study was underpinned by the theory of dynamic capabilities. It was deemed relevant since it encourages managers to adapt to evolving business environments through sensing, seizing, and transforming phases. Furthermore, it embraces the managerial capabilities.

This was a qualitative study that conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with participants from different industries. The study interviewed participants with the private sector background, experience, and insights.

The core findings of this study indicated that C-suite level strategic leaders need to create enabling organisational culture, communicating strategy, enable collaboration and lead change and adaptation as their function. In addition, they need to have the ability to communicate strategy, changes in timely and transparent manner. Lastly on the tools, this study observed that there is a gap between academia and business on the use of strategy implementation tools.

The research contributed to the body of knowledge through presenting a five-step conceptual framework, implications to C-Suite strategic leaders, academia, and recommendations for further research. The implications to academia are an invitation to intensify research work on drivers of enabling organisational culture and strategy implementation tool. The implications to C-suite level are a call to value communication, communication skills and be the ambassadors of enabling organisational culture for adaptive strategy implementation.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Corporate Strategy 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 authorization and consent to carry out this research.

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KEYWORDS

Chapter 1: Introduction to the research problem

1.1 Introduction

Several scholars have widely agreed that strategies do not fail at formulation but implementation phase (Friesl et al., 2021; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021; Vigfusson et al., 2021, Okaka et al., 2017; Sull et al., 2015). Predominantly, the inability to adapt and adjust strategies to rapidly changing, uncertain, unpredictable and volatile business environment accounts for the failure of most well-formulated strategies (Tawse and Tabesh, 2021). Furthermore, Tawse and Tabesh (2021) presents and argument that managers and organisations struggle with implementation of business strategies. Therefore, it is worthwhile to explore how strategic leaders can unlock successful strategy implementation in the continuously evolving business environment.

The business world has experienced uncertain and rapidly evolving environment that had a direct impact on the strategies of businesses. The recent examples could be the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war. These unpredictable changes have necessitated businesses to reconsider their current strategies if they were to remain relevant to their clients (Wiles, 2021) and constantly delivering on changing demands (Lynch and Mors, 2019). According to Sull et al. (2015) traditionally detailed strategic plans that have been developed by executives have fallen short of predicting uncertain and changing environments. Therefore, this compels the executives to consider some level of flexibility and adaptability in strategy implementation to relevantly respond to these changes.

The essence of strategy implementation consists of seizing relevant strategic opportunities (Sull et al., 2015). According to Colis (2021) strategy adaptation entails continuous experimentation, iteration, learning and action. The iteration of strategy is not an indication of failure (Weiser et al., 2020). However, it is an acknowledgement that the assumptions which informed the strategy formulation have changed due to environmental circumstances (Simons, 2010). To remain relevant and competitive the strategic leaders of organisations would be required to constantly evolve and adapt their strategies (Favaro, 2015). The recent changes in business environment has placed the importance of adaptive strategy implementation at the centre of all executive boardrooms discussions.

According to Sull et al. (2015) both the leaders and employees managers in the organisation need to adapt to the facts on the ground, build agility to adapt to changing market conditions. In addition, the implementation process has to adapt to constantly changing environments

while building the capabilities needed to realise value over the long term. This indicates that the ability to adapt to changing environments could position the organisations to thrive under uncertain market environments.

1.2 Background

The recent study by Weiser et al. (2020) has brought adaptive strategy implementation conversation at the centre of strategy research by conducting 40 years strategy implementation research review. The study by Vuorinen et al. (2018) argued that adaptive strategy implementation is not a new phenomenon in the strategy management literature. This argument supported by research work conducted by Anderson & Nielsen (2009) on adaptive strategy making as well as Mintzberg & Waters (1985) on intended and emergent strategies. Despite the inception work done by these scholars, there is still a glaring gap in strategy research on adaptive strategy implementation.

According to literature Weiser et al. (2020) along with Tawse & Tabesh (2021) shared the similar sentiments that there has been a greater deal of focus on strategy formulation over strategic implementation processes. These scholars are among many scholars that are lamenting a lack of enough research on strategy implementation. There is some coherence amongst scholars that strategy implementation research has not received sufficient research attention. Therefore, it may go without saying that adaptive strategy implementation is still far behind in current research conversation.

The research paper that focused on adaptive strategy implementation was published by Ahearne et al. (2014). However, its focus was on the middle managers' social capital in influencing adaptive strategy implementation. The study that followed this one was by Weiser et al. (2020) and their focus was on the integrative approach in adaptive strategy implementation. It is worth noting that Weiser et al. (2020) conducted the forty-year review on adaptive turn and found that there is still a gap on adaptive strategy implementation. This presents a great opportunity for researchers to contribute to the body of knowledge in exploring the concept of adaptive strategy implementation. The study on the adaptive strategy implementation is anticipated to make a contribution in answering the question of why well formulated strategies fail.

The study by Weiser et al. (2020) has defined adaptive strategy implementation as the process that entails continuous evolution, enacting and conceptualising strategy. Tawse & Tabesh (2019) shares similar sentiments with Weiser et al. (2020) on enacting strategy in practice. It

is worth noting that Shultze & Pinkow (2020) used the term organisational adaptability which entails the ability of an organisation to recognise the need to change and seize opportunities in dynamic environments.

Adaptability entails ability to seize opportunities and adjust to volatile markets (Birkinshaw & Gibson, 2004). There is an agreement that adaptive strategy implementation entails adjusting and responding to changes. However, different scholars have used similar terminologies namely adaptive strategy implementation, organisational adaptability and adaptation. The different terminologies used by scholars have been synthesised under Table 1.

The intention of adaptive strategy implementation is to enable organisations to relevantly respond to unforeseen, unpredictable and unplanned changing business environments (Friesl et al., 2021; Reeves & di Carlo, 2017), increasing volatility and complexity (Vuorinen et al, 2018). The approach of sticking to the designed plan regardless of the changes in the environment and strategy assumption accounts for strategies that have not yielded desired results.

The study by Uhl-bien & Arena (2017) has identified three enablers for organisations to thrive which are adaptation, flexibility and innovation. This provides an indication that the ability for the organisations to survive depends on the leadership willingness to be adaptable, flexible and adjust their strategies to respond to the current business environment changes. There is still a lack of studies to share empirical evidence on how strategic leaders enable adaptive strategy implementation in practice (Weiser et al., 2020). Therefore, this indicates the existing opportunity to investigate the role of the strategic leaders in driving adaptive strategy implementation.

The term strategic leaders has been used to refer to the top management teams of the organisations. Different scholars are in agreement that strategic leaders includes the Chief Executive Officers, members of the executive team and the board of directors (Vera et al., 2020; Samimi et al., 2021; Rannuci & Wang 2022; & Boal & Schultz, 2007). This small group of individuals who are at the apex of an organisation command greater influence in the organisations that they lead. This view has been supported by Lieu et al. (2021) by indicating that top managements are the primary shapers of organisation's strategic direction and outcome. Samimi et al. (2021) states that strategic leadership comprising of CEOs, TMT members, Directors and General Managers orbit around the functions of the top leadership in an organisation. In the light of this definition, this study will on explore the functions and attributes of CEOs, TMTs and General Managers.

Vera et al. (2020) focused on the functions of strategic leaders include strategic decision making, being role models and setting the tone for organisational behaviour (Raes et al., 2021). Samimi et al. (2021) has provided eight functions of strategic leaders while Mubarak and Yusoff (2019) indicated five functions of strategic leaders. In the study by Samimi et al. (2020) and Mubarak & Yussof (2019) there are similarities in three areas namely strategic direction, ethics and managing resources. However, it has been noted that Samimi et al. (2020) has included culture under the motivating and influencing function. The concern with this is that it may not elevate the role that strategic leaders need to play in driving the desired culture within organisations. The identified functions of strategic leader provides a clear understanding that their focus is on strategic not operational matters.

The research work by Uhl-Bien & Arena (2018), has focused on leadership for organizational adaptability and has built on Uhl-bien & Arena (2017). The proposition that came out from these two studies is that leaders need to create adaptive spaces to enable organizational adaptability. These studies unlike Samimi et al. (2020), they are very specific on the role of leaders in enabling adaptation.

In performing these critical functions, the attributes of the strategic leaders play an important role to enable them to be successful in leading organisations. The study by Samimi et al. (2021) have used the term attribute to entails competencies, personality traits and characteristics of strategic leaders. There are five attributes identified which are dispositions, managerial abilities, charisma, power and abilities (Samimi et al., 2021). This study intends to explore skills and competencies of the strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation. Furthermore, attributes will be regarded as skills and competencies which will exclude personality traits.

According to Tawse & Tabesh (2021) dynamic managerial capabilities are fundamental to the phenomenon of strategy implementation. Furthermore, this may describe the success or failure of organisations in strategy implementation. According to Sull et al. (2015), lack of agility and difficulties in adapting to market circumstances are critical obstacles to effective execution among the companies they have studied. Therefore, it is imperative to explore skills and competencies that strategic leaders need to have for enabling adaptive strategy implementation.

The strategy implementations tools are what the strategic leaders can use to enable adaptive strategy implementation. The findings by Vuorinen et al. (2018) on the strategy tools indicated

that have only three out of eighty eight articles that they have reviewed were focused on strategy adaptation while seventy five articles were focused on strategy architecture and action. According to Roper & Hodari (2015) has been stated that the practitioners reject strategy tools due to lack relevance to business practices. The experts of the famous strategy implementation tool balanced scorecard (Jarzabkwoski & Kaplan, 2015) present different view that strategy tools are helpful to structure information, thoughts and simplify information. These different views are worth investigating to understand the choices of practitioners in using or not using strategy implementation tools in particular.

A study by Kruger (2017), indicates that an adaptive strategy requires greater flexibility and experimentation. It is imperative to note that Kruger (2017) is neither referring to "adaptation" nor "adaptive strategy implementation" but adaptive strategy which still entails the indicators of adaptive strategy implementation. There are several constructs that have been used to refer to the similar phenomenon. These constructs are adaptive strategy implementation, adaptation, adaptive strategy. This indicates that there is more research work that needs to be done to develop a consistent construct between especially amongst the leadership and strategic management scholars.

1.3 Research purpose

This study is critically concerned with understanding what is required to drive adaptive strategy implementation. The intention of this study is to gather insights into functions, attributes of strategic leaders necessary for enabling adaptive strategy implementation. In the light of this the primary research question for this study is "What is the role of C-suite level strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation?"

In the quest to understand this primary research question, this study will unpack the following sub-questions:

a. What are the attributes (i.e., skills, experiences, and competencies) that strategic leaders should have to enable adaptive strategy implementation?
b. What are the functions of strategic leaders in adaptive strategy implementation?
c. How do strategy implementation tools enable adaptive strategy implementation?

1.4 Rationale for research

Several scholars have agreed that strategies of different organisations fail at the implementation process and phase (Friesl et al., 2021; Vigfusson et al., 2021; and Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). This in an indication that there is still space to investigate the root causes of failure in strategy implementation and why other organisations succeed in their strategy implementation process.

In the study that was conducted by Weiser et al. (2020) it was established that there is a need to shift from the structural control view of strategy to adaptive strategy implementation. The research of adaptive strategy implementation has a critical role to play in providing insights on the gap between the formulated and realised strategies, and explaining behavioural and social dynamics of strategy implementation (Weiser et al., 2020). The study on the adaptive strategy implementation may bring a possible answers on why some well formulated strategies fail. This research intends to contribute on understanding the reasons some companies are better at implementing strategies and why some strategies fail at implementation phase.

In reviewing literature, very few studies have explored the subject of adaptive strategy implementation including the role of strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation. This research aspire to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the role of strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation. The area of adaptive strategy implementation is of interest to organisations that would like to implement their strategies successfully.

1.5 Research contribution

The understanding of antecedents for enabling adaptive strategy implementation will immensely contribute to the body of knowledge on the role of C-level strategic leaders for creating the conducive environment that will enable adaptive strategy implementation. This study sought to make a case that organizational strategies do not fail at formulation but at implementation due to lack of an adaptive environment.

In understanding skills and competencies that strategic leaders need to possess to enable adaptive strategy implementation will assist organisation to be intentional in harnessing these set of skills. In the research arena, this will spark interest to further deepen research work in exploring the attribute of C-suite level strategic leaders. Lastly, this research has explored the strategy implementation tools that C-suite level strategic leaders may use to enable adaptive strategy implementation.

1.6 Scope of the research

The study aimed to analyse the role of strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation. The study attempted to bring insights on how the functions, roles and strategy implementation tool can be used to enable adaptive strategy implementation.

The focus of the participants has been mainly the C-suite level strategic leaders in the private sector. This study did not attempt to analyse the relationship between the strategic leaders in adaptive strategy implementation.

1.7 Structure of the research report

This research is organised in such a way that it will enable the understanding of the role of C-suite level strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation.

Chapter 1: Introduction to research problem

This chapter introduced the study, the need for the research on adaptive strategy implementation and the gaps that exists in adaptive strategy implementation. It has painted the picture for the relevance of the study in business and academic research context.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The literature review chapter has taken time to explore the existing theoretical arguments looking at strategy implementation, strategic leadership and strategy management tools. This chapter further indicated the theory that underpins this study.

Chapter 3: Research questions

The research questions of this study have been outlined in this chapter. These questions were built out of critically reviewing the literature in Chapter 2. They are an outcome of identifying what is known and not known in literature.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

This chapter presents the rationale for the methodology that has been chosen for this study. It goes at length to address aspects research design which entails sampling, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations and reliability among others.

Chapter 5: **Research results**

The findings of this study based on the data that was collected through semi-structured interviews is reported in this Chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion of results

This chapter reports the analysis of the data that was collected and detailed in Chapter 5. The structure of reporting this analysis followed the three research questions that were being explored in this study.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The key findings of this study have being presented in this chapter. Furthermore, the limitations of the study, implications for C-suite level strategic leaders, implications for academia and recommendations for further research have been outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of literature review is to provide insights into the research topic and demonstrate its relevance. This has being achieved through making reference to relevant literature and/or presenting extracts from relevant literature. Furthermore, the researcher is also making own arguments as they emerged from the different literature that was critically reviewed.

This study makes a submission that the lack of adaptive strategy implementation accounts for the failures of well-designed strategies.

The first section of this chapter began by presenting the dynamic capabilities theory that has been selected to underpin this study. This section outlines the theory and its relevance to the study.

This study deemed it necessary to discuss an overview of strategy implementation concept before delving specifically into adaptive strategy implementation. This was considered because adaptive strategy implementation emanates from broader strategy implementation concept. Strategy implementation concept was used to lay a foundation and to introduce the emerging research gap around adaptive strategy implementation.

The third section of this chapter has explored construct of adaptive strategy implementation, the need and importance of adaptive strategy implementation and the role of tools in adaptive strategy implementation.

The fourth section of this chapter explored the construct of strategic leadership by looking at the definition of strategic leadership, the role of strategic leaders, attributes of strategic leaders and the challenges that strategic leaders faces when leading organisations.

2.2 Dynamic capabilities theory

According to Teece et al. (1997) dynamic capabilities refers to "the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments" p516. The study that came close to two decades later refined the concept of dynamic capabilities to entail the firm's ability to adapt to change and create the change that enables the company to innovate (Teece et al., 2016). Therefore, the dynamic capabilities

theory concerns the firm's ability to identify the changes in the internal and external environment and respond in an agile manner.

The ability to respond to changing environments which might be uncertain and risky largely depends on the ability to the managers to accurately scan the environment (Teece et al., 2016; Teece et al., 1997). The dynamic capabilities theory entails the three important aspect which are the ability sense, seize and transform the firm (Teece et al., 2020). The third element of the theory carries the essence of the organisation to adapt its strategy to be able to compete in the changing environment.

Figure 1: Dynamic capabilities theory

Sensing	Seizing	Transformation
Identification of opportunities	Mobilisation of resources to deliver value and shape markets	Continuous renewal and periodic major strategic shifts
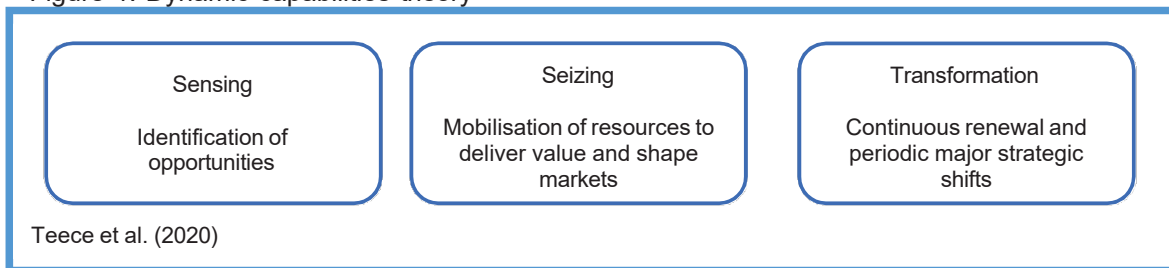
Teece et al. (2020)

The theory made an argument that the managerial and organisational processes play a vital role in the firms competitiveness (Teece et al., 1997 and Teece et al., 2020). The role that top management play in the organisation according to Teece et al. (2020) are operational entrepreneurial and leadership. The operational function is mainly concerned with strategy implementation, leadership function is concerned with strategic alignment while entrepreneurial is focused on environmental scanning.

The theory is underpinned by the aspect of learning which is a process of experimentation, trial and error, feedback, evaluation and continuous improvement (Teece et al., 2016 and Teece et al, 1997). Furthermore, it encourages the interorganisational learning, creates collaborations and partnerships in the organisation to pursue competitive advantage. It is through organisational learning that the firm may identify the areas of improvement and adjust to the changing environments.

The top Management of the firm have to be seized with constant scanning of the environment, evaluate the markets, quickly adjust the firm strategy to respond to the internal and external environment (Teece et al., 1997). Therefore, the success of the firms lies on the ability to spot emerging trends, their impacts and developing carefully thought strategic responses. This indicates that the management must be agile in responding to dynamic environment to stay

ahead of competition. If the management does not respond in an agile manner, this may lead to the collapse of the firm.

2.3 The relevance of the theory to this study

The aim of this study is to explore the role of C-suite level strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation in the dynamically evolving environments. The premise of this study is that several well-defined strategies fail due to lack of adaptation to evolving business environment. The Dynamic Capabilities theory acknowledges that the business environment is continually evolving and top managers have a role to play in positioning organisations for success. The role of top management is directly linked with the C-suite level strategic leaders.

The theory emphasise the organisational learning as a fundamental aspect that will enable organisations to test and adapt their strategies. The core of this study is to centred on adaptation which comes through leaning, experimentation, evaluation and reconfiguring the organisational strategy to satisfy customers and be ahead of competitors.

2.4 Strategy implementation

The studies by Tawse & Tabesh (2021) and Vigfusson et al. (2021) make a submission that strategy implementation has a significant role in the effective functioning, performance, success and creating competitive advantage in any organisation. Therefore, it is imperative to have an understanding of how strategy implementation defined by different scholars.

According to Tawse & Tabesh (2021) strategy implementation involves the collaboration between employees and management of the organisation to translate the strategic plans into reality with the aim of achieving desired strategic objectives. The definition by Sull et al. (2015) of strategy implementation entails seizing strategic opportunities and continuous coordination of organisational activities that support the realisation of the strategy. According to Friesl et al. (2020) strategy implementation simply entails converting strategic decisions into actions in an organisation. The definitions by these scholars make an argument that strategy implementation is an intentional collaborative effort between the strategic leadership of an organisation and employees towards the realisation of organisational strategic intents.

According to Friesl et al. (2021) strategies do not fail at the formulation phase but at the implementation phase. This is the view that is also supported by Friesl et al. (2021); Vera et

al. (2022) and Dunlop et al. (2013) that strategies fail due to ineffective implementation and lack of adaptability. This indicates that strategies do not fail at the development phase but at the implementation phase. The study by Vigfusson et al. (2021) has identified lack of implementation, poor implementation and poor managerial capabilities as some of the factors that accounts for failure of strategy implementation. The performance of organisations improves significantly when the management pay significant attention to strategy implementation (Mubarak & Yusoff, 2019). In addition, the findings by Gary et al. (2008) found that decision making, information flow, clarity of communication and organisational culture are some of the factors that hinder strategy implementation. These scholars make an assertion that the failure of strategy implementation is an indication of poor leadership and managerial capabilities in the organisation. Therefore, it is worth understanding the factors that lead to failure in implementing formulated strategies.

There seems to be some level of fragmentation in the research on strategy implementation despite several calls from scholars to intensify research on strategy implementation. The recent study by Vigfusson et al. (2021) indicates that it is encouraging to note that there has been a positive response on the call to engage on strategy implementation research even though there is still a huge space to explore the strategy implementation research. The recent studies by Tawse & Tabesh (2021) and Friesl et al. (2020) have also advocated for an extended exploration of strategy implementation.

The recent and detailed study by Weiser et al. (2020) have made a very formidable case for scholars to consider exploring adaptive strategy implementation. This is an area of research that is receiving attention especially at the back of the volatile, uncertain changes in business world. In searching literature especially in the highly rated journals, it has been found that there is still lack of research work on the concept of adaptive strategy implementation. Therefore, this makes this study relevant to add value in the adaptive strategy implementation domain.

2.5 Adaptive strategy implementation

The recent study by Weiser et al. (2020) has made a clarion call for the researchers to further research on adaptive strategy implementation by paying attention to the construct of adaptive strategy implementation. The construct of adaptive strategy implementation seems to be a new terminology that has been used in the strategy management literature. Nevertheless, in reviewing literature, the researcher has found that this terminology has been utilised in varied manners by different scholars.

The organisation studies researchers used organisational adaptability (Shulze & Pinkow, 2020; Birkinshaw et al., 2016), strategy management researchers (Ahearne et al, 2014; Weiser et al. 2020), astute strategy researchers have used emergent strategy (Mintzberg, 2021), management scholars (Birkinshaw & Gibson, 2004) have used adaptation and strategy as practice scholar (Jarzabkowski, 2004) has used adaptability.

The use of these different constructs does not only indicate fragmentation on strategy implementation but emphasis of different research streams. The idea is not to force different streams to use the same terminology but to identify similarities. There are some elements of similarity and differences in the definition and explanations of preferred terminologies. This has been demonstrated in the researcher's synthesis of definition in the Table 1:

Table 1: Synthesis of adaptive strategy definitions

Author(s)	Emphasis	Main construct
Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004)	The ability of organisations to move quickly towards the new opportunities, to adjust to volatile markets.	Adaptability
Jarzabkowski (2004)	The small incremental adjustment to radical reorientation of strategy	Adaptation
Ahearne et al. (2014)	Ability to accommodate and embrace adjustments in planned functional level strategies at the business unit level to fit with operational situations	Adjustment
Birkinshaw et al. (2016)	The ability of the organisation to adapt to a changing environment and shifting market conditions	Organisational adaptability
Uhl-bien and Arena (2018)	The ability of leadership to enable organisations and people to cope with effective change and uncertainty.	Organisational adaptability
Weiser et al. (2020)	Adaptive strategy implementation is "the process of continuous organisational evolution in which different organisational units at multiple levels of the organisation are simultaneously conceptualising, enacting and adopting their own strategies"	Adaptive strategy implementation

Author(s)	Emphasis	Main construct
Friesl et al. (2020)	Monitoring involves learning and how firms may adjust a particular strategic intent once implementation has been attempted.	Adjustment of a specific strategic intent
Shulze and Pinkow (2020)	Organisational adaptability is defined as the ability of an organisation to recognise the need to change and seize opportunities in dynamic environments	Organisational adaptability
Sarta et al. (2021)	Intentional decision making undertaken by organizational members, leading to observable actions that aim to reduce the distance between an organization and its economic and institutional environments.	Organisational adaptability

Source : Researcher's own synthesis

In assessing different definitions in Table 1, some scholars approach is mainly focused by seizing opportunities and responding to dynamic external environments (Birkinshaw et al. (2016); Birkinshaw & Gibson (2004); Shulze & Pinkow (2020) and Sarta et al. (2020). This view indicates that strategy adaptation has been influenced by the factors that are beyond the control of the organisation. The disadvantage with mainly depending on external factors is that leaders may not be proactive in factoring adaptation in the strategy implementation process until there is an external force.

The different framework that has been embraced by Friesl et al. (2021); Weiser et al. (2020); Ahearne et al. (2014); Andersen and Nielsen (2009); and Jarzabkowski (2004) is that strategies must be adjusted as they are being implemented. The researcher is supporting this approach as it intentionally and proactively factor in the need to be flexible in implementation process. The recent studies by Hunsaker & Knowles (2021); Teece et al. (2021), make an argument that the essence of strategy is knowing when to adapt and the ability to be agile in responding to changes in external environment. The strategic leaders and organisations need to make room for adapting strategies in the implementation process. This will enable them to quickly reconceptualise with the aim of achieving better results than to stick to a failing plan.

Uhl-Bien & Arena (2017) and Uhl-Bien & Arena (2018) have made a research contribution by introducing the concept of adaptive space, enabling leadership, operational leadership and entrepreneurial leadership. According to Uhl-bien & Arena (2017) entrepreneurial leadership

focuses on initiating, iterating and socialising ideas. Operational leadership mainly concerns ensuring organisational alignment and execution of ideas. Enabling leadership is critical for linking up different parts of the organization, sponsoring ideas and allowing idea conflicts. Furthermore, they have argued that adaptive space is created by enabling leadership. They have concluded that enabling leadership is suitable to create adaptive space in organisations.

The researcher has observed that scholars have viewed adaptive strategy implementation from external environment, strategy adjustment and the role of the leaders in enabling adaptation. These three different views are not problematic in adaptive strategy implementation but they may simply fragment the adaptive strategy implementation research contribution.

2.6 The need for adaptive strategy implementation

According to Weiser et al. (2020) adaptive strategy implementation entails seven important elements which are continuous evaluation of strategic direction, corrective feedback, enacting strategy in implementation, sense making, continuous learning, initiating adjustments and reconceptualization of strategies. The changes in the business, political, technological, market environment and myriad of other changes requires the firms to adjust and adapt their strategies in order to survive.

2.6.1   Organisational learning

One of the critical strategy implementation levers that organisations needs is organisational learning and continuous improvement (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2008). The study by Beer & Eisenstat (2000) lists lack of quality learning as one of the eight silent killers of strategy implementation. According to Friesl et al. (2021), improvisation and learning are important for the strategy implementation adaptive process. The study by Crittenden & Crittenden (2008) found that despite the organisational learning being regarded as a strength it has not being sufficiently engaged to drive continual improvement. Therefore, these scholars agree that organisational learning is a necessary enabler in adaptive strategy implementation.

2.6.2   Strategy continuous adjustment

The adaptive strategy implementation encourages managers to come up with creative solutions on the unforeseen solutions without undermining the systematic strategy implementation (Sull et al., 2015). In the adaptive strategy implementation process adjustments are not regarded as failures but as strategic learning that can influence the

implementation of strategic learning (Vuorinen et al., 2018). This provides the indication that organisation have to constantly adjust their strategies in order to remain relevant and thrive in the changing business environments. This is one of the biggest hurdles that leaders and organisations face which is to accept that strategy formulation assumptions may not be fit for the implementation environment. Therefore, adapting strategy is not an insult to the formulation assumptions, it is that the environment has changed. The intention to adapt strategies is to enable organisations to retain their business relevance, competitiveness in the constantly changing business environment (Uhl-bien & Arena, 2018).

2.6.3 Strategy feedback to top management team

The strategy feedback to the top management is a critical step in initiating the revisiting of the organisation strategy based on organisational learning in the implementation phase (Weiser et al., 2020). The purpose of the strategy feedback is not intended to discard the current strategy but to enhance it through incorporating the lessons learnt on implementation phase. This does not mean that the strategy has failed but it is allows for the adjustment of the strategy to position the organisation for success (Weiser et al., 2020). This is the approach and the view that the strategic leaders need to embrace when it comes to strategy implementation. The assumption that underpinned the strategy formulation might have changed and this may require an adjustment on a portion of the strategy.

The inability to receive feedback from the lower levels by the top management is one of the inhibitors to adapt the formulated strategy (Vuorinen et al., 2021). The contributing factor to this phenomenon could be that the top management invest a lot of time and money in the formulation of the strategy. Therefore, any feedback that seeks to suggest any amendment may not be easily received. According to Tawse & Tabesh (2018) there is a need to close the gap between the top leadership and middle management for the organisation to benefit from innovation and creativity. The strategic leaders have the teams that they are leading and it is imperative for them to create a feedback loop that will help them to take informed strategic decisions.

2.7 Strategy management tools

Spee & Jarzabkowski (2009) stated that strategy tools entails techniques, methods and approaches to support strategic decision making. This explanation is essential to lay a foundation on what are strategy tools and what are they intended for.

Vuorinen et al. (2018) conducted a twenty five years analysis that mapped the strategy tools. The tools that have been identified were categorised in to tools that drive strategy architecture, strategy action and strategy adaptation. The example of tools identified are strategy map, balanced scorecard, scenario building approach, business process re-generation, extended resource based framework, strategic management risk tools and etc (Vuorinen et al., 2018, Roper & Hodari, 2015). The critical finding of the study by Vuorinen et al. (2018) was that there are very few strategy management tools that are driving emergent, flexible and innovative strategies. The study by Vuorinen et al (2018) found that out of the 88 articles they have reviewed only three that were focused on strategy adaptation. This provides an indication that in the strategy management arena there is a lack of focus on strategy adaptation tools.

Figure 2: Strategy management tools distribution
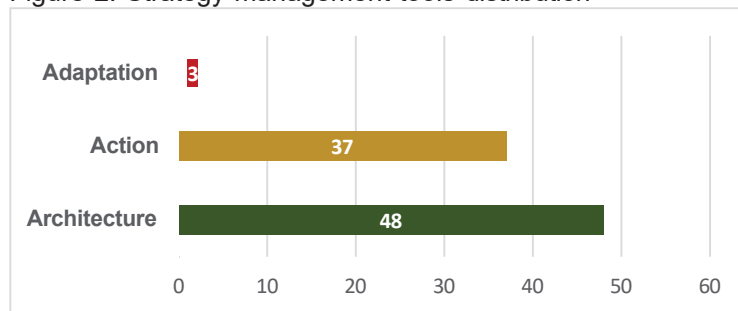
Vuorinen et al (2018)

The study by Roper & Roper (2015) provided the useful of tools and the reasons the tool are rejected in practice. The tools have been found to be useful in assisting practitioners to deal with uncertainty, structure information, synthesise and make meaning out of data, communication and drive strategic conversations (Roper & Hodari, 2015). Spee & Jarzabkwoski (2009) have added that strategy tools are useful for planning purposes, strategizing and problem solving. The tools such as SWOT analysis, BCG are easy to apply and remember in practice. It seems that the strategy tools have a lot to offer to the practitioners but there is still a gap between understanding by academia and practitioners in the application of strategy tools. In the findings by Roper & Hodari (2015), it was found that top executives did not use strategy implementation tools despite the fact that the consultants had recommended strategy tools.

In the similar vein the strategy tools have been rejected by practitioners because academia prioritise knowledge while practice prioritise application, tools does not provide guidance in decision making, some tools are outdated, limit creative thinking and innovation and some tools are irrelevant for industry context (Roger & Hodari, 2015). According to Spee and

Jarzabkowski (2009) the use of strategy tools may be affected by the context of the industry, simplicity and application of the tools. There is still a lack of sufficient research to support the use of strategy tools in practice. The findings by Olaka et al. (2017) encouraged the strategic leaders to use the strategy implementation like balanced scorecard to strike the balanced between the financial and strategic controls; and to drive innovation.

The balanced scorecard is one of the most popular strategy implementation tools that has been introduced by Norton and Kaplan since 1992 (Tawse & Tabesh, 2022). Interestingly, the year 2022 marked the 30 years existence of the balanced scorecard as a strategy implementation tool. It was introduced to give leaders insight on the performance of an organisation and to link strategy to operations (Kaplan & Norton, 2008). Furthermore, the it has been regarded as a tool that supports communicating strategic goals (Tawse & Tabesh, 2022), enables adaptation and harness organisational learning (Quesdalo et al., 2018). Therefore the balanced scorecard is one of the tools that strategic leaders may need to consider to enable adaptive strategy implementation. The strategy management system that has been introduced by Kaplan & Norton (2008) has six steps and step 5 directly talks to test and adaptation. The familiar aspects of the balanced scorecards are its four perspectives and strategy maps not the strategy management system. This element may lead to the lack of maximising the balanced scorecard value and potential in strategy implementation.

The study by Roper & Hodari (2015) provided the balanced view on the usefulness of the strategy tools and the reasons the practitioners rejected the strategy tools. However, the limitation to their study is that they mainly focused on BCG matrix, Value Chain, Porter's Five forces and SWOT analysis. It is possible that the picture could have been a bit different if the tools such as balanced scorecard and PESTEL analysis were included in the list given their popularity.

The usefulness and reasons for strategy tool rejection have been summarised have been summarised in the Table 2

Table 2: Summary of usefulness and rejection of strategy tools

Usefulness of the tools		Reasons practitioners reject tools
Deal with uncertainties		Lack of relevance
Evaluation of strategic choices		Lack of reliability
Sort and structure information		Outdated
Simplify information		Limits creativity and innovation

Usefulness of the tools		Reasons practitioners reject tools
Communicate strategic decisions		Non-responsive to industry context
Simplify complex situations		Limits use of experience based insights
Create shared context		Doesn't incorporate industry experience

Roper & Hodari (2015)

2.8 Strategic leadership

The research work by Vera et al. (2020) argues that strategic leaders are no confined to the apex and high echelons of the organisation and that they can be found in different roles and levels in the organisation. This seeks to suggest that the concept of strategic leadership should be more functional than it is positional or mainly focusing on top leadership. In addition, Vera et al. (2022) concedes that scholars deliberately chose to focus on top executives as strategic leaders. This study has taken the view of strategic leaders as the top executives which in South Africa are commonly referred to Executive committee (Exco) of the organisations

The strategic choices in organisations are made by individuals that that are sitting at the c-suites and leaders at the apex of organisations. This section will define the strategic leaders, explore their roles particularly in strategy implementation, their attributes and their challenges in the dynamic environments.

2.8.1 Definition of strategic leadership

According to Rowe (2001) strategic leadership is the continuous ability to influence others in taking decisions that helps the organisation to achieve both long and short-term viability of an organisation. According to Ireland & Hitt (1999), strategic leadership focuses on the person's ability to strategically think ahead about the viable future of the organisation and collaborate with others to create that envisioned future. Elenkov et al. (2005) views strategic leadership as the process that entails envisioning, communicating the vision and rallying everyone in the organisation to pursue that vision.

Conversely, Samimi et al. (2020) views strategic leadership based on the functions that the top leadership performs in order to achieve the organisations strategic ideals. Therefore the essence of strategic leadership according to these scholars orbits around top leadership setting the organisational vision, collaboration between the top leadership and employees, ensuring the viability of the organisation and achieving organisational strategic ideals. Boal

and Schultz (2007) introduced the different perspective as they view strategic leaders as people who drive organisational learning and adaptation.

The strategic leaders are regarded as the primary shapers of organisation's strategic decisions and outcomes (Liu et al., 2022). According to Crossan et al. (2008) strategic leaders are the executives responsible and accountable for the overall organisation. According to Rannuci & Wang (2022) top management team consists of a relatively small group of people at the top of the organisation and they have impact on organisational strategic choices. Given that there is no uniform structure and approach in different organisations, it is pivotal to understand as to which leaders are regarded as strategic leaders.

The chief executive officer, top management team (Samimi et al., 2020; Raes et al., 2021 and Vera et al., 2022), general managers and their direct reports (Liu et al., 2022) have been accepted by scholars strategic leaders. Other studies by scholars have included the board of directors and non-executive directors as part of the strategic leaders (Schaedler et al., 2022; and Van Doorn et al., 2022). There is no conflicting view on who is supposed to be part of strategic leadership in an organisation. It seems that different study might have followed the preference of their study to include to include or exclude some position such as board of directors (BOD).

According to Holmes et al. (2021) these executives are regarded as strategic leaders due to their level of influence, organisational impact and their decision making power. Therefore this study has focused on the top executives such as Chief Executive Officers, Top management Team and General Managers as strategic leaders which is in line with the views of scholars.

2.8.2 Roles of strategic leaders

The recent study by Vera et al. (2022) that integrated the leadership and strategy management views has found that there is still a research need to explore the role of the strategic leaders (i.e. CEOs and TMTs) in strategy implementation. Therefore, this study is relevant in making contribution on the research concerning the role of strategic leaders in adaptive strategy implementation.

The study by Samimi et al. (2020) have identified eight strategic functions of the strategic leaders which are strategic decision making, external stakeholder engagement, human resources management, motivating and influencing, information management, overseeing operations and administration, managing social and ethical issues, and managing conflicting

demands. On the other hand, Mubarak & Yusoff (2019) regards the functions of strategic leaders as defining strategic direction, organizational controls, allocation of resources, driving organizational culture and encouraging ethical practices in the organization. These scholars share the same sentiments on strategic direction, ethics, and resource allocation. The missing link in the list of these functions is that these scholars are not explicit on the role of strategic leaders in adaptive strategy implementation. The adaptation of strategies may be assumed to be included in the strategic decision functions as Samimi et al. (2020) state that as it talks to gradual changes in the organisation's strategy.

According to Vera et al. (2022) strategic leaders are responsible for developing long-term vision of the organisation and effective strategy. This study is clear that the vision and strategy formulation are the responsibilities of the top leadership of the organisation. The study by (Samimi et al., 2020) has found that strategic decision making function has been underexplored in the research domain. Therefore, this is sounding a call to researchers to consider exploring the functions of strategic leaders specifically in enabling adaptation.

According to Drucker (2004) executive leaders are solution oriented, develop clear organisational plans and take responsibility of decisions. The findings by Olaka et al. (2017) argues that determining strategic direction directly influences strategy implementation. The other interesting research view is that strategic leaders are responsible for strategic decision such as acquisitions, divestitures, market entry, new product launches and other major intended and emergent initiatives (Bartkus et al., 2022). There is clarity on the role of leaders in strategic decision making and the concept that has not received attention is being responsible for emergent initiatives.

According to Vera et al. (2022) strategic leaders (i.e. CEO and top management team) have a critical role to play in strategy implementation and to coordinate strategic activities throughout the organisation. A Samimi et al. (2020) as part of overseeing operations and administration, strategic leaders are expected to influence the execution of strategic initiatives. The tracking of progress towards the achievement of strategic goals remain the function of the strategic leaders. The tracking of progress provides strategic leaders with the indication on the performance of the organisation (Rowe, 2001).

The strategic leaders plays an important role in providing strategic direction to the organisations. According to Boal & Schultz (2007) the role of strategic leaders is to ensure that the organisation understands its current context, challenges and to prepare for the desired future through adaptation. Colis (2021) contends that strategic adaptation must become an

ongoing, iterative process of experimentation, learning and action. The adaptation to changing business environments, the environmental scanning is an important function that sets the organisation for optimal performance (Samimi et al., 2020; Vera et al. 2022). These scholars seem to be on the same page on the role of strategic leaders in enabling organisations to adapt amid dynamic business environments. This argument is supported by Mubarak & Yusoff (2019) by stating that the decision of strategic leaders helps the organization to adapt.

The term organisational culture has been very often in organisations. Therefore, it is important to indicate what it entails which is shared values, beliefs and assumptions which are often reflected in the behaviour of the organisation (Carvalho et al., 2019). The culture of an organisation has a direct impact on the success or the failure of strategy implementation. The good or fit culture will enable strategy implementation while bad culture will inhibit effective strategy implementation (Olaka et al., 2017). According to Sull & Sull (2015), the organisational culture that supports strategy implementation must encourage willingness to experiment which is core to agility, teamwork and ambition.

In the study by Crittenden & Crittenden (2008) found that the existence of positive organisational culture enabled the implementation of strategic initiatives and strategy implementation. Strategic leaders have the role to define, introduce, teach and most importantly be the embodiment of organisational culture in the organisation (Mubarak & Yusoff, 2019). Furthermore, the strategic leaders create and sustain the organisational culture that supports strategy implementation (Boal, 2007; Cortes & Hermann, 2021). Therefore, strategic leaders must be intentional in setting the tone on the organisational culture that will enable strategy implementation and adaptive strategy implementation. The success of adaptive strategy implementation, strategic thinking, innovation and growth in organisations largely depends on the organisational culture.

According to Tawse & Tabesh (2021) strategic leaders contribute towards the improvement of organizational. The implementation of strategies requires continuous improvement, identifying flaws and developing improvement strategies (Mubarak & Yusoff, 2019). The strategic leaders being intentional in driving accountability will enhance the ability to respond to changes in the environment while retaining strategy implementation. The aspect of accountability must start from the top management and be cascaded to the rest of the organisation.

The role of the strategic leaders is not only limited to identifying and hiring great talent and skills but to create a conducive environment that allows their staff to innovate think creatively

and utilize their creative capital (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2008). Furthermore, Boal & Schultz (2007) support the argument that strategic leaders have the role of influencing organisations towards the path of adaptation and innovation through creating a conducive environment. Therefore, the role of strategic leaders is not only to hire great talent but to create conducive environment for innovation and adaptation in the implementation process. The conducive organisational environment encourages the employees to explore ideas and be part of finding solutions in strategy implementation.

The allocation of resources entails the use of money, people and capabilities in an organisation (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2008). The resources in an organisation are not only limited to money, people and capabilities but can also include organisational capital, human resource capital and physical capital. In the adaptation of strategies where some strategic choices have to be made the strategic leaders need to know how to allocate and re-assign resources (Mubarak & Yusoff, 2019).

The recent study by Schaedler et al. (2022) has shown that the strategic leaders have a central role guiding the organisations in the time of uncertainty, ambiguity and time-pressures. This study was focused mainly on the role of strategic leaders in the time of organisational crises. The crises in the organisation may require the need to adapt the organisational strategy. Therefore, the strategic leaders are expected to play a leading role in navigating the organisations through the crises. This assertion is in agreement with Boal (2004) that strategic leadership makes sense of and gives meaning to the environmental turbulence, and provides a vision and roadmap that allows the organisation to evolve and innovate.

In navigating the organisational challenges, changes and predicaments, the strategic leaders need to find ways of soliciting buy-in from their teams and employee (Mubarak & Yusoff, 2019). This is a critical function that Uhl-Bien & Arena (2018) argues that enabling leaders create adaptive space through sponsorship of ideas. In the study by Ahearne et al. (2014) the aspect of social capital has been found to be critical in soliciting buy-in from the middle managers. Therefore, strategic leaders have to invest time and resources to win hearts and minds of their teams as this is imperative for adaptive strategy implementation.

2.9 Attributes of strategic leaders

According to Samimi et al. (2020) attributes refers to skills, traits and characteristics of strategic leaders. The successful implementation of the strategy depends on the richness of the skills and competencies that the strategic leaders possess (Mubarak & Yusoff, 2019). This

study has used the term attributes talk to skills and competencies that strategic leaders possess in enabling adaptive strategy implementation.

The study by Samimi et al. (2020) have identified managerial cognition, charisma, power and motivation as well as managerial knowledge as some of the critical attributes that the strategic leaders need to have in order to drive strategy implementation. This study has made an invitation for researchers to examine and explore the characteristics of strategic leaders. This has given an indication that the characteristics of the strategic leaders have not been thoroughly explored. However, there is acknowledgement that the characteristics of the CEOs as the critical strategic leader in the organisations have been explored. Since the CEO is not leading as an individual, it is imperative to study explore the characteristics of the strategic leaders (i.e. CEO and the top management team).

The study on the role of strategic leaders in organisational crisis by Schaedler et al. (2022) developed a conceptual framework on the characteristics of strategic leaders. The characteristics included power, personality, values, social capital, human capital, appearance, cognition and financial incentives. The limitation with these conceptual framework is that it is focused on the characteristics of strategic leaders in the time of crisis.

The dynamic managerial capabilities as stated by Tawse & Tabesh (2021), includes managerial capabilities (i.e. cognitive control), managerial social capital (i.e. ability to influence others) and managerial human capital (i.e. knowledge, experience, education and skills).

These attributes have been summed-up in the broader themes of power, personality, values, cognition, social capital and appearance. The lack and abundance of these attributes may positively or negatively affect the success of the organisation.

2.10   Challenges of strategic leaders

Strategic leaders are faced with challenges of driving organisational adaptability due to changing and uncertain business environments (Uhl-bien & Arena, 2018). Shulze & Pinkow (2020) states that the leadership of the organisation must pay attention to dynamic, distributed and contextual aspects of the business in order to enable organisations to adapt.

The rising uncertainly, increasing volatility, increasing complexity and increasing volatility makes it extremely necessary for the leaders to drive flexibility and adaptation of strategies (Vuorinen et al., 2018 and Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). The study by (Uhl-bien & Arena, 2017)

has stated that the leaders are faced with the challenge of driving organisational adaptability and enabling people to cope with changes and uncertainty.

In the organisational studies research, there is fairly a good understanding on how leaders enable organisations for productivity and performance. However, there is still a lack of understanding on how the leaders enable people, systems, and structures for organisational adaptability (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). In addition, according to Weiser et al, 2020), the management has not gotten the full grasp on how to account for strategy adaptation from the conceptualisation of a strategic implementation plan.

This section has identified the definition of strategic leadership in the context of this study, articulated strategic leaders functions, attributes and challenges that the leaders may face in leading different firms.

Chapter 3: Research questions

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 builds on the solid foundation that has been established in Chapter 2 through reviewing literature relating to adaptive strategy implementation, strategic leadership, and strategy implementation tools. The literature that has been reviewed has shown that there is still a research gap in the phenomenon of adaptive strategy implementation and the role of strategic leaders.

The literature has looked at the role of strategic leaders, the attributes that strategic leaders need to possess and the tools that they can use in enabling adaptive strategy implementation. The aim of this study is to explore the understanding of the role of strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation. This study has accepted research invitations from Weiser et al. (2020) as strategy management scholars and Uhl-Bien & Arena (2017) as leadership scholars. This research study brings together the strategy management and organisational leadership research domains to enrich the phenomenon that is under investigation.

In responding to the literature review analysed, the research question that has emerged is as follows:

> What is the role of the C-suite level strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy

To assist in answering this important research question, this study has identified and outlined three sub-questions which are as follows:

3.2 Research question 1

What are the functions of the strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation?

This question was intended to uncover insights on the functions of strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation. The value in gaining such insights was to assist strategic leaders and organisations to be aware of the role that they must play enable adaptive strategy implementation. The insights from this question will contribute answering what strategic leaders do.

3.3 Research question 2

What are the attributes that C-suite level need to have to enable adaptive strategy implementation?

This question was intended to identify skills and competencies that C-suite level strategic leaders need to have to enable adaptive strategy implementation. The skills and competencies of strategic leader have a role to either stifle or enable successful adaptive strategy implementation. The value-add of identifying the required skills will be raising awareness and challenging the leaders to invest in the skills that will be identified. The insights form this question will contribute to answering the question of how strategic leaders should be.

3.4 Research question 3

How are strategy implementation tools enabling adaptive strategy implementation?

This question was intended to explore the familiarity of the C-suite level with the existing strategy implementation tools. It has emerged from literature that practitioners are still skeptical in using strategy implementation tools. Therefore, this question was meant to identify the strategy implementation tools that practitioners use, reasons they use or not use and how have the strategy implementation tools have enable adaptive strategy implementation.

3.5 Conclusion

These three research questions have been carefully chosen and crafted to assist with exploring the insights on the role of strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation. This chapter highlighted the research questions to be explored in advancing the understanding of the role of strategic leader in enabling adaptive strategy implementation.

The next chapter provides the details and explains the research methodology selected for the study, the data collection, sampling, data analysis techniques and how will the quality be maintained to ensure validity and reliability of the study.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide insights into the approach that was taken in choosing the research methodology, the detailed research design and outlined research limitations considered. It further intends to provide details on the choices taken to be able to respond to the research questions outlined in Chapter 3 of this study.

4.2 Choice of methodology

4.2.1   Philosophy

According to Bell et al. (2019) among other factors the qualitative research takes the view that individuals participating in a research study have influence on the social reality. Hence, the qualitative research largely depends on the understanding and interpretation of the participants based on their world view and perception (Bell et al., 2019). It entails three aspects which are the observation of participants, interviews and analysis of the interviews (Bell et al., 2019). This study aims to explore the world view of the participants on adaptive strategy implementation looking at functions, attributes and strategy tools. Therefore, the qualitative research philosophy was deemed fit to enable the researcher to explore the participants' lived experiences and perceptions on adaptive strategy implementation.

4.2.2   Approach

According to Saunders et al. (2016) interpretivism research philosophy helps researchers to achieve their research goals through examining the details, reality and subjective meanings that are driving certain human actions. This has been complemented by Bell et al. (2019) where they stated that interpretivism addresses the reasons and approaches of social action. Furthermore, they have stated that it differs with positivism because it advocates for the application of natural sciences methods to the studies of social reality. The challenge with positivism is that it does not take into consideration the context under which social reality takes place. In the context of this study, the suitable research approach is interpretivism which will explore the lived realities of participants in adaptive strategy implementation.

4.2.3 Methodological choices

The recent study by Schulze & Pinkow (2020) explored leadership for organisational adaptability which is a similar study. The methodology that they have used was qualitative research design. and they used the qualitative research design. The other studies that were found to be similar were conducted (Splitter et al., 2021 and Mirabeau & Maguire, 2013) and they have used the qualitative research design. In the light of these similar studies that had research aims questions similar to this study, the researcher has chosen to follow the qualitative approach. This study conducted research interviews, transformed the recordings into text through the services of a transcriber and the researcher thematically analysed the results.

4.2.4 Purpose of research design

The literature review in Chapter 2 has built a solid case that adaptive strategy implementation phenomenon is in need of new research insights to find space in the research conversation. Furthermore, the role of strategic leaders has been defined from a generic perspective not relation to adaptive strategy implementation. In responding to these significant gap, the exploratory research design was deemed to be suitable to unearth relevant and insights in adaptive strategy implementation. According to Saunders et al. (2018), the benefit of exploratory research design is that it unearths new research insights.

4.2.5 Research strategy

In this study the participants shared their personal accounts, lived experiences, perceptions and views on the functions of strategic leaders in adaptive strategy implementation. They were also able to narrate the areas that they have not been able to do well as leaders.

In defining the research strategy, the submission by Saunders et al. (2018) stated that narrative inquiry encourages participants to share their events, actions, sequencing of events and connection. This strategy is called narrative enquiry and is deemed appropriate when the aim is to allow participants to share their insights based on where they have been exposed to. It was these background that made the researcher to considered narrative enquiry as a relevant strategy for this study.

4.2.6   Time Horizon

This research aimed to study adaptive strategy implementation as a phenomenon in a particular point in time. It does not look at the trend analysis but where the participants were at in a particular period of time. According to Saunders et al. (2018) cross-sectional research studies phenomenon in a particular point in time. This articulation is aligned to the aim of this research which is to give a moment in time of adaptive strategy implementation. The research interviews were conducted over the period of six weeks where 18 participants were interviewed based on the approach and strategy of this study.

4.3 Research design

4.3.1   Population

According to Saunders et al. (2018) a research population entails the set of cases from which the sample is sourced from. The population of the study was identified as individuals who held executive roles in the private sector. The strategic leaders in the context of this study was regarded as Chief Executive Officers, top management team (i.e. Chief Financial Officers, Chief Operating Officers, Chief People Officers, Executives, Managing Directors, Directors and Senior Managers) and General Managers.

The requirements for the participants were that they should be holding the strategic leadership roles in the private sector. Furthermore, these individuals were expected to have been involved in the implementation of the company strategy or strategic initiatives. This study assumed that if the strategic leader was involved in the strategy implementation, they would have a fair understanding of strategy implementation.

The additional requirement was that the participants should have been in the company for at least a period of two years. The rationale for this requirement was that they would have participated in the strategy implementation. As stated in Chapter 2 that adaptive strategy implementation finds its roots in strategy implementation, their participation in strategy implementation would have given them insights about adaptive strategy implementation.

In meeting these requirements, this population was deemed to be relevant to share insights on adaptive strategy implementation. Lastly, this study was not particular about an industry from which to source the population. As a result of this the sample was sourced from diverse industries.

4.3.2   Unit and level of analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was the individual strategic leaders and the level of analysis was individuals' experience in adaptive strategy implementation. The objective was to access their insights, views and perceptions on their role in enabling adaptive strategy implementation.

4.3.3   Sampling method and size

The purposive sampling which is a non-probability sampling method as it allows the selection of units which perhaps people, organisations, departments, and etc that will best address the research questions that have been asked (Saunders et al., 2018 and Bell et al., 2019). The non-probability sampling is more suitable for the exploratory studies as it focuses on a small number of cases and provides the research with insights-rich case studies (Saunders et al., 2018).

The aim of this study was not to develop a theory but sought to contribute to the body of knowledge in adaptive strategy implementation based on the research gap identified through literature review conducted. This is in alignment with gaining deep-insights from participants as mentioned by Flick (2018).

The participants that were interviewed were knowledgeable and informed about strategy implementation and they provided meaningful insights. Furthermore, strategy management and strategic leadership literature indicated that the role of the C-suite Level strategic leaders is to provide strategic direction and strategic decision to organisation. Therefore, the participants were selected on the basis of their roles and positions in their organisations. Their tittles were indicative of the role that they play in the organisation.

According to Palinkas et al. (2015) the purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research as it provides depth in the phenomenon that is under investigation. In addition, the participants in the purposive sampling should be knowledgeable, experienced and have the ability to deeply reflect on the phenomenon of interest which in this study is adaptive strategy implementation (Palinkas et al., 2015 and Flick, 2018). The selection of the participants was therefore deliberate to ensure that they are knowledgeable, experienced and could share insights in their strategy implementation journey.

Bell et al. (2019) has not specifically recommended a number of the participants that must be interviewed for the qualitative research but mainly emphasised the importance of reaching saturation. Then again Saunders et al. (2018) recommended minimum of 12 participants and maximum of 30 participants in the purposive sampling. The recommendation concerning this that the sample did not have to be too small to be able to draw conclusions or be too large which can make it difficult to analyse (Bell et al., 2019). This point is noble looking at several factors such as the availability of the participants, the period at which this study is expected to be collected and the possible volume of data that the interviews will generate.

This study took into consideration saturation argument and the recommended sample size minimum. This study conducted eighteen semi-structured interviews which were scheduled for sixty minutes each. The rationale for sixty minutes was influenced by availability and tight schedules of the C-suite level participants. However, the sixty minutes was used efficiently to build rapport with the participants and still be able to extract meaningful research insights.

4.3.4   Data collection process

Saunders et al. (2018) stated that semi-structured interviews in an exploratory study provides understanding on the phenomenon being studied and its contextual setting. In the light of this assertion, semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with an opportunity to deeply probe and challenge the participants to deeply reflect on their responses. The probing and challenging was done within the parameters of ethics and respect.

The other view on semi-structured interviews by Bell et al. (2019) alludes to the fact that the semi-structured interview allows the researcher to have an open mind on the subject that is under investigation.

The study ensured that data was collected from the heterogeneous sample to benefit from the diversity of the sample. The elements that were considered for the sample were gender, industry, race and lived experience in strategy implementation. In the data collection process, ninety four percent of the participants were black with only 6 percent being white. Although the focus was not a certain race, it could also be insightful to observe how different leaders approach adaptive strategy implementation.

The initially planned instrument for the data collection was the in-person semi-structured interviews with participants. The challenge that was encountered was the in-person availability

of the C-suite level leaders due to their tight schedules. As a result all research interviews were adapted to be virtual interviews. This was a classic example of adaptation.

The participants were comfortable to switch on their videos during the interviews which still emulated an in-person connection. It was only a few participants who had to switch off their video camera to stabilise network connectivity. Microsoft Teams and Zoom were used for the semi-structured interviews. The participants were given an opportunity to choose which platform they preferred for the interviews. Three out of 18 participants chose Zoom while the rest chose Microsoft Teams. The interviews were recorded via these platforms which made the recording easier and reliable.

4.3.5   Data analysis approach

The data that was collected form the participants was analysed, presented and discussed in response to the research questions outlined in Chapter 3. The large data was generated due to the duration of the interviews and the number of the participants that were interviewed (Bell et al., 2019).

The approach that was followed was the iterative approach which encouraged the analysis of the data before the completion of the interview process. This was helpful in the refining of the interview questions without changing the context of the questions but to make them clearer.

The data analysis was conducted iteratively given the fact that the data collection followed a semi-structured interview process. The thematic analysis approach that helped to identify, analyse, identify and report the results was applied in this study. Thematic analysis is an approach that seeks to identify, analyse and report patterns across cases (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2020). This approach was applied to critically analyse and interpret and making meaning out of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2018).

The six step approach that was developed by Braun & Clarke (2006) have been followed to conduct thematic analysis of data. The detailed steps and actions taken are detailed in Table 3

Table 3: Thematic Analysis Approach

Step	Actions taken
Step 1 - Familiarising yourself with data	The data collected through structure interviews was transcribed by the third party. To be familiar with the information and insights in the transcribed data, the researcher frequently listened to the recordings of

Step	Actions taken
	the interviews. The high level hand written notes were taken during the interviews.
Step 2 - Generating codes	The transcribed interviews that were translated into text were loaded on Atlas.ti. The researcher conducted the initial coding of the data to make meaning out of the data that was loaded on Atlas.ti. The first codes were generated and the codebook was generated to interrogate the codes on Excel spreadsheet. Following this, the second codes were generated excellently due to being able to engaging the generated code book on Excel.
Step 3 - Searching for themes	The meaning from the code was created through putting together the similar and related codes.
Step 4 – Revising the themes	The themes were revised against the research questions to ensure that there was proper alignment. In this process, there was one theme that was moved from the role of strategic leaders to the attributes of C-suite level leaders. In some instances the researcher was required to listen to some of the recordings again to confirm the theme allocations.
Step 5 – Defining and naming themes	The naming of themes was not complicated due to the rigorous processes that preceded this step. The themes were then tied to the research questions to enable the analysis and report writing process.
Step 6 - Report writing	The reporting of the data followed the sequence of the research questions. It was reported in line with the themes that emanated from data. The reporting followed the research questions in the results and research discussion chapters.

Source (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.3.6 Reliability and validity

To ensure reliability and validity of the study different strategies were applied throughout the research process. The instrument of measurement that was chosen was aligned to the research questions used to collect data.

4.3.6.1 Data saturation

In order to ensure reliability, the researcher ensured consistency of application in terms of determination of the codes. The determination of codes was very exhaustive due to the amount of data collected from participants. The different perspectives from the participants led to reaching saturation from the data as there was no further meaning that could be derived.

The categories were developed by building a relationship between the codes. According to Saunders et al. (2018) the up to-date definition of the categories maintains the consistency in application. The categories were refined as meaning was derived from the data. This led to categories reducing from 30 to 27 codes. Upon the establishment of the code groups, the themes were then developed. An understanding of the literature assisted in shaping and naming the themes.

4.3.6.2   Research quality and rigour

The qualitative research is not evaluated like the quantitative research and thus it is subjected to a different criterion. The qualitative research must meet credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability criterion to be regarded as quality research (Bell et al, 2019). The purpose of these four elements is to ensure that qualitative research is reliable and trustworthy.

Flick (2019) explains "credibility as the activities for increasing the likelihood that credible results will be produced by a prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field of and the triangulation of different methods, research and data"p.548. This explanation indicates that the researcher must endeavour to ensure that the research results are credible. According to Bell et al. (2019) the aspect of credibility acknowledges that there can be several possible accounts of a social reality. To ensure credibility the researcher will ground the findings on data and avoid premature conclusions.

The qualitative research results are not mainly concerned with generalisation but transferability due to the fact that it mainly studies a small group of individuals who have depth on specific subjects (Bell et al., 2019). The adaptive strategy implementation has not been fully explored as indicated in the literature review. Therefore, this study will aim to produce the results that are transferrable to other contexts such as the role of public sector strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation.

The record keeping on all the phases of research process such as participants selection, notes, recordings and interview transcripts should be kept in order dependability (Bell et al., 2019). Flick (2019) encourages the researchers to implement an audit trail approach to increase dependability of the research results. The recording of the interview and transcripts will be kept.

The challenge of the qualitative research is demonstrating total objectivity. The aspect of objectivity can be confirmed through showing that researcher did not allow personal values, assumptions and inclinations to influence the results of the research (Bell et al., 2019).

4.3.6.3   Ethical considerations

The data collection process was conducted within the confines of ethical standards of research. The participants were informed about their rights to voluntarily participate in the study and the right to withdraw from the study should they not feel comfortable to continue. The informed research consent was shared with the participants and discussed before the research interview could commence. The researcher took the responsibility to maintain an honest account of the participant's views throughout the data analysis (Bell et al., 2019).

The lack of adherence to ethical considerations may cast some doubts on the research findings. The four critical elements that were taken into consideration were harm to participants, informed consent, invasion to privacy and deception (Bell et al., 2019). Each of the four elements will be described in a little detail in the following section.

4.3.6.3.1 Avoidance of harm

The issue of harm to participants is regarded to be unacceptable and harm can take different forms such as physical harm and emotional harm (Saunders et al., 2016 & Bell et al., 2019). The choice of words that the researcher used in exploring further the perceptions of the participants were carefully chosen to ensure that there is no harm to the participants' emotions. In addition, the exploration questions avoided any situation that could pursue the participants to share company's sensitive information as they were giving examples. Lastly, the researcher endeavoured to respect the participants regardless of their religious, sexual orientation, race and gender. The participants who had promised to be available for the research interview and later were no longer available were not pursued further.

4.3.6.3.2 Informed consent

The participants were given information regarding the nature of the study and the purpose of the study before they could participate in the research interviews (Bell et al., 2019). Furthermore, the informed consent forms were shared with the participants in advance but were still discussed in the beginning of the interview. The participants and the researcher signed the informed consent after the interviews.

The first few interviews took a little bit longer but as the researcher became more familiar with conducting interviews the research interviews were more shorter and within the agreed timelines. The permission was sought in cases where there was a need as suggested by Saunders et al. (2018).

4.3.6.3.3 Privacy and POPIA

The right to privacy entails the need to protect the privacy of the research participants (Bell et al., 2019). The right to privacy of the participants was respected throughout the interview process. The interviews were conducted via Zoom and Microsoft Teams which also made it easier to record the interviews. The names of the participants were anonymised in reporting of research results to adhere to confidentiality and anonymity principles as (Saunders et al., 2016).

4.3.6.3.4 Deception

The views and perceptions of the participants were maintained as recorded in the transcripts to avoid any form of deception. There was no areas of possible conflict of interest in the research process which could threaten the reliability of the research results. The researcher maintained high levels of honesty throughout the research process and did not misrepresent the views of participants to drive the results to pre-conceived conclusions.

4.3.7   Research limitations

The study reflected insights from the perspectives of C-level strategic leaders based in different organisation. The senior management levels and the employees from the same organisations may hold different perspectives due to their own experiences on the similar study. The results of this study cannot be generalised from a sample population.

4.3.7.1 Researcher bias

The researcher as a tool in collection of data was not trained to professionally conduct interviews although his experience as life coach was helpful in asking questions, probing and paraphrasing during the research interviews. The research findings and discussions were based on the understanding, interpretation and analysis of the researcher. This simply acknowledges that the other research might reach a different interpretation and conclusion.

The stature and calibre of the participants placed some level of pressure to the researcher given their limited time and positions they held in companies that they lead and industry influence they had. The researcher ensured that this does not influence the interview, interpretation and analysis of the results to avoid biasness.

4.3.7.2 Selection bias

The study was conducted with the C-suite level leaders that were perceived to be relevant for the adaptive strategy implementation. These C-suite level leaders were from different companies and industries. However, due to snowballing sampling most of the participants were sourced from the financial services sector.

4.3.7.3 Geographic bias

The study was conducted with strategic leaders who were leading companies that were based in Gauteng province except for one strategic leader who was based in Western Cape province. This presents a possible geographic bias.

4.4   Conclusion

The rationale for the chosen research methodology, the pursuit of maintaining research validity and reliability and study limitations have been described in detail. The researcher has articulated the process that was followed to gather data and how this valuable data was analysed to inform the critical succeeding three chapters focusing on results, discussion and recommendations that have been established.

Chapter 5: Results

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 presents key findings of the interviews conducted by the researcher with 18 participants who have been referred as strategic leaders. This section begins with details of the interviewed participants (informants) and provides information towards a better understanding of the background and context of the interviews conducted. This is followed by a qualitative analysis of the results of each research question where the key themes emerged from the participants' responses and supported by insightful quotations are presented.

5.2 Sample description and context

The research interviews were conducted with 18 participants from 17 different companies. The sample consisted of eight female and 10 male executives. The roles that the participants played in their respective companies have been stated and where the tittle might be traceable it has been amended to ensure that the principle of confidentiality is not broken. The participants were involved in the strategy implementation as the heads of companies, members of the top management team or heads of strategies in their companies.

The name of the executives have been anonymised in line with the undertakings made to maintain confidentiality of the participants. In cases where the name of the company was mentioned in the quotations, the amendment was applied to ensure confidentiality. The mentioning of the company name in the quotations was used as an example because the participants were mainly sharing from their personal experiences not necessarily as a representation of the company for which they worked.

The participants were executives from industries including financial services sector, information communication and technology, aviation, consulting, services, mining, bio-technology and the FMCG. The participant from the financial services dominated the sample. The industry diversities gifted this study with the different insights based on the industry backgrounds even though industry was not the focus of this study.

Table 4: Description of participants

Participant	Tittle	Gender	Industry	Staff component
Participant 1	Chief Strategist	Female	FMCG	800
Participant 2	Chief Financial Officer	Female	Aviation	360

Participant	Tittle	Gender	Industry	Staff component
Participant 3	Executive Head: Strategy	Female	Financial Services	
Participant 4	Group Chief Executive Officer	Male	Services	2500
Participant 5	Chief Information Officer	Male	Financial services	3500
Participant 6	Chief Executive Officer	Female	Financial services	10
Participant 7	Chief Executive Officer	Male	Mining	103
Participant 8	Chief Operating Officer	Female	Financial services	458
Participant 9	Chief Executive Officer	Male	Property	120
Participant 10	Board Chairperson	Male	Financial Services	2000
Participant 11	Managing Director	Male	Advisory and consulting services	12
Participant 12	Managing Director	Female	Bio-technology	100
Participant 13	Country Lead: Strategy and Planning	Female	FMCG	7000
Participant 14	Head of Global Services*	Male	Financial services	1819
Participant 15	Group Executive	Male	Financial services	4500
Participant 16	Chief Executive Officer	Male	Financial services	1819
Participant 17	Chief Executive Officer	Female	ICT	338
Participant 18	Chief Executive Officer	Female	Financial Services	40

*the tittle was amended due to it not being unique and can be easily traced.

5.3 Introductory questions

The executives were asked two introductory questions. The first introductory question was for them to share their leadership journey and the second sought to capture the participants' understanding of adaptive strategy implementation. The question on their leadership journey provided some assurance that the participants were indeed strategic leaders. While second question which was focused on adaptive strategy implementation surfaced the fair understanding of adaptive strategy implementation. The participants demonstrated a fair understanding of adaptive strategy implementation.

> 'And so for me, adaptive strategy implementation is having clarity on that
> particular set of programmes by the drivers that impact your programme,
> and then being able to change them as the world around you changes. So,
> it requires a certain level of flexibility within you move to ultimately meet your
> goal" Participant 01

Another participant brought out several elements such as dynamic strategy and being agile in executing the strategy. One of the participants stated that they refer to their strategy as adaptive and dynamic strategy.

'And the third and most important and critical element around a dynamic and adaptive strategy for us is around, how agile are we in our execution of strategy? Participant 03

The participants have demonstrated an understanding of adaptive strategy implementation, which gave confidence to engage with the participants on the interview questions.

5.4 Results: Research question 1

> **Research question 1**
> What are the functions of strategic leaders in adaptive strategy implementation?

5.4.1   Introduction

This question explored the perspectives of the participants on their understanding of the functions of strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation. Furthermore, the question sought to find out the role that the C-Level strategic leaders played to enable adaptive strategy implementation.

5.4.2   Create an enabling organisational culture

The organisational culture has emerged as a critical enabler for adaptive strategy implementation. This theme has particularly been emphasised the strategic leaders who are Chief Executive Officers. The role that strategic leaders play is to ensure that they define the organisational culture and lead by example to infuse the desired organisational culture.

The participants unanimously shared similar sentiments that the strategic leaders must be the ambassadors of the culture that enables adaptive strategy implementation.

> *'Firstly, you are the culture ambassador of an organisation and you probably play a very important role in terms of being a change agent" Participant 18*

It also emerged that the strategic leaders must not only sit in the boardrooms and develop the organisational culture. They must endeavour to involve the employees in developing the culture that will enable strategy implementation. This will make it easier to hold everyone accountable for the culture that they have agreed upon. In one instance the participant

acknowledged that at some point he had hired a person who was not fit for the culture of the organisation. He had to be courageous and fire the person because the new hire was simply not a culture fit.

> 'Because, once we finished the strategy, we all go down to what culture is going to drive this thing, and we all agree to which culture that will be. Then we just simply go and hold people accountable to the values and the culture that they decided that we must have" Participant 09

The type of culture that enables adaptive strategy implementation is a culture that is agile and conducive for the employees to be innovative. In addition, if the culture is in an organisation is toxic, critical staff may leave, especially the high performers.

> 'If the culture is not conducive, if the culture is not agile, if the culture does not allow for fertile ground for strategy execution and adaptation, the organisation will fail without a doubt". Participant 05

> 'I have left organisations because I would say, this culture, I do not identify with it and this organisation is not going to succeed, I am out of here, I do it" Participant 05

The other role of strategic leaders is to create the learning organisation where the employees know that it is acceptable to experiment and to fail. The permission to fail does not mean the employees are allowed to deliver mediocre performance. The other finding relating to this is that companies that are generally driven by compliance do not encourage the fail-fast environment.

> 'So, first is to create a culture that says, it is okay to be wrong. We are not machines, we are not robots. Number two, create a culture where failing is not only allowed but it is encouraged, because the person that has never failed is a person that has never done anything" Participant 10

> 'If I had a punitive attitude, for example, you're going to find that in my managers. Again, we have no punitive attitude here. We understand people make mistakes, we correct it, but I tell you, if you make the same mistake more than twice, then we have a conversation" Participant 12

It also emerged especially from the participants based in both the financial services and technology that strategic leaders must encourage a culture of constant innovation, learning and improvement through removing the fear of failure and a punitive culture. One participant recalled an experience in their previous company that was compliance driven that there was no opportunity to experiment or innovate. The lack of an open-door policy for innovation has the ability to stifle creativity, especially where the company has a large number of youngsters who are not used to the traditional ways of working.

> *'During the time of the former CEO, the one thing he was famous for, or known for, was his open door policy to say that innovation and strategy, yes, we can come up with a strategy as leaders, but then innovative ways in most cases come from youngsters or people who don't know the traditional way of doing things, they just know what they know at the age that they are at."* Participant 08

> *'What I have seen in my experience is, those leaders that are reluctant to be decisive, it's because the culture is not enabling and receptive of fail-fast mindset, and the Modise Foundation was once such an example where it told you here we make policy decisions that impact the company so we don't have a fail-fast. You cannot fail"* Participant 03

Further, strategic leaders need to cultivate a culture of holding each other accountable as the C-suite level strategic leaders. They need to hold each other accountable for the commitments they make, bad organisational results and accountable for their responsibilities. This is the culture that demonstrates leading by example when it comes to accountability and honest feedback. The strategic leaders need to allow their employees to give them honest feedback so that they are able to improve. This should be encouraged to become the culture that is acceptable in the organisation.

> *'I am not just accountable for my space, but I allow my fellow Exco members to hold me accountable and call me out. I will have the trust that you are not calling me out because it is personal"* Participant 03

> *'Every single year I do a survey on every single leader in the business, including me. So mine goes out first. How are you experiencing me as a leader? And people have learnt to be open and honest with me. They tell me things that I do not necessarily like to hear sometimes, but I take it and I*

go back, and I say to people that I work with on a holistic basis, these are
the things that you said that I must work on". Participant 09

An interesting addition was made by Participant 05 to the common phrase "culture eats strategy for breakfast". They said "culture eats strategy for breakfast, lunch, desserts, dinner and everything in between".

5.4.3   Communication for strategy

Other critical findings that have emerged from the participants relate to the need for simple, clear and relevant communication, timely and transparent communication, and intentional and continuous communication.

5.4.3.1   Simple, clear and relevant communication

A finding from several participants was that the success of adaptive strategy implementation rests on the ability of the leadership to communicate in simple, clear and relevant manner to the various teams in the organisation. The ability to make strategy relatable, simplified and communicating across different levels of stakeholders is non-negotiable. The sense that really consistently emerged from most of the participants is that it is better to over-communicate than to under-communicate. However, Participant 13 raised a concern that communication must be relevant to the intended stakeholders. Soliciting buy-in, creating certainty and wining hearts and minds towards adaptive strategy implementation are some of the advantages of communicating effectively.

> *'Firstly, clearly defining what is our big ambitious, relevant purpose that the*
> *people can connect with it and communicate that clearly"* Participant 10

> *'So people on the ground if they don't have a bigger picture of what the*
> *organisation is trying to achieve this year, they will not be able to link every*
> *work that they do to the overall strategy".* Participant 07

5.4.3.2   Timely and transparent communication

Timely and transparent communication featured predominantly as one of the pillars that are important after simple and relevant communication. The timely communication emphasised that any change needed to be shared with the organisation without any delay. The delay in sharing the changes may lead to the loss of trust from the leaders. The participants were in

agreement that transparent communication is key regardless of the news that had to be shared with the organisation. The participants made a resounding contribution that the leaders must create an environment where they can talk about anything and where there is nothing hidden from the organisation.

> "*I think in certain instances, when something transpires, people are reluctant to communicate. By the time you try to communicate, it is by the time you communicate something that happened ages ago and the perception is then, why are you only communicating now? And what else are you communicating now that transpired so long ago*" Participant 13

> '*We speak to employees in terms of transparency around where we are without strategy execution and where we need rigour being applied, and just also to drive that overall coherence across the organisation to say*" Participant 03

One of the CEOs participants shared a story about how they had changed the culture of "information confidentiality" by the Executive Committee. It is also interesting that this participant is one that does not believe in the use of strategy implementation tools but transparent communication. The strategy implementation tools will be discussed under research question 3.

5.4.3.3   Intentional continuous and frequent communication

The Covid-19 pandemic has heightened the importance of intentional and frequent communication in the organisations. The participants indicated that they have been intentional create channels such as monthly town-halls, staff meetings, monthly staff communication, war rooms, WhatsApp group to ensure that there is frequent communication. It may look like it is time consuming but is a necessity if the leaders have to enable adaptive strategy implementation.

> '*So, for instance when we started with strategy implementation, I was the main driver sending out communication, opening myself up to questions because we have monthly team meetings, so I would be there to answer any questions*". Participant 18

'So, if there is a need, a change required, people move very quickly because there is constant communication on different forums. We do not wait to update these big PowerPoint and then have a long meeting to present to everyone. There are regular engagements with staff on weekly meetings".
Participant 15

Several participants who are CEOs made a common point that when people are well-informed, they will go beyond the call of duty when it comes to strategy implementation.

5.4.4   Lead change and adaptation

5.4.4.1   Initiate and own change

The aspect of change management has been found not to be a function of the "change management specialists". The participants seemed to have realised the importance of change management as their responsibility post the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of this, they were in synchrony in articulating the need for strategic leaders initiate, drive and lead change management. Participant 04 and Participant 05 made an example that companies such as Kodak and Musica where strategic leaders did not lead change and adapt. The companies where leaders have been reactive to changes in business have not survived.

'We need to own it and we need to drive it. If it not owned and driven if at a C-level, the level of success for that particular strategy adaptation is almost non-existent" Participant 04

'I think also important that people normally take it or they do not have appreciation for, it is change management. It is not possible to be innovative or adapt when you cannot manage change". Participant 08

5.4.4.2   Executive sponsorship

The success of change management in the organisation depends on the intentional executive sponsorship. The CEO and the top management team must be aligned to effect the anticipated strategy adaptation.

'CEO and his/her team need to sponsor whatever adaptation that needs to happen, because what it does then, it introduces change into the

organisation, and they need to take the lead so that the rest of the organisation might follow" Participant 13

5.4.4.3   Build a clear case for change

One finding indicates that a change in strategy can be perceived as a threat to people's jobs, positions and livelihoods. In the companies where the employees are generally low-skilled, the resistance to strategy tweaking or change is very high to job security uncertainty. The key performance measures and targets in the leaders' scorecard may lead to resistance to change, especially where business units are operating in silos.

Strategic leaders must find a way to make people feel that they are contributing towards that change that is taking place in the organisation. It is also important to drive conversations that will encourage the organisations to be receptive to change. Lastly, leadership must provide a clear and compelling case for change to the strategy of an organisation to avoid uncertainty and resistance to change.

'Creating a case for change is about helping everybody appreciate why things cannot be what they used to be. You need to create a case for change together like that". Participant 01

'My experience is in a particular company was a lot that firstly, resistance to change. We had not sufficiently planned or change management and we found a lot of resistance." Participant 03

5.4.5   Enable collaboration

Another key finding indicates that collaboration between the different stakeholders is determined by the level of clear communication. The participants emphasised the importance of cultivating collaboration because it is an enabler for change management and adaptive strategy implementation. Participant 18 shared a concept called "going to hunt as a pack" that they use in their company. This simply means that every leader of a department must know a little bit about what the other department does. The advantage of this collaborative work has created more business for the company and allowed them to improve their service offerings to the clients.

'When the executives are a good team, understand and collaborate, but then they also do the same with the juniors and it cascades throughout the organisation" Participant 06

'It is called co-creating, co-crafting the strategy together so that every one of the people, when they leave the room, they say, I can see my words here, I can see my expression. I can feel my image in this strategy because this is me. You don't need to go back and sell it to them, because we have developed the strategy". Participant 10

5.4.6 Environmental scanning

The question that was posed to the participants is why it is important to adapt strategies in implementation. The finding that emerged is that there are internal and external reasons that business must adapt their strategies.

'The importance of adapting strategy can be either as a result of the external environment having changed or it can be something very much internal in the organisation" Participant 17

5.4.6.1 External reasons for adapting strategies

The emerging finding is that the leaders must be attuned to changes in the business environment to be able to maintain competitiveness, relevance, and growth in business. It was indicated that the business environment is now about "adapt or die".

'The world changes. So, a business that doesn't adapt its strategy, a business that's not always looking out there to see what's going on, is a business that won't survive. That's just a fact."

The leaders whose companies have a global footprint raised the importance of understanding what is happening in the global market. The example that was cited is the war that has been happening between Russia and Ukraine. Therefore, as a global player leaders must be attuned to those events and adapt their strategies to respond to the impact of global events.

'You operate in an environment which has external factors, and the world is continuously evolving. Your context is continuously changing. Change can disrupt your business if you don't have it appropriately" Participant 15

Changes in a technological environment push businesses to adapt. The finding that emerged is that businesses that are operating in the technological spaces may not have the luxury of having long term strategies due to the nature of the industry they operate in. The nature of industry also determines the approach to adaptive strategy implementation.

'So, for us to remain relevant in a fast-moving technology phase with unproven, yet incredibly valuable technology, we need to be able to adapt. It is a continuous improvement, adjusting the strategy looking at the new products and looking at the new markets" Participant 12

It has emerged that leaders need to be accustomed to the change in the clients' mindsets so that they are able to adapt their strategies accordingly. The participant in the FCMG indicated that they had to discontinue a certain product as it was no longer in demand. Another participant in the financial services indicated that they had to discontinue the financial service product because of how it was perceived in the market.

5.4.6.2 Internal factors for adapting strategies

The emerging finding on the internal factors that the leaders need to be attuned to is the increasing war for talent and the new ways of working post the Covid19 pandemic. In the interview with participant s13 and 14 who happened to work for the same company, they both indicated the need to adapt their people strategy to be able to attract the young people in their company.

'There is also the change in your staff, so you have to be able to adapt your strategy – implementation when your workforce changes" Participant 06

5.4.6.3 Competitiveness

The large participants in this sample came from the financial services and the perception of the participants from the financial services is that competition and competitiveness are the core reasons that strategies must be adapted.

'And if you do not adapt your strategy, you will find you have become behind the curve and being behind the competition" Participant 14

'If you do not adapt, competition is coming to chow your lunch, breakfast, supper, and every snack in between. So, you have to adapt, otherwise you would be gone" Participant 05

5.4.6.4   Role of strategic leaders in leading change

The internal and external factors have provided the idea on the importance of adapting strategies in implementation. In responding to these changes, the emerging finding is that the strategic leaders must continuously conduct

- The strategic leaders must be proactive in identifying the changes and issues in the market so that they are not caught off guard by changes in the market.
- The strategic leaders must be decisive, agile and responsive to changes in the business environment (i.e. internal and external changes).
- The leaders need to keep abreast on the business developments.

5.4.7   Drive strategy implementation

The finding on strategy implementation mainly focuses on two aspects which are the frequency of strategy reviews and implementation. Several participants emphasised that strategic leaders must not only talk about adaptation but should implement the strategy and changes that have been identified.

5.4.7.1   Frequency of strategy review

The question that was posed to the participants was about the frequency of strategy reviews and what was the rationale for the strategy review period. The emerging finding is that participants have mentioned that they had to adapt the review of the strategies especially post Covid-19 era. There are two sentiments that have emerged in the period of strategy review. The first sentiment was that strategies have to be reviewed frequently as the time for long strategies have passed. The period that was suggested by the participants were as follows:

- Monthly review for reporting purposes
- Quarterly review to assess the implementation of the strategy.

- Bi-annually or annually for the major strategy review

> *'So, we have the review pencilled-in regularly every three months. That review is not, lets change the whole strategy" Participant 09*

The second contrary view especially from participant 10 is that strategy review period cannot be a blanket approach. The argument that participant 10 raised is that the nature of the industry will determine the appropriate and relevant strategy review period.

> *'As you formulate a strategy, you need to be clear as to how often you are going to go back to it and review it. Some companies do it once a year and it works for them. Some companies, in a fast-changing environment, they review it once a quarter. Pick a number that is practical and possible" Participant 10*

These participants mainly agree that strategies must be reviewed to be able to pivot whenever it is necessary.

5.4.7.2   Implementation

The finding that has emerged very slightly is that the strategic leaders have to be seized with ensuring that strategy is being implemented. To be successful in adaptive strategy implementation, the leaders must be committed to implementation of the changes that have been identified in the strategy implementation phase. The failure of many strategies is not at their formulation phase but lack of implementation or poor implementation by management. This finding mirrors the literature review that strategy does not fail at formulation but implantation phase.

> *'A beautiful strategy written on paper that is not executable is not a strategy. a leader who cannot push for strategy execution is bound to fail" Participant 05*

> *'Planning is critical but doing is more important because it was great general George Paton wo reminds us that great wars are won by good execution, not just good planning good execution will save even a mediocre plan" Participant 10*

It has emerged that to conducive to adaptation, the strategic leaders have the responsibility to measure performance of the organisation on an on-going basis. This responsibility is directly linked with the frequency of strategy reviews. Participants shared similar perspectives that key performance indicators must be identified to measure performance against strategy.

> *'Once the strategy has been formulated, the next thing is to develop key performance indicators that will be used to measure our performance against the strategy. I would track those on monthly basis. So based on that tracking against targets, I will identify where there are opportunities for improvement" Participant 13*

> *'So for me, it is always being able to measure what you are doing on an -n-going basis using numbers. When you meet as the Executive team, you start looking at factors that influence the numbers" Participant 09*

This theme has indicated that it is critical for the strategic leaders to be intentional in monitoring strategy implementation as this provides early warning on any interventions that may become necessary.

5.4.8   Resource management

Resources are critical to drive strategy adaptation. The changes in strategy may require the resources to be re-allocated from one project to another or resources may have to be mobilised to enable adaptive strategy implementation. Therefore, strategic leaders need to be efficient in managing resources in the organisation. It has emerged that resources are not only limited to physical or capital resources but this may include human resources.

> "*So, making sure that you have got the resources, human resources, financial resources, systems and tools. You have to be intentional about being an enabler of adaptive strategy implementation" Participant 18*

5.5 Summary of the findings of Research Question 1

The findings on Research Question 1 have identified seven strategic roles that leaders have to play to enable strategy implementation. The first four roles namely communication, culture, change management and collaboration seemed to be interrelated. The C-level strategic

leaders need to continually scan the environment and mobilise resources when there are changes in either the internal or external environment.

5.6 Results: Research question 2

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Research question 2

What are the attributes (i.e., skills, experiences, and competencies) that strategic leaders should have to enable adaptive strategy implementation?
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5.6.1   Introduction

The question on the attributes of strategic leaders focused on the skills and competencies of the participants. The intention of this question as to explore the competencies that strategic leaders need to enable adaptive strategy implementation.

This study found four skills that leaders need to have to enable adaptive strategy implementation, namely the ability to communicate, enabling leadership, flexibility, and strategic thinking. These themes will be discussed in the sections below.

5.6.1   Ability to communicate

The key finding is that the ability to communication effectively remains an essential skill that every strategic leader needs to possess. The finding from this study is that communication is a tapestry that is weaved within leadership skills and roles of the strategic leaders.

It has emerged that since adaptive strategy implementation is influenced by the ability to manage change and enable organisational culture. Therefore, the ability to communicate has influence in shaping the culture of the organisation. Furthermore, communication is essential in helping strategic leaders to communicate changes in the strategy of the organisation. The participants were unanimously in sharing this sentiment.

> *'They must be able to communicate those changes with the people that are impacted by those changes" Participant 01*

It has also emerged that the leaders need to use various ways to communicate their messages to the organisation. The ways that emerged are the use of townhalls, staff communications, war-rooms, walking the corridors and storytelling. An observation from the participants is that storytelling has not been the approach that has been used widely in communication.

> *'It is pictorial, it is explanatory, it is simple things that people, everybody in the business can remember. It is stories" Participant 09*

The strategic leaders must invest time, energy, and effort in communicating changes, influencing culture through communication and simplify messages by using various ways of communicating such as storytelling.

5.6.2 Flexibility

The emerging finding is that adaptive strategy implementation requires strategic leaders to be flexible on how they implement strategies given the changing business environments.

> *'Being open-minded and not allowing yourself to be rigid and allowing yourself to have what I called a live strategy document" Participant 17*

The other important aspect that came out on flexibility is that the leaders need to be in the fore front to lead flexibly. This indicates that when leaders are flexible in strategy implementation, they can influence their employees.

> *'As a leader and probably as a decision maker in most cases, if you don't become the pioneer or you do not lead the way in bringing about flexibility, adaptability, dynamic-ness in your area, then your employees or your resources will suffer" Participant 08*

The finding on flexibility of strategic leaders seemed to be related or influenced by the culture that is existing in an organisation. The leaders that are receptive and value to feedback enable organisation.

> *'Being receptive to feedback it just changes the organisation. I really believe so; I have seen it. It changes the organisation because people start giving each other feedback openly" Participant 05*

This finding has indicated that it is critical for the leaders to be flexible on the approach of implementing the strategy without necessarily overhauling the whole strategy. The level of the leaders' flexibility to strategy implementation has the direct influence to create an environment that embraces flexibility in strategy implementation.

5.6.3   Enabling leadership

The role of strategic leaders has been seen as providing leadership instead of driving operations of the business. The finding that emerged from the study is that the strategic leaders hat can enable adaptation must be agile, decisive, courageous, ethical, curious and entrepreneurial. These are some attributes that participants have regarded as important to enable adaptive strategy implementation.

> "*Decisiveness balanced with the ability to adapt. I make a decision today and say guys we are putting this platform and this is where we are going. Three months later, I say modify the platform because this is where the science is going*" Participant 12

The participants that are leading companies that have global footprint and technology industries valued the attributes of agility and being decisive. On the other hand, the participants that are in the financial services harped more on authenticity and being ethical to enable adaptation.

There was a consensus that leadership must be willing to listen to the employees regardless of their positions. The other participants have created listening platforms such as townhalls, planned staff communication and opened their email for staff to share information and insights with them.

> '*So being able to listen to your juniors, I think to me being. Leader is not always a top-down, but it is also a bottom-up approach to be receptive to suggestions on dealing with those changes*" Participant 14

> '*But the eighty percent is to make sure that people feel listed to and consulted, but most importantly heard*". Participant 10

5.7 Summary of the findings of Research Question 2

Research question 2 was focused on identifying the attribute that strategic leaders need to enable adaptive strategy implementation. The findings indicated that the ability to communicate remain a very critical attribute and it has influence on enabling organisational culture. Furthermore, the study found that the strategic leaders must be flexible and have

enabling leadership skills which entails agility, decisive, curiosity, courageous, ethical, empathetic, entrepreneurial, and listening.

5.8 Results: Research question 3

Research question 3
How do strategy implementation tools enable adaptive strategy implementation?

5.8.1   Introduction

The aim of this question was to explore the understanding which tools have they used to implement strategies and which benefits they have derived in using strategy implementation tools.

5.8.2   Strategy implementation tools

The first question that was asked to the participants was "which strategy implementation tools have you used"? This question divided the participants into three different categories. The first category used the tools but they were not aware that they were using them. The second category was aware of the tools that they have used for strategy implementation. The third category was the one that have deliberately chosen not to use the strategy implementation tools.

5.8.2.1 Category 1 - Not sure about the tools

The first response that came from several participants was "what are you referring to when you are talking about strategy implementation tools? They have generally asked for an example and only after an example was provided were they able to talk to some of the strategy implementation tools. They actually struggled to talk to strategy implementation tools. The observation was that strategy implementation tools were not as familiar in practice, especially during the strategy implementation process. In addition, the mention of tools such as PESTEL, SWOT analysis and balanced scorecard in one sentence indicated that there was no clarity on which one was a strategy implementation tool.

> 'Help me, what sort of tools, an maybe these are the things that I use and I
> am not even aware that they are tools" Participant 02

> *'Oooh! You know sometimes you are using a framework but you are not even aware that you are using it. I mean we use SWOT analysis, we use PCG matrix. There has never been like a defined set of matrix. What other frameworks will I use". Participant 13*

Participants 01 and 13 are heads of strategies in their respective companies. Their response indicated that the understanding of the use of strategy implementation tool in practice was still lacking.

5.8.2.2 Category 2 - Used the tools

The emerging finding was that some of the participants in the financial services sector are generally aware of the strategy implementation tools. They did not struggle to mention the tools that they use and the rationale for using the chosen strategy implementation tools.

> *'So, we are using scientrix and what informed scientrix is the fact that it is a group tool that allows visibility from all different companies within the group. To create visibility of where they are in terms of their strategy execution" Participant 03*

5.8.2.3 Category 3 - No usage of strategy implementation tools

The finding that emerged from the third group of participants was that they did not want to use strategy implementation tools. In as much as the participants were not grouped according to their tittle, it is worth noting that most of the participants that did not like using tools were mainly Chief Executive Officers.

The rationale that have emerged from this category of the participants is that tools and frameworks have a way of boxing and limiting adaptive strategy implementation. The emphasis is that they subscribe to simplicity, transparency and visibility of the targets that are being pursued by the organisation. The fact that they do not use tool it does not mean they do not measure performance of the strategy.

5.8.4   Usefulness of strategy tools

The emerging finding from the third category is that the strategy implementation tools are very useful for enabling adaptive strategy implementation. The strategy implementation tools that

have been cited are balanced scorecard, project management tool and Power BI. The most cited strategy implementation tool was the balanced scorecard. The participants have shared several reasons they have found the balanced scorecard in particular as a useful tool for adaptive strategy implementation.

> *'In all honesty balanced scorecard enables you y measure how you are doing against your targets. So, it allows you to have corrective measures if you are behind your targets" Participant 08*

> *'With the balanced scorecard, I find it consistent in how you analyse progress over time. The balanced scorecard is what you will use to assess the implementation of the strategy. I guess that is why most organisations use it" Participant 17*

The participants were further asked if the tools that they have used or chosen to use have they been able them to adapt their strategies. The emerging and resounding finding is that the strategy implementation tools have enabled adaptive strategy implementation.

5.8.5 Benefits derived from using a strategy implementation tool

The importance and benefits of using strategy implementation tools seemed to still be lacking among the participants. Despite this gap that still exists on what are the strategy implementation tools, the participants were able to share several benefits derived from using strategy implementation tools especially the balanced scorecard.

The following benefits were derived from using the balanced scorecard
   a. Enabled measurement of financial and non-financial performance of the organisation.
   b. An easy and user-friendly strategy monitoring tool.
   c. Enabled strategic performance conversation.
   d. Enabled transparency in strategy implementation.
   e. Enabled the prioritisation of strategic imperatives.
   f. Enabled clarifying the targets that the organisation pursued in the strategy.
   g. Enabled measuring performance against the set targets and this led to the development of corrective measures where targets were not achieved.

"The balanced scorecard is easy in that you are able to monitor, it is an easy monitoring tool. I also gives a clear picture of where we are going as an organisation" Participant 02

5.9 Summary of the findings of Research Question 3

The findings of Research Question 3 have indicated that there is still a gap in the utilisation of strategy implementation tools. This study uncovered that there are three perceptions from participants when it comes to strategy implementation tools. Despite these different perspectives, this study was able to identify six benefits of using strategy implementation tools to enable adaptive strategy implementation. The balanced scorecard has been found to be the most popular strategy implementation tool.

5.10   Conclusion

This study has revealed that C-suite strategic level leaders have the seven functions of strategic leaders which are enabling culture, communication, leading change, enabling collaboration, conducting environmental scanning, implementation strategy and managing resources. The attributes that surfaced from the findings are the ability to communicate, flexibility and enabling leadership. The strategic leaders had different perspectives on the use of strategic tools. The tool that has been noted as the popular one was the balanced scorecard.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1   Introduction

This chapter discusses the principal findings that were presented in Chapter 5. The discussion will take an approach that focuses on shedding light on what is known in the literature and what is not known in the literature. The literature that has been reviewed focused mainly on adaptive strategy implementation, strategic leadership, and strategy implementation tools.

The key findings are discussed in detail as per the research questions of this study. The themes that have been identified have gravitated more to the functions of strategic leaders compared to the attributes and the strategy implementation tools. This picture is making sense given the fact that the main question of this study as to explore the role of C-suite level leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation.

6.2   Research question 1 discussion

The findings on the role of strategic leaders entails seven identified areas which are enabling organisational culture, communicating strategy, lead change and adaptation, enable collaboration, environmental scanning, drive implementation and resource management. The sections below will provide the details on each finding.

6.2.1 Create enabling organisational culture

Crittenden & Crittenden (2008) states that there is a direct relationship between culture and strategy implementation. According to Sull et al. (2015) the culture that supports execution embodies the enablers such as agility, teamwork, ambition, and willingness to experiment without fear of failure.

There are four elements that have been found to be important to create an enabling culture namely leadership leading by example, leadership and employee co-creation of culture, agility and learning organisation. These four elements are discussed in detail in the following sections.

6.2.1.1   Leadership leading by example

The finding pointed out that the strategic leaders have a role to play in defining and influencing organisational culture that allows adaptive strategy implementation. This finding is aligned to the literature reviewed on the role of the leadership in setting the tone at the top (Raes et al.,

2021). Their role does not only define the culture but serves to embody the shared values and norms that allows the learning environment. This finding means that the strategic leaders need to embrace walking to the talk and being clear about the type of the culture that the organisation must embrace. This finding emerged very strongly from the participants who are holding role of CEOs, and this makes sense as their responsibility is to create an enabling culture for adaptive strategy implementation.

The finding was consistent with the participants regardless of the size of the companies that they are leading. Therefore, leading by example is role that every strategic leader has to embrace to positively influence their organisational culture. The finding is aligned with what Mubarak and Yusoff (2019) stated that strategic leaders have the role to define, introduce, teach and most importantly be the embodiment of organisational culture in the organisation.

6.2.1.2   Leadership and employee co-creation of culture

The discovery on the co-creation of organisational culture between the leaders and the employees has been found to be very important to create ownership, accountability, and shared responsibility in the strategy implementation. This was only limited to co-creation of culture. However, it also entailed listening leaders so as to ensure that people are heard when they share their criticism and inputs with leadership. Therefore, this result indicates that co-creation of desired organisational culture serves as an enabler for adaptive strategy implementation in organisations.

It has also emerged that after developing the new strategy, the leadership and the employees must redefine the culture that will enable the implementation of the new strategy. This finding may provide the possible answer to the popular "culture eats strategy for breakfast" which means that the success of the strategic plan is dependent on the team sharing a suitable culture. This insinuates that the new strategy with the old culture is like putting new wine in the old wine skin. Therefore, it is imperative for strategic leaders to consider redefining, re-evaluating, and refreshing their culture whenever a new strategy is developed in order to enable adaptive strategy implementation.

6.2.1.3   Agile decision making

The lack of agility and inability to respond to disruptions in the business environment are some of the reasons several companies have not survived in business due to disruptions (Arena, 2018). To respond to the fact changing business environments, the leadership of the

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organisations must create a culture that enables agile decision making. This finding is in line with the dynamic capabilities theory on seizing opportunities (Schoemaker et al, 2018).

It has emerged that the delays in making decisions can make organisations to lack behind their competitors. It has been noticed leaders of organisations that have the global presence and technology based they were more concerned with agile decision making. Therefore, this shows that the space that the organisation does business in and the nature of the industry requires agility.

6.2.1.4   Learning organisation

The result on the learning organisation emerged from most of the research participants regardless of the size of the organisations that they lead. The submission by research participants has been that the leadership must create a culture that allows experimentation, has an open-door policy, removes the fear of failure, and eliminates the punitive culture to enable adaptive strategy implementation. It was also worth noting that one of the CEOs who is leading a company that is listed in the Johannesburg Stock Exchange(JSE) stated that she has an open-door policy which allowed staff to even send her emails which she responds to.

The advantage of creating the learning environment is that is encourages creativity, innovation and can attracts great talent for the organisation. In the era where employees have broader choice and are concerned about the culture of an organisation, the learning organisation can help to attract and retain great talent in the organisation. This finding is aligned with the literature where Sull & Sull (2015) suggests that organisational culture must encourage willingness to experiment.

It has also emerged that the industries where compliance to policies and legislations is regarded as the principal feature, it is very difficult to create an environment that allows employees to experiment. The participant that made an example about a company that she worked for where failure was not allowed, it was a state-owned entity that is more concern3d with policy making. Therefore, this presents a dynamic that indicates that the nature of the entity could stifle or enable adaptive strategy implementation. This is a finding has not emerged from the literature reviewed.

In the study by Crittenden & Crittenden (2008) found that the existence of positive organisational culture enabled the implementation of strategic initiatives and strategy implementation. Furthermore, the strategic leaders create and sustain the organisational

culture that supports strategy implementation. Therefore strategic leaders must be intentional in setting the tone on the organisational culture.

6.2.2 Strategy communication

The overall finding is that communication is a critical element in adaptive strategy implementation. The missing link is mainly on the three identified areas relating to simplicity, timeliness, and frequency of communication. The finding on communication has been shared by a large majority of the participants. The sections below will provide details on each of the three findings in communicating strategy.

6.2.2.1   Simple, clear, and relevant communication

The primary finding on communication was that the strategic leaders the communication of any change in the strategy must be in simple and clear manner. The finding on communication has been emphasized by a large majority of the participants. There seemed to be an agreement that communicating strategy is critical for adaptive strategy implementation. In engaging with the data, the means of communication were relating to townhalls, staff communication, war-room and the written columns that were sent to the staff. However, the critical concern the participants had was ensuring that the message is simple and clear to ensure understanding. This result is supported by the assertion from the study by Sull et al. (2015) where the problem of strategy communication has been identified as lack of understanding of the communicated message.

6.2.2.2   Timely and transparent communication

The second important finding on communication was the timeliness of communication to the stakeholders. The stakeholders that have been identified were the boards and employees. The participants that are leading companies reports to the boards have indicated that they needed to be proactive in engaging the boards on any possible changes that they needed to implement. The timely communication to boards of directors would be able to secure the required approval when they must adapt the strategy due to the changes in the business environment.

The timely communication to employees was regarded as the critical element to ensure that there is buy-in for adapting the strategy. One of the CEOs that is leading an organisation that

has around 120 employees emphasised the timely communication to ensure that there is no office gossip. The timely communication may be easier in the smaller organisations as compared to the organisations that have a few layers of leadership due to their size.

6.2.2.3   Continuous and frequent communication

The last finding on communication is about the continuous and frequency of communication to adapt the strategy. In the study by Sull et al (2015) frequency has not been the challenge as the executive communicated frequently. However, this study has found that where there are unforeseen events such as Covid-19 pandemic, there was an increased need to communicate frequently to keep the staff informed whether there were good or bad news. The benefit that has been identified with communicating frequently is that it removes uncertainty in the organisation.

The observation of this research is that strategy communication is an enabler of organisational culture, effective change management and collaboration. Therefore, it is imperative for the strategic leaders to be intentional about communicating to enable adaptive strategy implementation. The other participants indicated that communication must be frequent, but it must not be over communication while the other submitted that it is better to over-communicate than under communicate.

6.2.3   Lead change and adaptation

The finding on lead change and adaptation raised three elements which are initiate and owing change, executive sponsorship for change, and building a clear case for change to enable adaptive strategy implementation.

6.2.3.1   Initiate and own change

The finding that relates to leading change and adaptation has been found to be more predominant from the participants that are top management team not the CEOs. The ability to lead change management has been identified as an area of weakness that the strategic leaders are failing in it despite the importance of this subject. The impact of not initiating change and adapting can lead to dire results such as the shutting down of organisations.

The root cause for the failure to lead change could be that the subject of change management is outsourced to organisational leadership department in the organisations. In addition, the lack of leadership agility often leads to the reluctance to lead change in an organisation. The

finding from this study is arguing that the change management function must be initiated and owned by the strategic leaders of an organisation.

6.2.3.2   Executive sponsorship for change

The finding on the executive sponsorship emphasised the importance of the strategic leaders to support a change in an organisational strategy. The critical finding in executive sponsorship has been about the alignment among the top management team.

6.2.3.3   Building a clear case for change

The need to build a clear case for change has been noted from the strategic leaders that are leading the small and large companies in terms of the staff component. There are three elements that have been identified to lead to resistance to change. The first one is the level of the employee skills where the critical concern is job security. So whenever, there is change in the traditional processes or tweaking in the strategy the resistance comes from a place of a concern about job security. The second element that has been identified to contribute to resistance has been lack of communication about the change that the organisation is intending to embark on. The last place where resistance comes from is when the strategic leaders do not provide the rationale for change. Therefore, these findings are building a case that there is a relationship between communication and building a case for change.

6.2.4   Enable collaboration

The finding that has emerged on the role of strategic leaders to enable collaboration indicated that adaptive strategy implementation is enabled when all different actors play their part (Weiser et al., 2020). The top management team may have the role to develop the strategic direction, but they need to be intentional in ensuring the participation and persuasion of the employees to participate in strategy implementation. This finding mirrors the literature where Ahearne et al. (2014) articulates the role of lower leadership levels in driving networks and collaboration in the organisation.

The importance of collaboration in adaptive strategy implementation is to remove silos and encourage information sharing between the different role-players in the

organisation. Therefore, it is critical for the leaders to share information with their employees to enable collaboration and removing silos.

6.2.5 Environmental scanning

The organisation is operating in the ecosystem, and it is directly affected by the changes in the environment. The strategic leaders need to have an appreciation of external environment to be able to adapt the organisational strategies accordingly. The finding on environmental scanning has revealed that the strategic leaders need to be attuned to both internal and external factors that would enable them to adapt strategies in implementation. The participants seemed to be familiar with PESTEL analysis to scan the external trends, recognize the impact of changes and develop the relevant responses to those changes.

The large number of the participants have focused more on the external reasons for adapting strategies while a very few indicated the internal reasons that required adaptation. This study has identified four external reasons to scan the environment which are competitiveness, business relevance, growth in business and responding to technological changes.

The implication of external and internal environment are that the strategic leaders must be proactive in identifying changes, patterns and trends in the market so that they are not caught off-guard. In responding to the change in the market, the leaders must be agile, decisive and responsive to the changes in business.

6.2.6 Management of resources

This study has also identified resource management as one of the critical roles that the strategic leaders need to play in organisations. The critical aspects in management of resources entailed the ability to mobilise resources in the time of change. This supports the study by both Samimi et al. (2020) and Mubarak & Yusoff (2019) on managing organisational resources. The resources of the organisation are not limited to human resources but entails also financial resources.

6.3   Research question 2 discussions

Research question 2 was aimed at understanding skills and competencies of strategic leaders. This study has identified three core attributes which are the ability to communicate, leadership flexibility, enabling leadership and strategic thinking.

6.3.1 Ability to communicate

Communication entails the ability to exchange information from the sender to the receiver. Kelvin-Illoafu (2016). This study derives that communication has been regarded as an indispensable skill in adaptive strategy implementation which is consistent with literature (Kelvin-Illoafu, 2016).

This assertion has emerged from all the participants in this study. An example of the Chief Executive Officer (i.e., participant 07) implemented a program where he hand-held his executive to learn how to communicate to both the board and the staff. This emulates the literature that indicates that the ability to clearly communicate may help managers to achieve the strategic goals of an organisation Kelvin-Illoafu (2016). In most instances the people who gets promoted or hired in the top management would have displayed their prowess in technical competencies. However, the challenge is that at the strategic leadership leaders are not expected to be technically excellent. The expectation is that they should be able to influence, motivate and communicate convincingly to the rest of the organisation. Therefore, this implies that the organisations must invest time and resources to equip the leaders to be able to communicate.

The other interesting example is where Participant 09 emphasized the importance of using stories to drive communication of strategy in the organisation. He shared three reasons stories are important. The first one is that people will not forget organisational stories, secondly employees are inspired by stories they can relate to and thirdly stories communicate purpose. This indicates the importance of the ability to communicate across all levels of an organisation and using various means to communicate.

The story-telling finding mirrors the submission by Boal & Schultz (2007) in stating that strategic leaders can shape meaningful strategic conversations through story telling which they regard as an essential skill for strategic leaders. Therefore, it is pivotal that strategic leaders learn how to tell customised, meaningful, and authentic organisational stories to influence their employees.

6.3.2 Leadership flexibility

The finding that emerged is that the ability for an organisation to be adaptable begins with having an adaptive and flexible leadership. It is consistent with the assertion by Dhar et al (2022) in saying that managers must have the ability to timeously respond to the environmental changes. Viewing this from a theory perspective, the leadership flexibility is consistent with dynamic capabilities theory on sense making and seizing opportunities. The leadership flexibility is no synonymous with shifting strategy goal posts but responds to changes in an environment to seize emerging opportunities. This finding indicates that leadership flexibility is pivotal to increase organisational productivity, competitiveness in the environment that is surrounded by change, complexity, and uncertainty. Therefore, strategic leaders need to consider developing adaptive capacity.

6.3.3 Enabling leadership

The principal theme that has is highlighted on enabling leadership is the ability to listen which may seem to be an easy thing, but it is actually a very challenging skill.

6.3.3.1 **Listening leadership**

The observation on listening leadership has been mentioned from five participants (i.e., participants 5, 8, 10, 12 and14). These participants highlighted a few aspects of the listening leadership. The first aspect was that leadership must listen and support their staff. The second aspect was that listening sets an example to your staff as a leader. The third aspect was that as a leader you should be able to listen to different views from others as this improves productivity. The fourth aspect was the willingness to listen even to the junior staff. The last aspect was that a leader must ensure that people feel heard.

These five aspects mainly create an environment where the people can freely share their opinions, views, and thoughts about the strategy implementation. The C-suite level leaders depend on the people who are directly driving strategy implementation to have accurate information about the progress of strategy implementation. Therefore, sharing of information from the people depends on whether the leaders are

listening or not. This finding reflects literature from Ahearne et al. (2014) in relation to the feedback to top management.

The submission by specifically by Participant 14 who stated that as a strategic leader, you must also listen to even your junior staff. The younger generation seems to be more curious, challenges the norm and express their opinions. Therefore, in order to attract this cohort of young people to share their innovative ideas, the leaders must remove tags and create space to listen regardless of the positions of their employees.

It was participant 08 who leads a team that has a lot of the millennials. The observation that she made is that these young people are very innovative and adaptable. On contrary, participant 02 as a CFO is leading a mixed generation that has older and low skilled individuals. It was her observation that the older and low skilled employees were resistant to change when they introduced some technological upgrades to improve efficiencies. In both instances, their successes were born out of patience to listen to their employees. Therefore, it is pivotal for the leaders must enable adaptation through listening and virtue of patience.

These findings are not far from the proposition made by Uhl-Bien & Arena (2017) on creating adaptive space where people can easily network, connect to accomplish a common cause.

6.4   Research question 3 discussion

6.4.1 Introduction

Research question 3 was intended to identify strategy implementation tools that strategic leaders are exposed to. Furthermore, to explore how the strategy implementation tools have enabled adaptation. The findings of this question gave rise to contradicting views around strategy implementation tools. The first view was not supportive of the use of strategy tools, the second view was supportive. It was the strategic leaders that held the second view that provided insights on the benefits of using strategy implementation tools. This research question that divided the views of the participants as compared to the other first two research questions.

6.4.2 Lack of familiarity with strategy implementation tools

The question on what the strategy implementation are tools that you have used has attracted answers such as what you mean by strategy implementation tools or give me an example of the strategy implementation tool. It was also noticed that even two the strategic leaders that are heads of strategy had to ask similar questions. This answer has indicated that strategy implementation tools are not being used on the normal cause of strategy implementation. It was only when the example was provided that they could relate with some of the tools. However, there was no clear differentiation between the strategy implementation and formulation tools. The tools that have been mentioned included, 2X2 matrix, SWOT analysis, Porter' five forces and balanced scorecard. This indicated that there is still a gap between the academia and business when it comes to the usability of tools. This finding reflects Roper & Hodari (2015) assertion that managers do not have the understanding on how to apply the tools in practice.

In asking participants about the rationale on the choice of the strategy implementation tools they have used, some of the answers that came forth were that it was a consultant who gave us the tool and I have found the tool being used already in my company. This finding indicated that there is still an information gap on the application of strategy implementation tools in practice.

These findings reflect the study by Vuorinen et al. (2018) that scholars need to pay attention to explaining methods used in developing strategy tools and pursue the case studies that can move from theory to practice.

6.4.3 No strategy implementation tool perspective

The second cohort of participants were clear from the onset that they do not subscribe to the use of strategy implementation tools. It was five participants out of 18 that indicated that they do not use strategy implementation tools. They provided three key reasons they don't use the strategy implementation tools.

The first reason strategy implementation tools are rejected is that some of the strategy implementation tools are unnecessarily complicated. It was participant 09 who recalled an old strategy that was developed by the consultants, but emphasised that it never worked as it was inundated with frameworks.

The second reason the strategy implementation tools was rejected has been because it boxes the organisations and does not allow adaptability and innovation. This view was shared by participant 12 and 13 despite them being from different industries. It is also worth noting that participant 12 is a Managing Director of a 120 people company and participant 13 is a strategist for a 7000 people company. Therefore, the size of the company may not be used to discount the assertion of not using the implementation tool. It could be easy to discredit a 120 staff component company.

The third reason is that the people are the implementers not the strategy implementation tools. The other participant stated that the participant 12 "my tools walk on two legs, people". This statement should not be taken out of context as it meant to demonstrate valuing people over the strategy implementation tools.

The three reasons provided by the participants are not contradictory to the literature by Vuorinen et al. (2018), Spee & Jarzabkowski (2009) and Roper & Hodari (2015) on the rejection of the strategy implementation tools by practitioners.

In as much as there was an outright rejection of the strategy implementation tools, it does not mean that these participants do not use anything to track their company progress. The finding was that they prefer having simple targets and use of simple excel spreadsheet.

6.4.4 Subscription to strategy implementation tools

The third cohort of participants which was at least ten out eighteen participants indicated that they use strategy implementation tools. The exploratory question that they had to respond to was what are the benefits they have derived from using strategy implementation tools? It is essential that before alluding to the benefits derived from using the strategy implementation tools to list tools that emerged from participants. The list had the following tools:

- Project Management Tool
- Excel spreadsheet
- Power BI
- Balanced scorecard
- Project Portfolio Management
- 360-degree engagement

The most common strategy implementation that participants referred to be the balanced scorecard. In terms of the benefits derived from the strategy implementation tools, much reference was made towards the balanced scorecard. This gave an indication that the balanced scorecard remains a popular and widely accepted strategy implementation tool. This assertion is articulated by Tawse & Tabesh (2022) that has been used over decades as a strategy implementation tool.

6.4.5 Benefits derived in using strategy implementation tool

It was observed strategy implementation tools such as the balanced scorecards and others are not the replacement to strategic conversations. The strategy implementation tools have to be kept alive to provide facts about the strategy implementation and facilitate crucial strategic conversations.

The importance and benefits of using strategy implementation tools seemed to still be lacking among the participants. Despite this gap that still exists on the use strategy implementation tools, the participants were able to share several benefits derived from using strategy implementation tools especially the balanced scorecard.

The following seven benefits were derived from using the balanced scorecard
  I.   Enabled measurement of financial and non-financial performance of the organisation.
 II.   An easy and user-friendly strategy monitoring tool.
III.   Enabled strategic performance conversation.
 IV.   Enabled transparency in strategy implementation.
  V.   Enabled the prioritisation of strategic imperatives.
 VI.   Enabled clarifying the targets that the organisation pursued in the strategy.
VII.   Enabled measuring performance against the set targets and this led to the development of corrective measures where targets were not achieved.

These benefits make a strong case to consider investigating challenges that makes the strategy implementation tool not to be widely received especially by the CEO cohort.

6.5   Conclusion

The participants shared similar perspectives on the role and the attributes of the strategic leaders. However, some different views emerged in the research question on strategy implementation tools. There seems to be an interdependence between communication, culture, change management and collaboration. The participants were much synchronised on

research question 1 and research question 2. However, participants expressed differing views when it came to research question 3.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The scholars have agreed that strategy failed at the implementation phase rather than the formulation phase (Friesl et al, 2021). The objective of this research was to identify the functions of the strategic leaders necessary to enable successful adaptive strategy implementation. Therefore, this study explored the functions, attributes, and tools that strategic leaders as enablers of adaptive strategic implementation.

The main objective of this study was to explore the role of C-suite level strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation. To respond to this question, the study explored three sub questions that were outlined in chapter three. It was anticipated that answering those three sub-questions will provide insights into the enablers of adaptive strategy implementation to contribute into the body of knowledge.

This is the last and final chapter of this study. Therefore, the approach will be more focused on what can be done next having discovered what has been outlined in chapter 5 and 6. The way-forward will focus on the implication of the results to academia, strategic leaders, and recommendations for future research.

7.2 Conceptual framework

The research finding of this revealed the need to understand the four steps that are necessary to achieve adaptive strategy implementation. This study used the house metaphor as depicted.

Figure 3: Proposed conceptual framework

OUTCOMES — Adaptive Strategy Implementation

TOOLS — Balanced Scorecard, Power BI & Project Management

ATTRIBUTES — Communicating Skills, Flexibility, Agility & Strategic Thinking.

FUNCTIONS — Communicating Strategy, Enabling Organisational Culture, Leading Change & Adaptation.

CONTEXT — Changing Business Environment, Environmental Scanning

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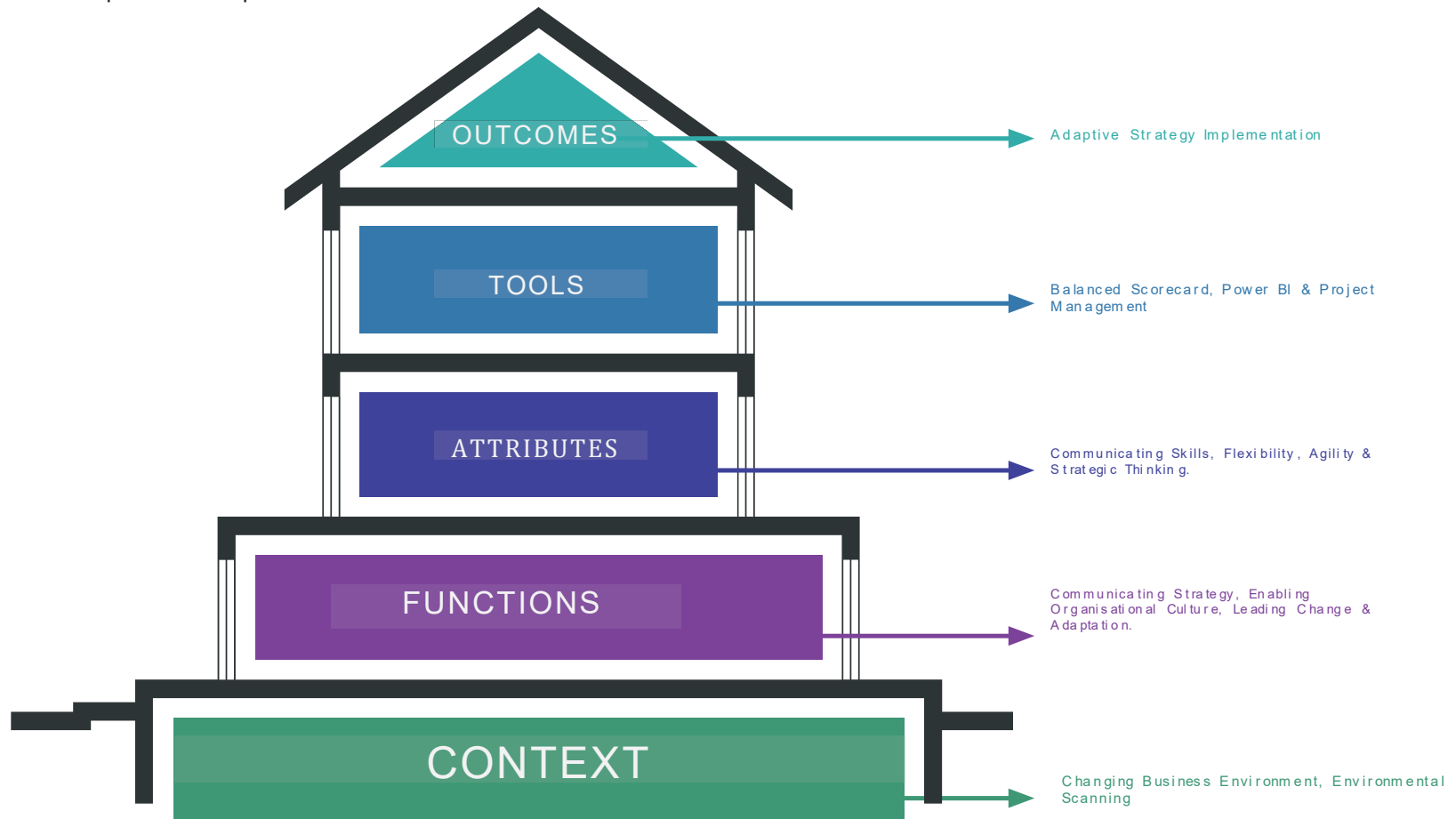
7.2.1   Changing business environment

The strategic leaders need to understand that the business environment is not static. It changes due to internal and excretal factors. The inability to discern these changes may lead to losing business to competitors and business collapse. Therefore, the strategic leaders must continuously conduct strategic environmental analysis through tools such as PESTEL analysis.

7.2.2   Functions of strategic leaders

The functions of strategic leaders are very critical in adaptive strategy implementation. The strategic leaders need to embrace the functions that they must play to enable adaptation. The key functions relate to creating enabling organisational culture, timely communication, transparent communication, leading change, and adaptation. The clearer the strategic leaders are in terms of their functions the better it will be for the leaders to enable adaptation.

7.2.3   Attributes

The attributes mainly referred to the skills and competencies that strategic leaders needed to have to enable adaptation. The ability to communicate, enabling leadership and agility are some of the skills that strategic leaders need to possess. The work on skills and competencies is a continuous effort that strategic leaders need to sharpen. In cases where leaders do not have these skills, they need to invest in developing these skills to be able to influence and motivate their teams.

7.2.4   Strategy implementation tools

The strategy tools are not meant to constrain the strategic leaders in adapting strategies. The tools are what the leaders may use to facilitate conversations, develop structure on performance management, holding each other accountable and provide data for the need to adapt or tweak some aspects of the strategy. The strategic leaders need to have few strategy implementation tools in their strategy management toolbox.

7.2.5 Adaptation

Adaptive strategy implantation is the outcome of the understanding the functions of strategic leaders, harnessing of skills & competencies, and using the strategy implementation tool that are relevant and reliable. This is the apex of the house. If the strategy context has not been properly understood it will have impact on the walls (i.e., functions, attributes, and tools) and the roof of the house (i.e., adaptation)

7.3 Primary research findings of the study

High-level key findings based on the results and discussions from chapter 5 and 6 respectively are presented in this section. This study has identified communicating strategy, enabling organisational culture, communication skills, change management and the balanced scorecard as the primary findings.

7.3.1 Communicating strategy and communication skills

The understanding of the importance of communicating strategy, changes, strategic direction to the organisation is the fundamental role that strategic leaders need to perform. The primary aspect of communication relates to the understanding that timely and transparent communication create necessary trust in the organisation and minimizes the possibility of resisting change.

Communicating strategy is critical for adaptive strategy implementation as it could influence the other aspects such as change management, culture, and collaboration in the organisation. Therefore, communication should not be viewed as just a mere function of disseminating information but the building block to influence other enablers of adaptive strategy implementation.

7.3.2 Enabling organisational culture

The culture of an organisation is concerned with the norms, behaviors and how things are done in an organisation. The crafting of organisational culture must not be regarded as a project that can be outsourced to the organisational development consultants or the chief people officers. However, it must be the primary function that is embedded within the role of every top management team responsibility. The Chief Executive Officer carries the responsibility to model enabling culture to his direct reports and his direct reports have the

similar responsibility to model culture to their teams. In this manner, there is a high possibility that the culture of an organisation will not be a beautiful ornament on the wall, but it is not a lived reality.

7.3.3   Change management

The changing business environment and context places a demand to the strategic leaders to be alive to uncertainties, disruptions, market volatilities and internal changes. The strategic leaders need to develop a habit of attending to small changes within the organisations without waiting for the big-bang external environment changes such as Covid-19 pandemic. In creating this habit of communicating and managing changes, it will make it easier to implement strategy adaptation.

It has been observed that the ability to communicate and building a case for change plays a critical role for the strategic leaders to enable change and adaptation.

7.3.4   Balanced scorecard

The balanced scorecard has been identified as a popular system in the strategy implementation process. This strategy implementation tool seemed to have defined benefits that it provides to the organisations and strategic leaders to manage strategy implementation. However, it seemed that it has been mainly used to report performance of the strategies instead of driving the whole process of strategy implementation. There is still an opportunity to find ways to fully optimize what balanced scorecard can provide to strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation. The balanced scorecard as a management system has a function of linking strategy to operations which entails the step test and adapt. However, this is step that has not been incorporated in the use of balanced scorecard in practice. The step on monitor and learn seemed to be what the participants have been familiar with.

7.4 Enablers and inhibitors of adaptive strategy implementation

To be able to adapt strategies, strategic leaders need to identify enablers and harness them to accelerate adaptation. In the same vein, they need to identify existing inhibitors of adaptation Adaptive strategy implementation and remove these hurdles for enabling adaptive strategy implementation. This study has identified seven enablers and seven inhibitors of adaptive strategy implementation.

Table 5: Enablers and inhibitors of adaptive strategy implementation

Enablers		Inhibitors	
1.	Communication	1.	Positions
2.	Defined Organisational Culture	2.	Power distance
3.	Coaching	3.	Profitability
4.	Collaboration	4.	Age differences (e.g., Gen Z & Gen Y)
5.	Change Management	5.	Skills
6.	Agility	6.	Industry type
7.	Accountability	7.	Lack of performance management

7.5 Implications for strategic leaders in practice

This study has identified three key implications for strategic leaders relating to organisational culture, communicating strategy and the usefulness of strategy tools.

The findings from this study suggest that the strategic leaders must be intentional in creating an enabling organisational culture in their organisations. There is a consensus from scholars that culture play an important role in strategy implementation. However, what seems to be lacking in the ability to adapt organisational culture to enable strategy implementation. Therefore, strategic leaders need to continually clearly define the desired culture of an organisation based on the desired strategic aspirations.

The second implication to leadership is that the strategic leaders need to invest time and money in sharpening their ability to communicate strategy. Therefore, it is pivotal to design programs that will empower the leaders to know how to communicate, influence and motivate their teams.

The third implication to leadership is that the leaders may need to be open to the use of strategy tools to enable them to adapt their strategies. In instances where they are not sold out to use strategy tools, they should open to sharing case studies on the methods and approaches they use to adapt their strategies.

7.6 Implications for researchers and educators

There are three key implications which the academics need to consider namely relevance of strategy tool and the role of communication in adaptive strategy implementation.

The results of this study reflected that some of the participants were not so familiar with the strategy implementation tools and could not differentiate the tools used in formulation and implementation. Therefore, the academia may need to consider moving putting more efforts in clarifying the types of strategy tools, engage with practitioners to reflect align theory and practice, create case study analysis, and involve more practitioners in the classrooms.

7.7 Study limitations

7.7.1 Research limitations

The study reflected insights from the perspectives of C-level strategic leaders based in different organisation. The senior management levels and the employees from the same organisations may hold different perspectives due to their own experiences on the similar study. The results of this study cannot be generalised from a sample population.

7.7.2 Researcher bias

The researcher as a tool in collection of data was not trained to professionally conduct interviews although his experience as life coach was helpful in asking questions, probing and paraphrasing during the research interviews. The research findings and discussions were based on the understanding, interpretation and analysis of the researcher. This simply acknowledges that the other research might reach a different interpretation and conclusion.

The stature and calibre of the participants had an intimidation to the researcher given their limited time and positions they held in companies that they lead and industry influence they had. The researcher ensured that this does not influence the interview, interpretation and analysis of the results to avoid biasness.

7.7.3 Selection bias

The study was conducted with the C-level leaders that were perceived to be relevant for the adaptive strategy implementation. The C-level leaders were from different companies and industries. However, due to snowballing sampling most of the participants were sourced from the financial services sector.

7.7.4   Geographic bias

The study was conducted with strategic leaders who were leading companies that were based in Gauteng province except one strategic leader who was based in Western Cape Province. This presents a possible geographic bias.

7.8 Recommendations for future research

The findings of this qualitative research cannot be generalized due to the population size and the different contexts of strategic leaders from multiple industries. The study has reflected the perspectives of strategic leaders in organisations. The senior management teams, middle managers and employee population may have different perspectives on the same study.

There seems to be a strong relationship between communication, culture, change management and collaboration in the organisations. Therefore, the future studies may consider a quantitative study investigating the relationship between communicating strategy on culture, change management and collaboration.

The fact that "culture eats strategy for breakfast" has been accepted in the organisational conversation, it will be imperative to study how to create an enabling culture for adaptive strategy implementation.

The second aspect that may be considered for further research is to explore the understanding of the reasons some practitioners are not keen to using strategy implementation tools. Furthermore, it will be beneficial to research fraternity to explore the reasons behind the balanced scorecard being a popular strategy implementation and draw lessons for practice.

The third area of further research that scholars need to consider is the role of power dynamics, age and skill level in enable or constrict adaptive strategy implementation.

This study has focused mainly on the private sector strategic leaders. Therefore, the similar study may be conducted to explore the role of public sector strategic leaders

in enabling adaptive strategy implementation. In addition, this study can investigate the factors that inhibit or enable adaptive strategy implementation.

7.9 Conclusion

This research has provided insights into the functions of strategic leaders for enabling adaptive strategy implementation. This study conducted eighteen interviews with different strategic leaders from diverse industries. The findings of this study were then analysed to explore the functions, attributes, and use of strategy implementation tools. This study compared, contrasted, and consolidated different perspectives from the strategic leaders.

This study contributes towards strategy management and strategic leadership literature with an analysis of the functions and attributes of strategic leaders to enable adaptive strategy implementation.

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Annexure A - Consistency matrix

Research question	Literature review	Data collection tool	Analysis technique
1) What are the functions of the strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation?	Samimi et al (2021) Weiser et all (2021) Shulze & Pinkow (2020) Vera et al. (2022)	Interview guide aspects 2.1, 2.2, & 2.3	Thematic analysis
2) What are the attributes that C-suite level need to have to enable adaptive strategy implementation?	Uhl-Bien & Arena (2017) Uhl-Bien & Arena (2018)	Interview guide aspects 3.1, 3.2 & 3.3	Thematic analysis
3) How are strategy implementation tools enabling adaptive strategy implementation?	Vuorinen et al. (2018) Spee & Jarzabkowski (2009)	Interview guide aspects 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 & 5.4	Thematic analysis

Annexure B - Ethical clearance approval

Gordon Institute
of Business Science
University of Pretoria

Ethical Clearance
Approved

Dear Modise Moloi,

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

Masters Research

Annexure C -Research interview questions

<table>
<tr><td>**Research interview questions**</td></tr>
</table>

Introduction
- o The researcher introduce the purpose of the study, explain method of data capturing and analysis.
- o Attain informed consent of the participant, explain the confidentiality and that their anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained.
- o Explain the estimated interview time.
- o Explain the possible benefit to the participant and allow space for any question that the participant may have.

Strategic leadership history
- o May you please tell me about your strategic leadership (C-suite level) journey?
- o How long have you been in strategic leadership?

Adaptive strategy implementation

1. **Adaptive strategy implementation**
   1.1 What is your understanding of adaptive strategy implementation/execution?

2. **Functions of strategic leaders**
   2.1 What are the functions of C-level strategic leaders in adaptive strategy implementation/execution?

   2.2 What are the lessons that you have learnt in adapting strategy?

   2.3 How do strategic leaders create an environment that enable adaptation (i.e. adaptive strategy implementation) in an organisation?

3. **Attributes of strategic leaders**
   3.1 What are the skills that C-level strategic leaders need to have to enable adaptive strategy implementation?

   3.2 What are the competencies that C-level strategic leaders need to have to drive adaptive strategy implementation?

   3.3 What are principles that you have used to enable strategy adaptation?

4. Organisational learning

4.1 Why is it important to review/adapt the business strategy?

4.2 Is the strategy review/adaptation factored in the formulation of the strategy?

4.3 What has been the frequency of strategy reviews and what informs the rationale for the frequency of the review?

4.4 How did you create environment that enabled continuous improvement in strategy implementation?

5. Strategy tools

5.1 What are the strategy implementation tools that you have used in strategy implementation? What informed the choice of the strategy tool?

5.2 How has the tool(s) that you have used enabled adaptation?

5.3 What are the reasons that you have not used any strategy implementation tool?

NB! This question will be asked if the answer to 5.1 is that the tools were not used.

5.4 What are the benefits that you have derived in using strategy implementation tool?

6. Concluding comments
Is there any additional insight and comment(s) that you would like to share?

Annexure D - Research interview informed consent

Dear leader,

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by Modise Moloi, an Mphil corporate Strategy student from Gordon Institute of Business Science at the University of Pretoria. The purpose of the study is to understand the role of strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation/execution. The results of this study will be used to contribute to the body of knowledge in adaptive strategy execution.

Please note the following:

1. Your name will not appear on the questionnaire and answers that you give will be treated as strictly confidential. You cannot be identified in person based on the answers that you give.

2. The interview to be recorded and the recording to be transcribed by a third-party transcriber, who will be subject to a standard non-disclosure agreement.

3. Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may, however choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without negative consequences.

4. The interview will not take more than 60 minutes of your time. However, where necessary your consent will be requested if there is still more insights and information that you will like to share to enrich this study.

5. The results of this study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal.

6. The summary of results will be made available to you on request.

7. All data to be reported and stored without identifiers.

8. You may contact my research supervisor (Professor Caren Scheepers) on scheepersc@gibs.co.za if you have any questions, concerns or comments regarding the study.

Thank you for agreeing to participate by sharing your insights, information and experience in this study

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____

Annexure E - Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreement (Transcriber)

CONFIDENTIALLY AND NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT (Transcriber)

It is a condition of engagement that students will assist in preserving all confidential information, ideas and plans; any confidential information or any information in respect of any data gathered, captured or analysed in respect of the research work they undertake in fulfilment of GIBS Mphil Corporate Strategy programme, in this case the research project titled "the role of C-Suite Strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation" conducted by Modise Moloi.

The parties under this agreement agree to the following:

1. To apply their best efforts to keep any information confidential which has been acquired or may acquire pursuant to the research work. For the purposes of this clause, confidential information excludes information which:

   1.1 is publicly available or becomes publicly available through no act or default of any Party;

   1.2 was in the possession of a Party prior to its disclosure otherwise than as a result of a breach by any party of any obligation of confidentiality to which it is subject;

   1.3 is disclosed to the student by a person which did not acquire the information under an obligation of confidentiality; and

   1.4 is independently acquired by a student and as a result of work carried out by a person to whom no disclosure of such information has been made;

2. No party shall use or disclose confidential information except with the prior written consent of GIBS or in accordance with an order of a court of competent jurisdiction or in order to comply with any law or governmental regulations by which any Party concerned is bound or as may be lawfully requested in writing by any governmental authority.

3. The party undertakes to permanently delete any electronic copies of confidential information received, and destroy any confidential printed documentation or similar material in their possession promptly once they are no longer required, usually on completion of the service contracted by the student.

4. On completion of the contracted service on behalf of the student, the party is to confirm to the student that they are not in possession of any confidential information.

Signed at _____ on this _____ day of_____ 20____.

On behalf of: _____

Name: _____ Signature:_____ duly authorised and warranting such authority

Witness: _____

Annexure F - Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreement (Editor)

CONFIDENTIALLY AND NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT (Transcriber)

It is a condition of engagement that students will assist in preserving all confidential information, ideas and plans; any confidential information or any information in respect of any data gathered, captured or analysed in respect of the research work they undertake in fulfilment of GIBS MPhil Corporate Strategy programme, in this case the research project titled "the role of C-Suite Strategic leaders in enabling adaptive strategy implementation" conducted by Modise Moloi.

The parties under this agreement agree to the following:

5. To apply their best efforts to keep any information confidential which has been acquired or may acquire pursuant to the research work. For the purposes of this clause, confidential information excludes information which:

    1.5   is publicly available or becomes publicly available through no act or default of any Party;

    1.6   was in the possession of a Party prior to its disclosure otherwise than as a result of a breach by any party of any obligation of confidentiality to which it is subject;

    1.7   is disclosed to the student by a person which did not acquire the information under an obligation of confidentiality; and

    1.8   is independently acquired by a student and as a result of work carried out by a person to whom no disclosure of such information has been made;

6. No party shall use or disclose confidential information except with the prior written consent of GIBS or in accordance with an order of a court of competent jurisdiction or in order to comply with any law or governmental regulations by which any Party concerned is bound or as may be lawfully requested in writing by any governmental authority.

7. The party undertakes to permanently delete any electronic copies of confidential information received, and destroy any confidential printed documentation or similar material in their possession promptly once they are no longer required, usually on completion of the service contracted by the student.

8. On completion of the contracted service on behalf of the student, the party is to confirm to the student that they are not in possession of any confidential information.

Signed at _____ on this _____ day of _____ 20____.

On behalf of: _____

Name: _____ Signature:_____ duly authorised and warranting such authority

Witness: _____