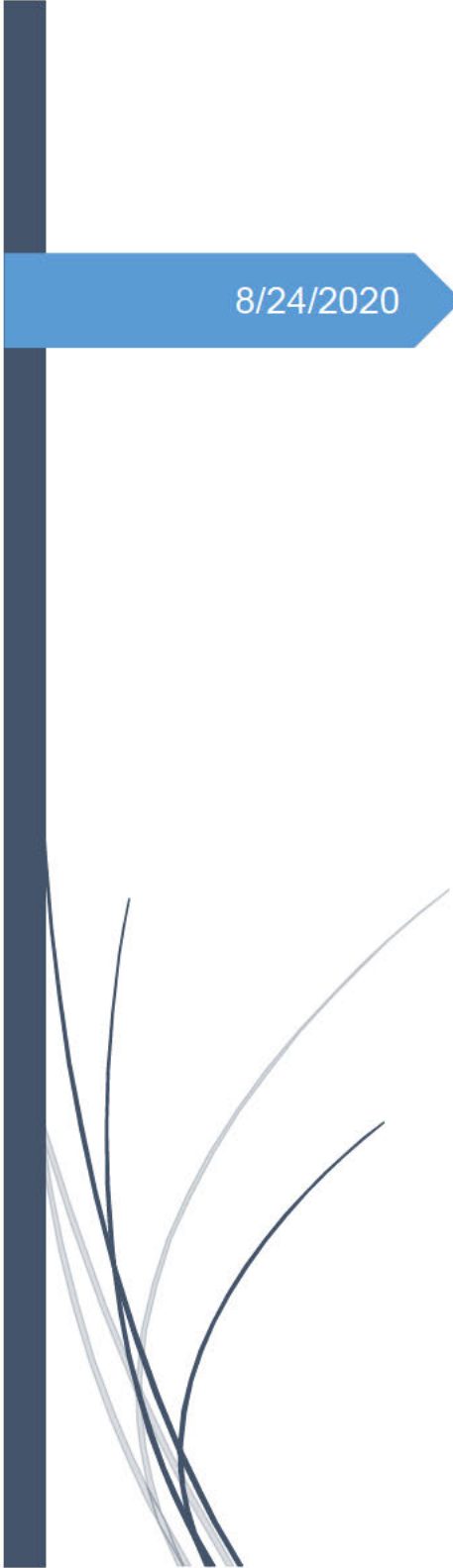




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Transformational leadership as driver of sustainability: An employee perspective.

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Declaration: I hereby declare that the Research Report for the Bachelors of Commerce Honours in Management (HBCM412) degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

Title of the study

Transformational leadership as driver of sustainability: An employee perspective

Abstract

Leadership and sustainability are two related concepts that have gained a lot of interest in recent years among businesses in tough economic conditions. In the dynamic business market, the impact transformational leadership has on the sustainability of a business has become a popular topic of discussion. Research on the influence transformational leaders have on the employees of the business when aiming to achieve sustainability is important for the development of a dynamic workforce and is useful to leadership teams across the business market. Thus, the research identifies the influence of a transformational leader's actions has in achieving organisational sustainability.

Previous literature identifies the importance of transformational leadership and a business culture that focuses on employee development when aiming to achieve business sustainability. This qualitative research highlights the relationship between transformational leadership and organisational sustainability during tough periods in a business. A total of 5 participants' data was collected from an employee group of top-level management in the transportation and supply chain management market from Unilogic Supply Chain and Logistics (USCL). The research made use of thematic coding to analyse the data gained from the in-depth interviews of the participants.

The findings of the research indicated that transformational leadership had a positive influence on the sustainability of a business. Further, it was evident that a transformational leadership style assists in managing change within an environment, increasing the level of sustainability for the business.

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1. Introduction and Contextualisation

As a dominant leadership style, transformational leadership has been identified and extensively researched over the last few decades (McCallaghan, Jackson & Heyns, 2019). Transformational leadership consists of a process which maximises the efforts of individuals through social influence, in achieving a defined set-out goal (Kruse, 2013). Ward (2020) defines transformational leadership as an art of motivating a group of individuals to act towards achieving a common objective. Moreover, White (2018) identifies transformational leadership as a leadership style that involves leaders encouraging, motivating, and inspiring employees to innovate and bring about change within a business. Transformational leadership, a dynamic style of leadership unlocks the potential in the employees, which assists in managing diversity in the workplace (McCallaghan *et al.*, 2019).

Despite the extensive amount of research that has been conducted around transformational leadership, few scholars have taken the leadership processes, organizational context, and the employees' perspective into consideration when conducting their research.

Research has shown that the workplace environment has become more diverse in recent years (McCallaghan *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, the level of diversity in the market has led to challenging environments where businesses and employees are required to overcome dramatic political, social, and economic changes (Blaga, 2018). The South African economy has experienced dramatic political, social, and economic changes in recent times under various political leaders. These changes accompanied by the lack of political leadership have made it challenging for businesses to achieve organisational sustainability (Kgatlé, 2012).

As mentioned, organisational sustainability has become challenging for most South African businesses. Unilogic Supply Chain and Logistics (USCL) operates within the South African transportation and logistics business market. USCL prides themselves on establishing strategic alliances with their client base by continually identifying ways to unlock value through operational excellence. Moreover, the company commits itself to actively promote a vibrant, transformed, and globally competitive organisation which reflects the demographics of South Africa (Kgatlé, 2012). USCL has experienced a high level of change in leadership and management over the past few years. The research made use of USCL's top-level management employees as the population of the study to

assist in understanding how employees experienced a transformational leader's actions in changing a loss-making business.

1.1. Rationale

In the current tough economic conditions, South Africa appears to be lacking transformational leadership (Ndalamba, 2019). The lack of strong leadership has negatively impacted both economic growth and development within South Africa (White, 2018). Ndalamba (2019) identified leadership ethos as the missing component in the recipe for successful public leadership. Leadership ethos works in conjunction with transformational leadership as they focus on empowering employees through moral values and common beliefs to innovate and bring about change within a business (Asrar-ul-Haq & Kuchinke, 2016). Employees are seen as one of the most significant stakeholders in the business as they are the driver of performance and output for the business (Blaga, 2018). Thus, it is vital to understand how the employee perceives the business and its leadership in relation to the environment it operates in when aiming to achieve organizational sustainability (Langa, 2018).

The importance of organisational sustainability is often overlooked by businesses (Earley, 2016). Transformational leadership focuses on the employee and innovating change to achieve a better future (Craig, 2019). Thus, the research highlights the importance and impact of transformational leadership has on the business when aiming to achieve organisational sustainability.

By evaluating the influence, a transformational leader's actions can have on their employees, the research substantiated the importance of a transformational leadership style in achieving organizational sustainability.

1.2. Problem Statement

In today's tough economic climate internal employee focus or the lack thereof has a major influence on the sustainability of a business (Blaga, 2018). Organisational sustainability is largely influenced by the high level of change within the business environment. The high-level of change has placed a large amount of pressure on business leadership. Businesses are placing too much focus on the external macro-environmental factors and ignoring the benefits of empowering their employees in order to drive organisational sustainability (McCallaghan *et al.*, 2019). Transformational leadership plays an important role in promoting employee development as well as a culture that is able to achieve

organisational sustainability (Muchiri, McMurray, Nkhoma, *et al.*, 2019). In recent years South Africa has experienced a high level of corruption and a lack of transformational leadership. This has led to economic unrest which has negatively influenced the business environment and its employees. As a result, the sustainability of the business environment has been negatively impacted.

1.3. Research Goal

The goal of the research was to evaluate the influence transformational leaders have on the employees of a business in achieving sustainable business practices in tough economic conditions. The research achieved the goal of the study through meaningful in-depth interviews with employees in conjunction with extensive research around transformational leadership, sustainability, and the employee's perspective. In achieving the research goal and answer the research question, the study achieved various objectives. The objectives in the research were closely linked to the research question, providing a strict focus for the research (White, 2018). The research question and objectives of the research on transformational leadership as driver of sustainability within a business from the employee perspective are highlighted in detail below.

1.4. Research Question

How do employees experience a transformational leader's action in changing a loss-making business?

1.5. Objectives

The main objective of the research was to measure the level of influence a transformational leaders' actions have on the employee's experience of a business when aiming to achieve organisational sustainability. To achieve the main objective and answer the research question, the main objective was broken down into sub-objectives. This assisted the research in unpacking the research question and understanding each component of the question. The sub-objectives were;

1.5.1. Employee Experience

A greater understanding of the employee experience and perception was gained and understood. An objective of viewing the business and its leadership from the perspective

of the employee was achieved to more accurately understand and measure transformational leadership as driver of sustainability within a business.

1.5.2. Transformational Leadership

Leadership as a whole differs in various environments. Thus, it was important to establish the level of transformational leadership within the business and the environment in which the business operates. Moreover, the research established that the employees correlate transformational leadership with organisational sustainability.

1.5.3. Change Management

Another objective of the research was to understand the impact change has on the employee and the sustainability of the business. Transformational leadership is identified as creating and managing change. The objective was to understand how the employee perceives change within a business.

1.5.4. Sustainability

The last-mentioned objective was to determine how the participants perceive sustainability. An objective of determining how important sustainability within a business is to the employee was established.

The objectives mentioned above assisted the research in demarcating the framework and outline of the research. The theory of human development by Erik Homburger Erikson was adopted to gain a better understanding of the employee perspective. The theory will be discussed in further detail below.

2. Theoretical Foundation

German American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst, Erik Homburger Erikson, established a theory of human development in his book “Children and Society” in 1950 (Erikson, 1950). Erikson’s book includes the eight stages of human development. The theory of Human Development by Erikson (1950:222) is mainly concerned with how behaviour and personality are influenced following human birth. Chapman (2013) reinforces Erikson’s theory by emphasizing a firm focus on nurture and experience in human development. By obtaining a greater understanding of how human development occurs, Erikson’s theory assisted the research in gaining a deeper understanding of how transformational leaders’ actions can influence the employee’s performance levels in achieving business sustainability.

The research identified the influence of a transformational leader's actions has in achieving sustainability within a loss-making business. Erikson's theory identified the relationships as well as the impact certain experiences have on an individual in the human development process. The theory of human development consists of Eight stages. The eight stages are as follows;

1. Trust vs Mistrust,
2. Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt,
3. Initiative vs Guilt,
4. Industry vs Inferiority,
5. Identity vs Role Confusion,
6. Intimacy vs Isolation,
7. Generativity vs Stagnation,
8. Integrity vs Despair.

(Chapman, 2013).

The eight stages mentioned above assisted the research in understanding and explaining how behaviour and personality develop within individuals, generating a strong employee focus (Brezuleanu, Viziteu, Robu, *et al.*, 2017). Transformational leaders construct common goals and relationships with their employees. By managing the eight stages of human development within the transformational leader's model of leadership, the leader will be able to create positive permanent change and development (DeClerk, 2017). The theory of human development is based on how behaviour and personality are influenced after human birth (Chapman, 2013), transformational leadership focuses on creating change and development amongst their followers (McCallaghan *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the theory of human development acted as a solid basis for the research of transformational leadership as driver of sustainability within a business.

Literature Review

2.1. Literature

2.1.1. Change in Leadership

Due to the increased complexity and global business change, the topic of leadership has been widely debated. Although debated, no common definition has been agreed upon (Asrar-ul-Haq & Kuchinke, 2016). A study on leadership versus management, defined leadership as a process in which a leader sets a goal or a sense of direction for one or

more individuals and guides them to act with competence and full dedication to achieve the set-out goal and direction (McCallaghan *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, leadership can be defined as an effective predictor for realizing the benefits linked with diversity (Brezuleanu *et al.*, 2017). With the mentioned definitions of leadership in mind, it is important to note that although the importance of leadership is recognized, there is no clear and unanimously accepted definition of leadership (Bridges, 2019). Although leadership may lack a unanimous definition, the importance and presence of leadership needs to be understood when aiming to achieve sustainability in a business market that is constantly changing.

The complexity of business leadership stems from the rapidly evolving business environment and the quick pace at which businesses need to keep changing to remain competitive and sustainable. Leadership styles that can manage change flourish, whereas the leaders who don't manage change often experience a disruption in their business (Bridges, 2019). Kurt Lewin's change management model manages change by proposing a 3-step model as a useful tool when managing change. The 3-steps in change management model consists of;

1. Unfreeze, ensure the business is ready for change, and the understanding and acceptance to change is present,
2. Change, making the required changes moving towards the desired state,
3. Refreeze, reinforcing and institutionalising the desired changes, embedding the changes into the corporate culture

(Bridges, 2019).

The model proposed by Lewin gives a leader or change agent an idea of what implementing change means when dealing with employees. In business, the change will only be effective once the employees involved embrace the change and help to put it into practice (Chapman, 2013). During the process of human development, a level of change constantly exists (Bridges, 2019). Thus, a relationship between Erikson's theory of human development and Kurt Lewin's 3-step change management model was drawn as Lewin's model assists the leader in managing change within the development process of the business and the employee. Through this process the leader gains a greater understanding of how to create positive permanent change (Chapman, 2013) which is in line with human development, thus employee development (Hussain, Lei, Akram, *et al.*, 2018).

Moreover, in a study of the role of leadership and employee involvement in organisational change, it was evident that the employee's acceptance of the change was directly influenced by the actions of the leader (Hussain *et al.*, 2018). The purpose of the study was to identify a relationship between processes and change, and how the leader's knowledge sharing identifies and implements the change in the business (White, 2018). Leadership and the style of leadership play an influential role in human development and change. Transformational leadership plays an influential role within the mentorship and guidance of employees in a business (White, 2018).

2.1.2. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership consists of a leadership style where leaders motivate, encourage, and inspire employees to innovate and create change which will assist to shape and grow the future sustainability of a business (Goodman, 2020). Moreover, the transformational leader is identified as constantly looking for ways to bring about change and growth within a business to achieve organisational sustainability (White, 2018). Transformational leaders motivate and inspire their employees without the effort of micromanaging (White, 2018). Towler (2019) supports this by emphasising that transformational leaders place authority in decision making to their trained employees. This allows employees to have more room to be creative and look to the future to find new solutions to old problems. A transformational leader achieves this by setting an example at the highest level of the business, through a strong sense of corporate culture in the business. Although the transformational leaders' characteristics may differ from leader to leader, it is important to note the following essential characteristics within a transformational leader:

1. An understanding of what needs to change,
2. The capability to continuously stimulate the employee,
3. The ability to encourage participation,
4. A high-level of communication skills,
5. Loyalty to the business and its employees,
6. An idea of the bigger picture,
7. A high sense of personal integrity,
8. The ability to inspire people.

(White, 2018).

The eight mentioned characteristics of a transformational leader provided the research with a base measurement of the characteristics of a transformational leader. Moreover, a

relationship was drawn between organisational sustainability and the characteristics of a transformational leader. The relationship stems from the focus of the transformational leader's characteristics aiming to create change and improvement to achieve sustainability (Peng, Liao & Sun, 2020).

For the organisational sustainability to be made permanent and impactful Towler (2019) and White (2018) emphasise the importance of employee focus and engagement. The two researchers illustrate that a transformational leadership style that has a strong internal employee focus achieves organisational sustainability within the business environment.

2.1.3. The Employee Perspective

The role of transformational leadership has a sizeable influence on an employee's psychological connection to their business (Peng *et al.*, 2020). A relationship was evident between the theory of human development by Erikson (1950) and the literature of transformational leadership by Peng, Liao, and Sun (2020). A strong relationship exists between the transformational leaders' actions and the employee's perspective and impression of the business (Peng *et al.*, 2020). The literature of Peng *et al.* (2020) focuses on how a transformational leader can bolster employees' affective commitment to the business, by strengthening the employee's perceptions of work impact. A thorough understanding of the leadership process requires an in-depth study of appropriate factors under which leadership occurs (Lim & Cromartie, 2018). Through gaining a thorough understanding of the leadership process required in the business, the leader can imbed a solid corporate culture. A strong corporate culture, that is lived and respected by employees, leads to high levels of sustainability for a business (White, 2018). Moreover, Lewin's change management model contributes to understanding how to create permanent change in achieving and embedding a corporate culture in the business.

Corporate culture plays an important role in the success of transformational leadership (Lim & Cromartie, 2018). The corporate culture refers to the behaviours and beliefs which determine how the business's management and employees handle the relationships and how they interact with each other (Narver, 2016). Moreover, the study by McCallaghan *et al.* (2019) identifies the impact on corporate cultures in the South African business context. The study goes on by indicating the challenges of managing cross-cultural leadership within South African businesses. Cross-cultural leadership exists when individuals of different cultural values and beliefs interact with each other (Chapman, 2013). Erikson's theory of human development is an important factor when understanding

cross-cultural leadership, as it identifies how the experiences of the individual have been influenced and how experiences will influence the further development of the individual (Lim & Cromartie, 2018). The South African population is made up of a vast range of cultures, increasing the complexities of managing the expectations of each individual to create one corporate culture in which individuals of different cultures fit into and respect. Thus, the transformational leader needs to understand the values of the different cultures within the business when creating a corporate culture (Lim & Cromartie, 2018). The employee's perspective of the business and its leadership is largely influenced by the corporate culture of the business (Goodman, 2020).

Moreover, the employee's perspective is influenced by the actions of the leader. Transformational leadership places a large focus on empowering employees within the business (Caulfield, 2019). Lim & Cromartie (2018) identified a positive correlation between a corporate culture that empowers employees and organisational sustainability. The corporate culture's level of success can be determined by how well the leader adapts and incorporates the perspectives of the employees (Davoodalmousavi, 2013). Davoodalmousavi (2013) identified that a strong corporate culture within a business leads to an increase in employee job satisfaction. Moreover, the research explains that an increase in employee job satisfaction leads to an increase in business sustainability. Job satisfaction refers to how the employee thinks and feels about their job (McCallaghan *et al.*, 2019).

Job satisfaction can be defined by two dimensions when breaking the term down; namely extrinsic and intrinsic satisfaction (McCallaghan *et al.*, 2019).

- Extrinsic satisfaction is linked to work incentives, promotion opportunities, acceptable working hours, safety, and rewards (Towler, 2019). This level of job satisfaction is more likely to be found under a transactional style of leadership (McCallaghan *et al.*, 2019).
- Intrinsic satisfaction is linked to the subjective or qualitative aspects of the employee's job content. The job experience is typically made up of a variety of skills, autonomy, degree of responsibilities, and supervision (Towler, 2019). This level of job satisfaction is more common under a transformational leadership style (Ingram, 2019).

It is important to note the common misconception between Transformational leadership and Transactional leadership in relation to the employee. The leadership styles differ in their management and motivation. Transformational leadership as mentioned focuses on

change within the business, whereas transactional leadership focuses on organisation, performance, and supervision of the employees (Towler, 2019). A transactional leader will maintain operations to keep the business afloat, whereas the transformational leader will ensure sustainable operations take place, even if it means changing operations that are already working (McCallaghan *et al.*, 2019). The transactional leader will encourage employee commitment through rewards even if performance standards are met (Towler, 2019). Although the goals and objectives are being achieved, if the performance standards are not in line with long-term sustainability, the business may face challenges in the future. In the same situation, a transformational leader will take corrective actions in ensuring that the employee is practicing the correct measures with a long-term sustainable view in achieving the goals and objectives (White, 2018). Transformational leadership understands the importance for employees to act with the view of long-term sustainability for the business to remain sustainable (Towler, 2019).

With an understanding of a transformational leader and the influence the leader has on the employee as well as for the business, for this study, it was important to understand the influence the South African business environment has on businesses, employees, and transformational leadership (Kgatlé, 2012).

2.1.4. Business Sustainability in South Africa

The South African population demographic has been shaped by the range of diversity in culture, religion, and race groups during South Africa's history. A previous study on political leadership in South Africa showed that the mismanagement of the changing environments, together with unethical leadership has negatively impacted economic growth and development in South Africa (Kgatlé, 2012). In a more recent study by Cook (2019) the weak economic growth and low level of business sustainability in South Africa were believed to be the result of multiple corruption scandals spearheaded by the country's then-leader, president Jacob Zuma. However, the study points out that under the new leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa, economic growth and the perusing range of efforts to reduce unemployment, socioeconomic inequality, racial divide, and improve education and healthcare, are all aimed at creating a more sustainable economy (Cook, 2019). By looking at the above passage of the two presidents in question, there is a clear difference in the leadership style and drive towards achieving sustainability. The research-based on transformational leadership as driver of sustainability was not based on the assumption that Jacob Zuma is the reason South Africa lacking sustainability,

instead the precedence was mentioned as an example of how different leadership can influence the sustainability of an environment.

When looking at the sustainability of a business, it is important to understand the sustainability of the environment the business operates in (Cook, 2019). The absence of transformational leadership and lack of political leadership in a country that is under major change has led to a more volatile business environment, due to a lack of focus on sustainability (Bridges, 2019). The volatile business environment has a direct impact on the level of sustainability of a business. The transformational leader's ability to drive sustainability is therefore more challenging in the volatile business environment. Thus, Lewin's 3-step model of change management is influential when attempting to create permanent impactful change within the business (Cook, 2019). The relationship between change and development are crucial components to the success of the transformational leader's ability to achieve sustainable business practices (Blaga, 2019).

The study by Blaga (2018) identifies a business model for social entrepreneurship in achieving sustainable business practices. Social entrepreneurs identify new opportunities to serve the business's mission and are strong-minded to make their vision work (Edirisingha, 2012). An immediate relationship can be drawn between social entrepreneurs and transformational leadership. Blaga (2018) identifies that social entrepreneurs learn about what is working and what is not working, then place emphasis on the importance of the individual's personal qualities and are persistent in ensuring their mission is achieved. In comparison, White (2018) identifies the transformational leader looks to the future to find new solutions to old problems, they place a large emphasis on empowering and developing employees, and they ensure they meet the sustainable business mission laid out. The role of a social entrepreneur and a transformational leader both incorporate the theory of human development within their leadership model as they place a large emphasis on enriching and empowering the development of the employee.

2.2. Conceptualisation

2.2.1. Business Sustainability

The concept of business sustainability, also known as organisational sustainability, is the management and coordination of the environmental, financial, and social concerns and demands which ensure, the ethical, responsible, and long-term existence of a business (Spiliakos, 2018).

2.2.2. Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership consists of a leadership style where leaders motivate, encourage, and inspire employees to innovate and create change which will assist to shape and grow the future sustainability of a business (Goodman, 2020). Moreover, the transformational leader is identified as constantly looking for ways to bring about change and growth within a business to achieve organisational sustainability (White, 2018).

2.2.3. Employee perspective

The employee perspective considers all the individuals working within the business, their situations, routines, and experiences through their journey. This perspective takes a view of through the eyes of the employee (Hussain *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, the employee perspective allows the reader to understand how the different factors and influencers impact the employee.

2.2.4. Organisational culture

The concept of organisational culture is defined as a system of shared beliefs, assumptions and values which define how employees conduct themselves within a business. The shared beliefs, assumptions, and values strongly influence the way in which employees perform and conduct their jobs (Lim & Cromartie, 2018).

2.2.5. Top-level management

Within a business, the board of directors, and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), are examples of top-level management. The members of this management team are responsible for overseeing and controlling the business as a whole. Moreover, the development goals, policies, plans, and make decisions on the overall direction and path the business aims to take (Scalia, 2020).

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is defined as a cluster of common agreements and beliefs, that are shared amongst researchers regarding how problems should be addressed and understood (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014: 23). Three dominant research traditions exist; namely Positivism, Interpretivism, and Critical realism:

- Positivism makes use of natural sciences in its research approach (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014: 25),

- Interpretivism integrates human interests in its research approach (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014: 31),
- Critical realism distinguishes between the “observable” world and the “real” world (Kara, 2018).

Within the study of how a transformational leader’s actions influence an employee’s experience in a loss-making business, a view of interpretivism was adopted.

3.1.1. Interpretivism

The employee perspective is largely made up of human interests, which differ from one individual to the next (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014: 27). Moreover, the core idea of interpretivism is that people are fundamentally different from objects and therefore should not be directly compared. The difference lies in the fact that constant change exists in humans, whereas objects are seen to remain the same over time. Interpretivism believes that studies should describe meaningful social action to understand human behaviour, thus the employee perspective (Blaga, 2018).

3.1.2. The Role of Interpretivism with the Research

The definition and understanding of transformational leadership, sustainability, and an employee’s perspective vary when placed in different environments. This comes from the high level of complexity and diversity that exists in the above-mentioned fields (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014: 23). The research identified existing knowledge in the mentioned fields and used the knowledge as a base to create a greater understanding of the employee’s perspective of transformational leadership in achieving sustainability. Moreover, to contribute to the understanding, human behaviour with a grasp for what employees view as common sense was established (Lee, 2016). This process contributed to a greater understanding of the employee’s perspective. The employee’s perspective can be influenced by multiple factors, which makes it important to understand and interpret these factors within the context of the study, and not to make pre-determined assumptions of the employee perspective (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014: 31). Various factors and values within transformational leadership and sustainability may be perceived as more important between various employee’s perspectives (Edirisingha, 2012).

An employee’s perspective as mentioned differs from one employee to the next. Interpretivism believes in subjectivity, with the belief that reality is experienced differently amongst all humans (Kara, 2018). The theory of human development by Erikson (1950) identifies the eight stages of human development. These eight stages in conjunction with a view of interpretivism contributed to the body of knowledge in understanding and

interpreting the employee perspective as well as the transformational leader's contribution to the employee's development in aiming for sustainability within a business (Zefeiti & Mohamad, 2015).

An in-depth understanding of how an employee perceives transformational leadership as driver of sustainability consists of a manifold of realities. To collect in-depth data, a structured qualitative research design was used under a view of interpretivism.

3.2. Research Design

A research design derives from the function as an important connection between the arguments and theories that give insight into the research and the data collected (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Moreover, Sileyew (2019) believes the research design provides direction when gathering and analysing data within the research. The research approach can be viewed as an onion. When designing the research several approaches and layers are available and need to be consistently applied while performing the research to get to the core of what is required (Zefeiti & Mohamad, 2015).

Qualitative research is a systematic approach that aims to build a narrative, holistic, description of a certain phenomenon. By adopting an exploratory qualitative research approach, the research unpacked the different levels of influence and perspectives the employee had in relation to transformational leadership as a driver of sustainability within a business. The exploratory approach assisted the research to identify the exact nature of the problem statement and ensured additional research was taken into consideration when performing the study (Kréń, Szabó, Pál, *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, the approach was descriptive and an exploratory analysis of the employee perspective of transformational leadership as driver of sustainability within a business.

3.3. Population

A population is defined as the entire number of components or objects to whom the results of the study will apply. When conducting research, no matter the methods used (qualitative or quantitative) for data collection and analysis, the researcher is bound to face difficulties in seeking to study everyone, doing all things, in all places (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014: 97). The employee group at USCL was classified as the population of the study of transformational leadership as driver of sustainability within a business. The employee group at USCL is made up of individuals with expertise and experience in the transportation and supply chain industry of South Africa. The company is national in its operations, with business units throughout South Africa. Due to time constraints and

the magnitude of the population, the research did not address the entire population at USCL. Thus, the research made use of a non-probability sampling method to refine the population size into a more niche defined sample size of 5 participants.

3.4. Sampling

Non-probability sampling is used when the entire population is deemed as too challenging to gain access to. This means that each employee of USCL did not have an equal opportunity to form part of the sample of the research (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014: 97). To refine the sample size to an achievable sample size, the researcher made use of purposive sampling. A purposive sampling method includes elements that the research purposefully includes in the sample, based on a predetermined requirement list of characteristics (2018). The characteristics were drawn from the population of top-level management at USCL in-line with the research question of how employees experience a transformational leader's actions in changing a loss-making business, to determine the defined sample for the research. Purposive sampling was used to identify 5 USCL top-level management employees whose characteristics and experience fitted the predetermined list of characteristics of the newly defined sample (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014: 142).

These sample characteristics determined by the researcher consisted of employees with vast experience of the influence leadership has on a business within the supply chain industry. The sample must have experienced transformational leadership actions during their employment at USCL. The sample characteristics included;

- Top-level management,
- Previous exposure to transformational leadership,
- Involvement in the turnaround of a loss-making business.

By disregarding employees who had not experienced transformational leadership in a loss-making business, the researcher obtained more accurate information on the influence transformational leader's actions have on the employee's experience when driving sustainability within a business. Once the sample had been established for the study, data-collection methods were established to obtain the required research around transformational leadership as driver of sustainability within a business.

3.5. Data-collection Method

Data collection consists of the process of gathering information from various resources to answer the research question (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). There are various collection

channels to obtain data from the sample population. To gain a greater insight into the defined sample, the collection method of in-depth interviews was used. The in-depth interviews proposed questions to the participants to gain a greater understanding of the beliefs, views, and opinions the employees had on the influence transformational leaders have in driving sustainability within a loss-making business. Moreover, the type of in-depth interviews were standardised, repeated open-ended interviews. These repeated in-depth interviews focused on asking the participants the same set of open-ended questions in their own respective interviews.

Interview questions were developed to determine the influence a transformational leaders' actions have had on employee's performance levels, and what influence the actions had on achieving sustainability within the business. The in-depth interviews consisted of questions aimed to obtain a greater understanding of how the transformational leader's actions impact the employee's performance levels in achieving sustainability. These open-ended questions aimed at moving from a broad focus to a narrower focus (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). By keeping the questions clear and simple, the researcher aimed at making it easier for the participants to understand what is expected of them, aiding them to fully express how they feel about the topic and not answer what they think the researcher wants to hear (Mortensen, 2020). The interview questions can be viewed in Annexure B page 39.

The researcher is an employee of USCL, which grants the researcher open access to lines of communication with the participants involved within the research. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were not conducted face-to-face. Thus, the interviews were conducted and recorded, with the permission of the participants, via the company video conferencing tool, "StarLeaf". Each interview was held independently at a convenient time for both the researcher and the participant. Participants received the set of questions before the interview, for the participant to prepare more in-depth answers. The researcher would have preferred to conduct the interviews in person, to ensure no distractions or other individuals made an influence on the answers of the participants. The researcher took note of the time constraints for the proposed interviews. However, to draw the most impactful data, the data collection of in-depth interviews was seen as the most appropriate.

By obtaining the information in a structured format, the data was analysed more easily, as the format allowed the researcher to compare notes on the opinions and views of the participants in a far more organised manner (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). To extract the

necessary information for the study, the data analysis method used will be discussed in further detail.

3.6. Data-analysis Methods

Once the data from the participants was obtained through the in-depth interview process, the data was analysed. Qualitative data often largely consists of in-depth information normally presented in the form of words. The analysis of the data consisted of refining the data, looking for differences or similarities and subsequently finding themes and developing categories (Gibbs, 2007).

To analyse the data, the researcher made use of coding. Coding data refers to the scrutiny of the data, taking note of only the meaningful and relevant sections of the information with descriptive words or codes that structure the data into areas that can be referred to when analysing the data (Mortensen, 2020). Coding can be broken up into several forms of coding. Thematic coding was used when refining the data obtained from the interviews.

Thematic coding involves identifying or recording pieces of text which are linked to a common idea or theme which allows the researcher to group the text to establish themes within the gathered data (Mortensen, 2020). In order to establish the themes of the data, inductive thematic coding was used. An inductive thematic coding approach involves allowing the data to determine the themes found in the data (Mortensen, 2020). The inductive thematic coding themes which emerged in the data can be viewed below in Figure 1 page 20.

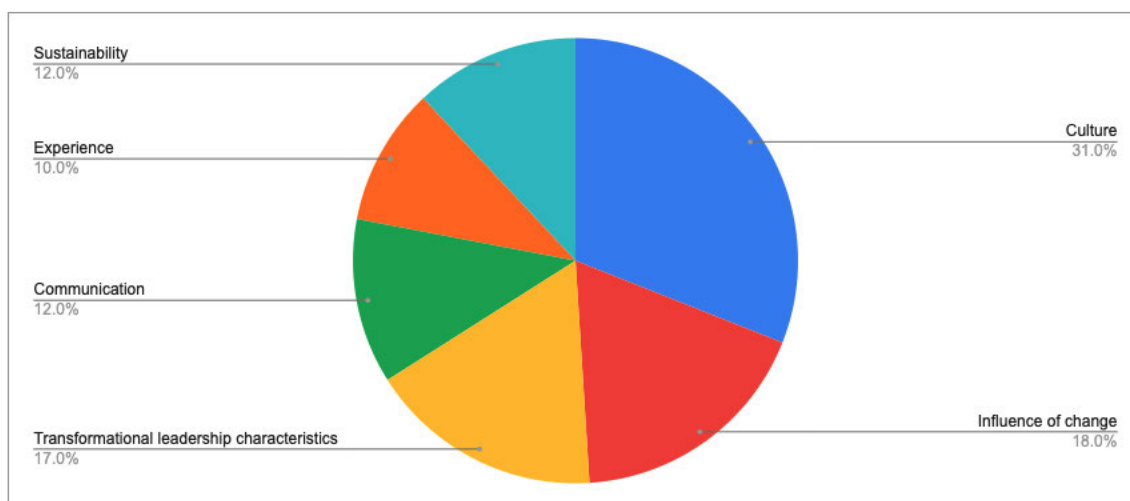


Figure 1: Pie chart of emerged themes.

For the reader to trust the research and the data collected from the participants, the research needed to establish a level of trustworthiness from its data and methods.

4. Findings and Interpretations of Findings

4.1. Trustworthiness

In qualitative research trustworthiness is often questioned by positivists as the concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in qualitative research the same way in which quantitative empirical research can be addressed. This stems from quantitative researchers having numbers to back their research and thus seen as more factual whereas qualitative data is generally backed by the views of participants which can be viewed in different ways (Sileyew, 2019). Thus, it is imperative that during the data collection stage of the research the researcher remained unbiased and illustrated a fair representation of how the participants within the study felt about transformational leadership as driver of sustainability within a business. However, on the same merit, the researcher needed to identify trustworthy participants who understood the importance of giving trustworthy answers. This was achieved by making participation in the research completely voluntary to the participants who fell into the sample characteristics.

The research study was made up of a very large population but only addressed a small sample size within the population. A small sample size does have an impact on the trustworthiness of the results of the study due to the answers not coming from a comprehensive number of the population. However, by using a sample size with the highest level of experience of the business and the influence of transformational leadership, the research aimed to mitigate the negative influence of using the small sample size. The researcher is an employee of USCL and has a direct channel of communication with the employees. This made it easier to identify the employee's characteristics within the top-level management at USCL, making the defining process of the sample size more accurate and achievable.

In addition to the above, the researcher ensured that his involvement as an employee of USCL did not influence his perceptions as the researcher within the study. However, the researcher did not aim to irrefutable evidence about transformational leadership, sustainability, or the employee perspective, but rather aims to explore and contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the respective fields.

4.2. Presenting of findings

The in-depth interviews ranged from 30 – 45 minutes. Each participant expressed great interest in being involved in the research. All 5 of the predetermined questions were answered by all of the participants. Each participant gave in-depth views when answering the questions. After concluding the interviews, the researcher compared the answers of the participants question by question. After scribing the interviews, the researcher made extensive notes on each of the interviews. The data gathered from each participants interview was rich in information, allowing the research to obtain a wide enough view from a small sample. The findings of the interviews as well as the emerging themes of each question are summarized in Annexure D on page 48. The below question summaries assist the reader with an overview of each question answered by the participants, highlighting the main outcomes of the question.

Question 1: What transformational leadership characteristics stand out the most for you during loss-making periods of a business?

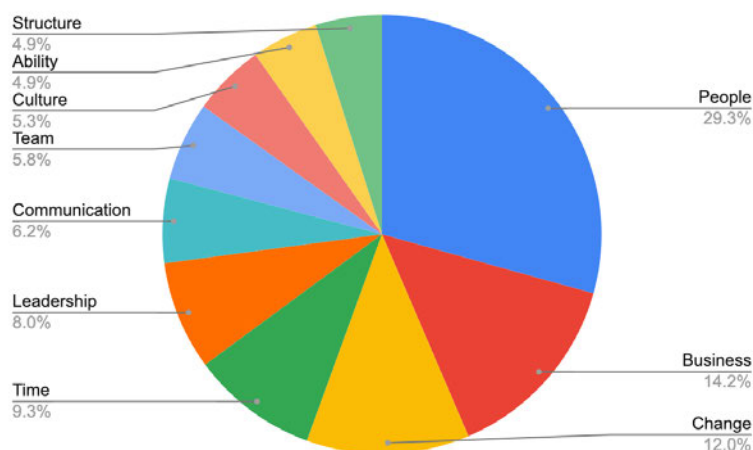


Figure 2: Pie chart of the 10 most common words.

All 5 participants indicated the importance of transformational leadership characteristics during loss-making periods of the business. 7 of the 8 characteristics mentioned in the literature of White (2018) were extensively referred to when addressing what characteristics, a leader needs to possess. The characteristic of; Loyalty to the business and its employees was only mentioned by participant 5. In answering question 1, all participants expressed a positive sentiment towards the question.

Question 2: How has transformational leadership influenced or changed your experience at USCL?

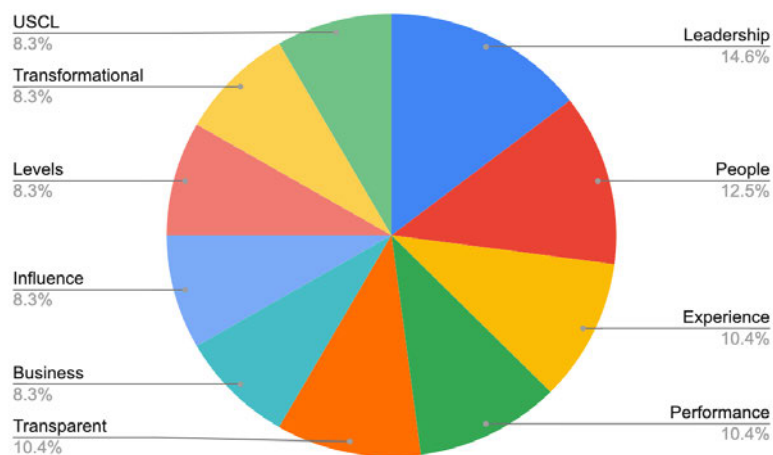


Figure 3: Pie chart of the 10 most common words.

All 5 of the participants indicated that transformational leadership had an influence on their experience at USCL. Each participant shared their own unique experience; however, a common thread of a positive influence was evident throughout the answers. One of the focal points from all of the participants which shows in word cloud was the impact transparency as well as people had on the participants experience at USCL.

Question 3: How did this experience influence your job performance levels?

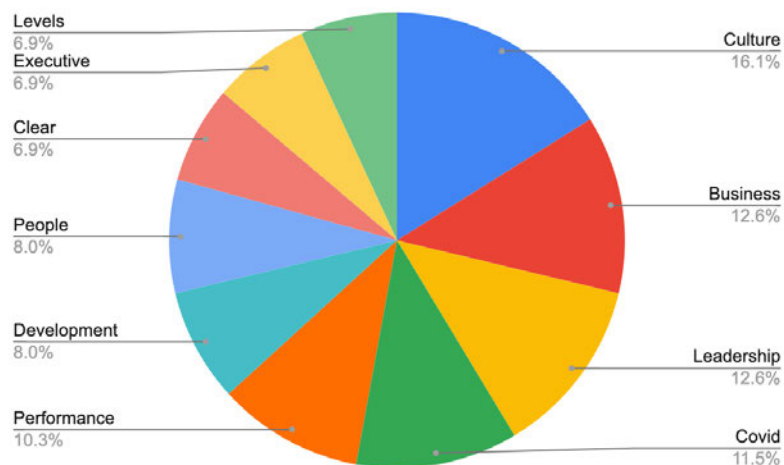


Figure 4: Pie chart of the 10 common words.

In understanding how transformational leadership influenced the participants job performance levels, 4 of the 5 participants indicated that transformational leadership had a positive influence on their job performance levels. The remaining participant indicated that although transformational leadership was present, a leadership style has no influence on his performance levels as he is a self-driven individual. The theory of human development proposed by Erikson (2018) assisted in understanding what influences the experience and development of an individual.

Question 4: What is your perception of transformational leadership in empowering employee development?

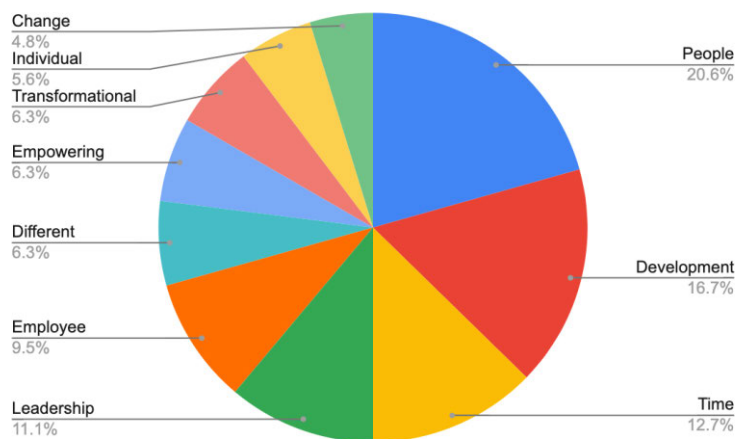


Figure 5: Pie chart of the 10 common words.

Question 4 was strongly agreed with by all 5 participants. Each participant highlighted employee development as a very important aspect in achieving organizational sustainability. In relation to the research problem, the participants indicated that it is important to focus within and strengthen your immediate resources before attempting to tackle the external macro-environmental factors. As highlighted in the literature of Lim and Cromartie (2018) a positive organizational culture is a contributing factor to achieving organizational sustainability in a business.

Question 5: Do you believe there is a relationship between transformational leadership and organizational sustainability?

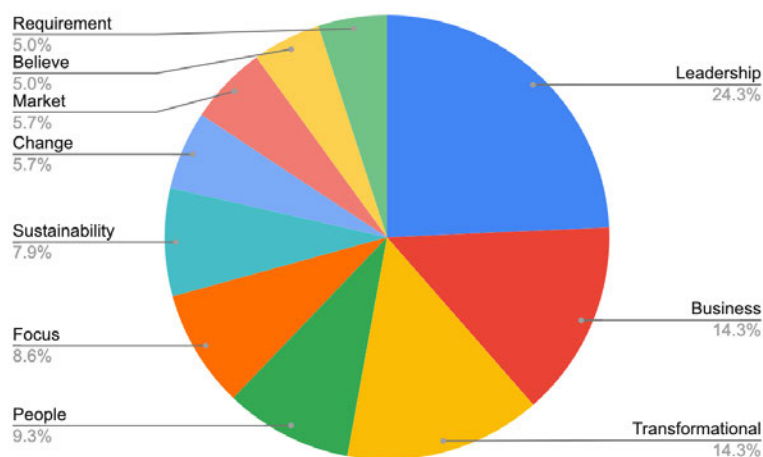


Figure 6: Pie chart of the 10 common words.

A strong relationship between transformational leadership and organisational sustainability was expressed the participants. 2 out of the 5 participants indicated that although transformational leadership plays an important role in achieving organisational sustainability, it is not the only influencing factor. The importance of the business's ability to adapt to the changes of the environment was highlighted by the participants. Participant

2 explained that during the tough economic period of the COVID-19 pandemic the business was seeing this relationship more than ever. The sentiment towards the relationship of transformational leadership and organisational sustainability was seen in a positive light by the participants.

Overall questions summary

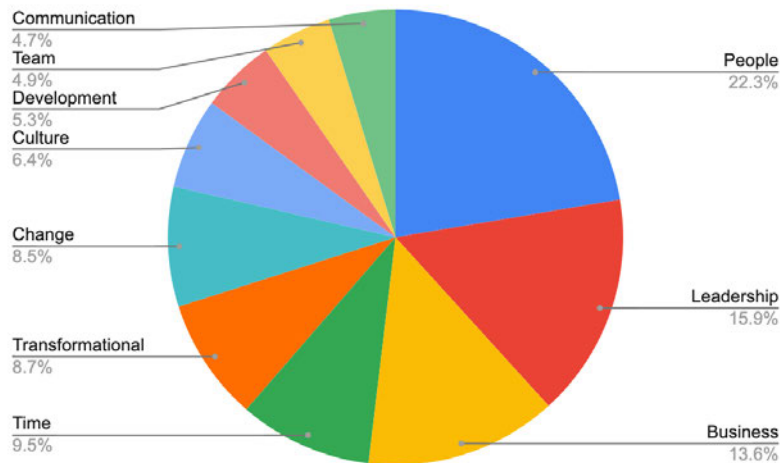


Figure 7: Pie chart of the 10 most common words.

As an overview of the 5 questions, a large focus was placed on the importance of the business building a culture largely revolved around the employees. The importance of making the employees feel seen, heard, and appreciated was highlighted by 2 of the participants extensively. A positive experience of transformational leadership was evident throughout the participants' interviews indicating a positive view of a transformational leader's actions during a loss-making period of a business.

4.3. Interpretation of findings

The below section is a critical evaluation of the findings presented above from the in-depth interviews of the 5 participants. The findings will be constantly related back to the theory and literature of the research on transformational leadership as driver of sustainability. The themes that emerged as illustrated in Figure 1, will be discussed further in order to interpret the findings.

Theme 1: Culture

The first theme which emerged was the theme of culture. As is evident in Figure 1 the theme and focus on culture was dominant throughout the participants' experience. All 5 participants extensively expressed their views on the importance of business culture in achieving organisational sustainability. Participants 1 and 3 highlighted the work the business had done to improve the business culture. Moreover, the two participants go on to explain that had they not extensively worked on the business culture, the business

would not have been as sustainable through the COVID-19 pandemic thus far. Although the influence of change COVID-19 caused in the environment was not within the aim of the study, the impact emerged during the period the study was conducted. COVID-19 had a large influence on the level of change within the business environment. This change had a detrimental impact on the country's economy as well as the profitability of businesses within the market. As mentioned the study was not based on the impact of COVID-19, however, the participants referred to the impact the pandemic had on the business, and how well the company adapted to this threat by ensuring a strong corporate culture was achieved. The literature of Narver (2016) highlights the role of corporate culture in the success of transformational leadership. Moreover, Lim & Cromartie (2019) expressed a positive correlation between organisational sustainability and a corporate culture that empowers employees. The focus on building a strong corporate culture as highlighted by all 5 of the participants, indicates a positive experience for the employees of transformational leadership during loss-making periods. The participants constantly referred to the importance of building a business culture where employees felt seen, heard, and appreciated.

Participant 3 compares the current transformational leadership the business is under, to the prior autocratic leadership the business was previously under. The participant goes on to explain how the autocratic leader created a business culture where employees found it challenging to develop within the business, as they were unsure if and how they added value to the business. This resulted in a negative experience for the employee. The lack of communication of the bigger picture in steering the business in the same direction had a direct impact on the employee's experience as well as the sustainability of the business. The change from an autocratic leadership style to a transformational leadership style resulted in a drastic culture change.

Participants 1, the new leader of the business coins leadership as an environment that is less about leadership where people just follow, but more about an environment of fellowship. The environment of fellowship indicates the importance of the employees to the business, indicating a strong drive to a people-centric corporate culture. Participant 4's view on transformational leadership was that the leader needs to empower the employee to be able to take over from the leader one day. White (2018) emphasises the importance of employee focus and engagement in creating a more sustainable corporate culture. The constant attention to the corporate culture that comes out through the

transformational leadership team in the business, resulted in a culture where employees experience of the business was enhanced.

Theme 2: Transformational leadership characteristics

The second theme which emerged when analysing the data was the importance of transformational leadership characteristics. All of the 5 participants extensively covered the importance of the characteristics. 7 out of the 8 characteristics mentioned in the literature of White (2018) were extensively covered by the participants. The characteristic of loyalty to the business was not discussed in much detail throughout the interviews. However, the participants did not indicate that they were not loyal to the business.

The general experience of transformational leadership was positively expressed by all 5 of the participants. Participant 1 explains the transformational leadership style of the business as trying to get everybody to be a part of finding the solution in the business as opposed to being the problem. Moreover, a large effort of breaking down the barriers between the leadership team and the employees was focused on as the leadership team tried to position themselves as not being more special than the employees. This created a more unified business culture, where employees felt a part of the business and the leadership team, having a positive influence on the employee's experience.

Participant 5 expressed that transformational leadership was not his chosen style of leadership. The participant went on to explain that leadership does not need a certain style in order to lead, leadership just needs to be present in order for a business to succeed. Although Participant 5 did not take the stance of transformational leadership as the preferred leadership style, he extensively referred to the characteristics of a transformational leader when explaining his definition of what good leadership is. The mentioned example expresses the importance of transformational leadership characteristic within the business.

From the basis of the 8 eight characteristics mentioned by White (2018) as well as the constant reference to the characteristics by the participants, it is evident that these characteristics are influential on the experience of the employee.

Participant 1 expressed that transformational leadership acts as a catalyst in empowering employee development. An employee who is inspired and equipped to develop within the business will have a positive experience within the business, even in the tough times. The importance of communication through the business in the good and bad times was extensively highlighted as a success factor by the participants. The characteristic of a

high level of communication skills as listed by White (2018) was supported by the participants as a characteristic which enhanced the employee's experience during tough periods of the business. As highlighted by the participants the presence of transformational leadership characteristics are highly important within a business culture as they guide the business in the direction of achieving organisational sustainability.

Theme 3: Communication

The theme of communication in conjunction with the importance of the business culture was dominant in the participants' answers. Participant 3 highlights the level of importance and focus the business has on communication within the business. All 5 of the participants indicated that in uncertain times, the level of communication needs to increase. This indicated that the level of communication within a business has a direct impact on the experience of the employees within a business. Transformational leadership places a large focus on ensuring communication throughout the business. Participant 2 expresses the leadership team as transparent which makes it easier for employees at all levels of the business to engage with the leadership team. This indicated that the open lines of communication allow for a greater level of employee engagement, enhancing the experience of employees at all levels of the business as they feel a part of the business.

Participant 4 gave the example of departmentalisation, where departments were previously too far apart decreasing the amount of communication between departments. This caused a dysfunctional environment where communication levels were low, which was not sustainable. Through the restructuring of the departments, the employees were able to communicate at a greater level. The increase in communication allowed employees to work better together, increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the departments as indicated by Participant 4. The example above shows the influence and impact open communication channels can have on an employee's experience in a business, indicating the importance of communication within the business.

Theme 4: Experience

The experience of the employee, being one of the focal points of the study emerged as a theme in the data. Each participant expressed their own personal experience and how transformational leadership had influenced their working experience. None of the participants indicated a negative experience from transformational leadership during loss-making periods. This indicates that transformational leadership has a positive influence on the experience of an employee.

Throughout the interviews, the value for people and the importance of the employees was extensively expressed. Respect for people's values, needs, and feelings was also focused on. The Transformational leadership style created a culture where people felt seen, heard, appreciated, and understood as indicated by Participant 1. This culture aided by the transformational leadership style assisted the business in ensuring organisational sustainability during loss-making periods of the market. Moreover, Participant 1 goes on to explain that the employees are made to feel like the most important asset in a business. This resulted positively in the culture of the business as well as the experience of the employee.

Peng *et al.* (2020) identifies how transformational leader's actions can bolster employees' affective commitment to the business by strengthening the employee's perceptions of work impact. Participant 3 expressed positive experiences of transformational leadership within the business and indicated that the larger employee group came across as more committed and productive under the new transformational leadership team in comparison to the prior autocratic leadership team. It can be drawn that the shift in leadership to a more transformational leadership style had a direct impact on the employees' productivity and commitment to the business, resulting in an increase in job satisfaction levels for the employees.

The job satisfaction levels based on the experiences explained by the participants can be related to the definition of intrinsic satisfaction identified in the definition given by Towler (2019). The participants expressed how the transformational leadership approach of the business revolves around enhancing the employee experience through a variety of skills and giving the employee a degree of responsibility, resulting in empowering the employee. The intrinsic satisfaction levels correlate with sustainable business practices. In relation to the research problem, the focus on enhancing the employee's experience as well as empowering employee development indicates that the transformational leadership style placed a large internal focus in order to obtain organisational sustainability. Participant 3 emphasised this by explaining that the business needs to ensure they are doing the best they can internally, before the concentrate on the external macro-environmental threats of the market in order to remain sustainable.

Theme 5: Sustainability

The fifth theme which emerged in the data was the theme of sustainability. Organisational sustainability was mentioned by all 5 participants, as well as highlighted as a critical success factor of the business.

For the organisational sustainability to be made permanent and impactful Towler (2019) and White (2018) emphasise the importance of employee focus and engagement. The two researchers illustrate that a transformational leadership style that has a strong internal employee focus achieves organisational sustainability within the business environment. The participants emphasised the literature of Towler (2019) and White (2018) through their explanation of how transformational leadership had allowed the business to adapt to the changes forced on it by the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that transformational leadership played a pivotal in achieving organisational sustainability during the pandemic period.

The participants highlighted that organisational sustainability had become a challenging task due to the complexity and volatility of the market. Moreover, Participant 4 explained that the constant change in the market together with the political unrest of the country makes it difficult for a business to remain sustainable. Blaga (2018) identifies a business model for social entrepreneurship to achieve organisational sustainability. Participants 1, 2, and 4 highlighted this when explaining the vision and mission of the business. The participants explain that under the transformational leadership team, the business strives to identify new ways to compete in the market by fully utilising their internal resources. This can be related back to the research problem as a good example for businesses who are not focusing internally on improving their business. The internal focus on improving the business under a transformational leadership style allows for the business to adapt to the level of change, increasing the desired level of organisational sustainability.

Theme 6: Influence of change

The final theme that emerged was the influence of change. Participant 3 explains that transformational leadership goes hand in hand with the reconsideration of business outputs as well as the reconsideration of the requirement to diversify. These points revolve around constantly managing the influence of change in order to ensure the Transformational leadership style is sustainable. By ensuring that change is measured and monitored on a continuous basis, the leadership team is able to strive for excellence and achieve a business environment where employees feel safe during times of uncertainty, as the business installs confidence in the employees. In relation to the theory of Human Development, when an individual feels a sense of trust, they are able to further develop as they trust the environment they are in allowing them to focus on the job at hand and not worry about the surrounding influencers. Transformational leadership is

critical in managing change within a business and by ensuring the employees trust the business and its leadership, the business is able to manage change a lot better.

In relation to change in the business and the business environment, all 5 of the participants identified that the business and the business environment had been through a radical change in recent times. Each of the participants experienced different levels of change throughout their business. However, all 5 participants indicated that the Transformational leadership style of the business made adapting and managing the change a lot easier. Participant 1 identified the feeling of psychological safety as the biggest switch, in building a relationship of trust in the business.

The results of the research reinforce the literature of Goodman (2020) that during periods of change leader's actions directly influence the employees' acceptance of the change. The business's decision of doing a complete leadership restructure was a bold decision. However, the change in leadership was widely accepted in the business as explained by the participants as the employee group was made to feel a part of the change. The transformational leadership style assisted in ensuring that the high level of change was easily accepted by the employee group.

5. Ethical Considerations

Research ethics provides the guidelines for the research to be conducted responsibly. Moreover, the ethics monitor and educate the researcher to ensure high ethical standards within the research (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012: 16). It is of the utmost importance for the research to portray honesty in protecting the rights, dignity, and respect of the participants and the information collected within the research (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012: 17).

The information provided by all participants was treated as a privilege. The participants of the study had the right to withdraw at any stage of the study. Moreover, the participant's details were not shared within the study or made available to the public at any point during or after the study. Thus, the interviewed respondents remained anonymous. The participant's contribution and participation in the study were completely voluntary, throughout the study.

To ensure the researcher remained unbiased throughout the research, a form of bracketing was performed. Within qualitative research, bracketing is used to reduce the

potential deleterious preconceptions that may influence the research process (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). This ensured the researcher remained ethical towards the participants as the researcher did not disregard any information or perspective of the participants during the data collection and analysis period.

Due to the data being collected via a virtual channel, the researcher ensured that the platform used, “Starleaf”, was a trusted known source for the participants. The participants of the study have made extensive use of the platform before the study. Moreover, with the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded. The recording of the interviews will be kept in storage for at least 5 years, to ensure the confidentiality of the data obtained through the interviewing process. The participants are referred to as “participant 1”, “participant 2”, “participant 3”, “participant 4” and “participant 5”. While conducting the interviews, the rights of the participants were adhered to at all times. In ensuring the honesty of the research, all data collected was referenced according to the standards of the Harvard Style Reference Guide – Adapted for The IIE. This ensured that all data that is gathered was available for the reader to view and evaluate.

Ethical clearance from the IIE Varsity college ethics committee was obtained before commencing with the research. Moreover, institutional permission from USCL was obtained before commencing the study, ensuring the participants had authorisation to share data on the organisation.

6. Limitations

Within all research, limitations exist. These limitations can be described as constraints in the research which are out of the control of the researcher. The limitations of the research will influence the outcome of the research (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014: 275). The limitations for the qualitative research were as follows;

6.1. Time-constraints

Due to the research being conducted over a relatively short period of time, the research had limited time to pilot the study to improve the trustworthiness of the participants and the information obtained. However, to mitigate the impact of the short time period the researcher had already proposed the interview questions to pilot with the USCL human

development department. This assisted the researcher in being equipped to conduct the interviews in a timely manner after ethical clearance was granted.

6.2. Accessibility

Due to the size of the population and the limited time frame mentioned above, the researcher was only able to interview a small sample population. This limited the number of perspectives obtained within the research. Thus, the research was based on a fraction of the USCL population. In order to mitigate this factor, the researcher ensured that the participants had extensive business knowledge, experience, and prior exposure to transformational leadership in achieving organisational sustainability.

6.3. Participants Contribution

The amount of information that can be obtained during an interview is limited by the time period of the interview. Thus, it could have influenced the participants' answers in extensively expressing their perspective and views of the topic, leading to a shortfall in information, which could have led the researcher to a misconception of the employees' perspective.

7. Heuristic Value

Although various studies have been conducted on transformational leadership and the impact a leader can have on the sustainability of a business, the core concepts of the research exist in an environment that is constantly changing. Transformational leadership keeps evolving as leaders are presented with new challenges every day. The perspective of an employee is forever changing and evolving as different factors and influences exist in their environment as time goes on. The sustainability of a business is impacted and influenced daily by the environments around it (McCallaghan *et al.*, 2019).

Thus, the research aimed at contributing to the existing body of knowledge around transformational leadership and the influence the leadership style has on the sustainability within a business. The long-term goal of the research was to identify the importance leadership has on a business, especially within the transportation industry where a change in leadership is often slow and overlooked. Moreover, the study gives an insightful contribution to the understanding of transformational leadership and the positive influence transformational leadership can have in a dynamic working environment.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research set out objectives in order to determine the influence transformational leadership has on driving sustainability within the business, from the employees' perspective. The research managed to achieve the objectives set out by gaining in-depth answers from the 5 participants on their experience of transformational leadership and sustainability within the business.

The research question was answered, indicating a correlation between transformational leadership and organisational sustainability. The relationship indicated that the leadership style can assist a business in achieving organisational sustainability. It is important to note the importance each participant placed on people, leadership, and the business in their interviews. The transformational leadership style of the business focused extensively on the empowerment of the employees within the business. Although the business was experiencing challenging times, the leadership team identified the importance of focusing on the experience of the employees ensuring it was positive.

The theory of human development was important to the study in understanding the employee's experience as well as unpacking the literature presented in the study.

Based on the data gathered from the interviews and the literature of the research, the actions of the transformational leader are directly related to the level of success the business is experiencing. Although the leadership style is not the only contributing factor, the study shows that it is definitely a critical factor in achieving sustainability within the business.

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Annexure A – Participants Consent forms

Note: The full consent form indicating what was expected from the participants has only been attached once. There after the section where the participants signed has been attached. Each participant was issued their own consent form however each form was identical in information.



CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern,
My name is Stefano Comninos and I am a student at IIE Varsity College. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Karel Marais about transformational leadership as driver of sustainability from an employee perspective. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the influence transformational leadership has in achieving sustainability. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research in sharing your views on transformational leadership and sustainability You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?
Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
Do I have to participate in the study?
• Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary; • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so; • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.
Will my identity be protected?
I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at IIE Varsity College will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?
Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Bcom Honours Business management. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.
What happens if I have more questions about the study?
Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.
You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.
My contact details are as follows: Stefano Comninos [REDACTED]
The contact details of my supervisor are as follows: [REDACTED]

Consent form for participants	
I, [REDACTED] agree to participate in the research conducted by Stefano Comninos about transformational leadership as driver of sustainability from an employee's perspective. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • I agree to be interviewed for this research. • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research. • I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
[REDACTED]	20/07/2020
Signature	Date



CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING

Consent form for participants	
I, [REDACTED] agree to allow Stefano Comninos to audio record my interviews as part of the research about transformational leadership as driver of sustainability from an employee's perspective. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
[REDACTED]	20/07/2020
Signature	Date

Consent form for participants	
I, [REDACTED] agree to participate in the research conducted by Stefano Comninos about transformational leadership as driver of sustainability from an employee's perspective. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:	
• I agree to be interviewed for this research.	
• My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.	
• My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.	
• I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.	
• I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
[REDACTED] 20/07/2020	
Signature	Date



CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING

Consent form for participants	
I, [REDACTED] agree to allow Stefano Comninos to audio record my interviews as part of the research about transformational leadership as driver of sustainability from an employee's perspective. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:	
• My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.	
• The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer.	
• Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
[REDACTED] 20/07/2020	
Signature	Date

Consent form for participants

I, [REDACTED] agree to participate in the research conducted by Stefano Comninos about transformational leadership as driver of sustainability from an employee's perspective.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to be interviewed for this research.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature

Date

20/07/20

**CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING****Consent form for participants**

I, [REDACTED] agree to allow Stefano Comninos to audio record my interviews as part of the research about transformational leadership as driver of sustainability from an employee's perspective.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer.
- Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.

Signature

Date

20/7/20

Consent form for participants	
I, [REDACTED] agree to participate in the research conducted by Stefano Comminos about transformational leadership as driver of sustainability from an employee's perspective. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • I agree to be interviewed for this research. • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research. • I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
[REDACTED] 20/07/2020	
[REDACTED] Date	



CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING

Consent form for participants	
I, [REDACTED] agree to allow Stefano Comminos to audio record my interviews as part of the research about transformational leadership as driver of sustainability from an employee's perspective. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
[REDACTED] 20/07/2020	
Signature	Date

Consent form for participants	
I [REDACTED] agree to participate in the research conducted by Stefano Comminos about transformational leadership as driver of sustainability from an employee's perspective. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • I agree to be interviewed for this research. • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research. • I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
Signature [REDACTED]	Date 21/07/20



CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING

Consent form for participants	
I [REDACTED] agree to allow Stefano Comminos to audio record my interviews as part of the research about transformational leadership as driver of sustainability from an employee's perspective. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
Signature [REDACTED]	Date 21/07/20

Annexure B – Gatekeepers Letter



Gatekeepers letter/ Request to conduct research

Dear [REDACTED]

I am writing to ask your permission to conduct research at your Unitrans Supply Chain Solutions (USCS).

My name is Stefano Comninos, a Bcom Honours student at the Varsity College a brand of the Independent Institute of Education (IIE). The research I wish to conduct for my Honours Research Report on Transformational leadership as driver of sustainability: an employee perspective.

The aim of this study is to investigate the influence transformational leadership has in achieving sustainability in a business. The nature of your firm's participation will require 5 top-level management employees, who will assist the research by sharing their view so on the influence transformational leadership has on a business during loss-making periods.

Yours sincerely

Student: Stefano Comninos

Supervisor: Karel Marais

My contact details are as follows:

Stefano Comninos
[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor/navigator/lecturer are as follows:

Karel Marais
[REDACTED]

Gatekeepers Approval

Consent form to conduct research at my company	
I, 	
Representative of Unitrans Supply Chain Solutions	
My capacity: CEO	
Give my permission that Stefano Comninos may conduct research at my company. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time. I also understand that research reports are available in the library and IIE Repository unless I indicate below that I would not	
Select below:	
• I request that my company's identity be kept confidential. • My company can be identified in the study • The study may never be available on the repository. • The study may be made available on the repository. • The study may be made available on the repository after6..... months.	
	20/07/2020
Signature	Date

Annexure C – Interview questions

The following questions were sent to the participants on the confirmation of the interview date and time.

Q1. What Transformational leadership characteristic stick out the most for you during a loss making period of a business?

Q2. How has Transformational leadership influenced or changed your experience at USCL?

Q3. How did this experience influence your job performance levels?

Q4. What is your perception of Transformational leadership in empowering employee development?

Q5. Do you believe there is a relationship between Transformational leadership and Organisational Sustainability?

Annexure D – Data analysis: Common words and emerging themes

In-depth interview guide: Major topics and questions

<u>Question:</u>	<u>Commonly used words:</u>	<u>Themes emerged:</u>
Q1. What Transformational leadership characteristic stick out the most for you during a loss making period of a business?	• People, • The business, • Change.	• Culture, • Transformational leadership characteristics, • Communication.
Q2. How has Transformational leadership influenced or changed your experience at USCL?	• Leadership, • Transparency, • People.	• Communication, • Culture, • Experience.
Q3. How did this experience influence your job performance levels?	• Culture, • Business, • Leadership.	• Experience, • Communication, • Influence of change.
Q4. What is your perception of Transformational leadership in empowering employee development?	• People, • Development, • Empowering.	• Sustainability, • Communication, • Culture.
Q5. Do you believe there is a relationship between Transformational leadership and Organisational Sustainability?	• Leadership, • Transformational, • Business.	• Influence of change, • Sustainability, • Communication.

Annexure E – Concept document

Research Purpose/Objective	Primary Research Question:	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method	Ethics	Anticipated finding	References
The research aims to evaluate the influence transformational leaders have on the employees of a business to achieve sustainable business practices in tough economic conditions.	How do employees experience a transformational leader's action in changing a loss-making business?	By evaluating the influence, a transformational leader's actions can have on their employees, the research substantiated the importance of a transformational leadership style in achieving organizational sustainability.	- A. Chapman - S. McCallaghan, L. Jackson, M. Heyns - S. Blaga - S. Brezuleanu, S. Viziteu, A. Robu, C. Brezuleanu	Theme 1: <i>Change in leadership</i> Theme 2: <i>Transformational leadership</i> Theme 3: <i>The employee perspective</i> Theme 4: <i>Business sustainability in South Africa</i>	Interpretivism, considering the employee's feelings and experiences within the workplace.	Qualitative methods Population The population of the research will consist of top level management employees at Unilogic Supply Chain and Logistics	In-depth interviews, conducted over a video conferencing tool – "StarLeaf"	The researcher was nonbiased towards the style of transformational leadership, and protect the information provided by participants	The researcher believes that Transformational leadership, has a positive influence in achieving business sustainability.	Harvard IEE Varsity College
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/ Hypotheses/ Objectives	Key-Concepts	Key Theories			Sampling	Data Analysis Methods	Limitations	Anticipated contribution	
In tough economic conditions, businesses are losing focus on internal employee focus. By not focusing on the business factors which are controllable, businesses are not operating in a sustainable way leading to tough economic conditions.	None	Business sustainability Transformational leadership Employee perspective Organisational culture Top-level management	Theory of Human Development – Erik Erikson <i>Reinforced by – Alan Chapman</i>			Purposive sampling based on 5 Unilogic Supply Chain and Logistics (USCL) employees.	A deductive method of thematic coding was used when analysing the data.	Small sample size, Information provided is based on feelings and emotion, which can differ in large sample sizes, Time-constraints.	The researcher aims to increase the importance of transformational leadership styles in the work place, in order to increase business sustainability.	

Originality Report