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INYUVESI YASETHEKWINI YEZOBUCHWEPHESHE

A FRAMEWORK FOR DECISION MAKING FOR ETHICAL CONSIDERATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In a world where there is so much injustice and unfairness particularly regarding vulnerable groups of people, ethical and moral decisions need to be applied to ensure fairness and consistency. Higher education (HE) is regarded as a place of knowledge growth embedded with ethical values and morals. This thesis aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the thought processes used by education practitioners in making fundamental teaching and learning decisions and to develop a framework for ethically conscious decision-making for HE. Students are our main focus in this trajectory of knowledge growth. Therefore, decision-making requires thoughtfulness and consideration of many areas to holistically understand the interconnections of various organisational structures that are fundamental to teaching and learning. The study looks at ethical practices and decisions made by various HE stakeholders that affects teaching and learning. This study is important to assist HE practitioners to re-connect with their duties and focus as professionals. A mixed method approach using explanatory sequential design was employed for this study. The target population for this study included all the academic staff from the six faculties and academic support staff (Centre for Quality Promotions Assurance [CQPA] and Centre for Education Learning and Technology [CELT]) of the Durban University of Technology. The paradigms/theories engaged with were the deontological theory, normative theory, justice theory, ethics of care, and virtue theory. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were the instruments used for the collection of data. The findings revealed that the institution places prominence on academic metrics rather than the holistic development of students. Discrepancies between the support and actual implementation of ethical practices revealed further development is needed in the alignment of values with action. Inconsistencies in decision-making are noted in relation to fairness and transparency. Consultation, consistency, listening and transparency are important tools to utilise in decision-making processes. Overall the study has the potential to contribute to social change by stimulating critical thinking, inclusive and equitable learning environments, ethical leadership, and responsible decision-making. The stakeholders that will benefit from this study are the students by way of building an ethical and authentic learning environment, and educators in guiding them in making decisions that are ethical and transparent.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Ethics and ethical decision-making are critical to the primary objective of the functioning of higher education (HE). Ultimately our goal is to teach students to behave in a moral and ethical manner (Masudi, 2024). In academia, making ethical decisions and applying ethics on a daily basis ought to come naturally (Burleigh, 2020). The word 'ethics' comes from the Greek word *ethos*, which means "character or custom" and from a Latin word that has roots in the words "mores" and "customs," which refer to societal ideals. Moral principles that instruct people on what is right or wrong are referred to as ethics. Thus, it is focused on what is morally upright in interpersonal relationships and centres on three ideas: the self, the good, and the other (Lazenby, 2022: 46). Rossouw and van Vuuren (2017) state that ethics is concerning what is good or right in human interaction. One's behaviour is said to be ethical if one thinks about what is good for others not only him/herself. It is imperative that 'self', 'good' and 'other' be part of the significance of ethics.

Gao, Liu and Yin (2021: 1) define ethics as "principles guiding people's behaviours and actions". Each profession has certain ethical duties to society as a whole. The standards that govern a practitioner's behaviour in order to preserve the public's confidence in that particular profession are known as professional ethics. In particular "ethics in education" is a set of standards that guide educators so they can serve society with excellence and use the power that society has granted them to carry out their immense duty (Gao, Liu and Yin, 2021: 1).

According to George and Rose (2025) the foundation of sound decision-making is ethics. The majority of professions, businesses, or communities of practice create codes of ethics or practices in an effort to control and direct behaviour and decision-making. Leaders have to make decisions. More significantly, they have to make the correct decisions, frequently in difficult circumstances when the best course of action is unclear. Given the significance of education for both individuals and society, leadership in HE institutions is fundamental (George and Rose, 2025).

Arising from one's line of work, a person's decisions may differ in terms of their importance, applicability or significance. Professional decision-making has grown increasingly complex. One of the most demanding and difficult jobs on a university campus is that of academic leader. The most frequent and noteworthy concerns leaders are confronted with are: "Who are we? What are we here to do? How should we go about doing it?". As leaders look for answers to problems that cannot be answered, the need to address such broad issues "can create a cycle of exhaustion" (Gallos and Bolman, 2021: 126).

A faculty dean's decision-making responsibilities involves many paths as they fulfil their duties to executives, faculty members, and staff. Therefore, to help them in making decisions that would benefit the university system, a faculty dean must have faith in their own moral code, self-confidence, and individuality (Basalla, 2022).

One important factor that influences behaviour, decision-making, and the general organisational culture in the HE environment in universities, is leadership ethics. Following ethical guidelines, values, and professional norms while exhibiting honesty, responsibility, and a dedication to the welfare of all stakeholders are characteristics of ethical leadership. It is impossible to overstate the significance of leadership ethics in HE. High-integrity leaders create a culture of moral conduct and responsibility by providing a good example for educators, employees, and learners. They encourage trust and assurance in the institution's decision-making procedures and activities (Brigue and Orlu, 2023).

The radical transformation at many institutions of HE has drawn attention to the significance of effectual and ethical leadership "relative to employees". HE in South Africa and the world over is confronted with significant change and transformational challenges that require exceptional leaders. Many lower level managers, namely line managers at supervisory level and middle level managers, and executive management have manipulated departments and faculties in an unethical way with a blatant or lack of consideration for the necessary stakeholders (Bhana and Bayat, 2020: 129).

Senior management executives at universities and colleges need to have a thorough awareness of not just what is going on around them but also of their own principles, beliefs, credibility, and moral compass. The fragile foundation of the HE structure

suffers when executives act dishonestly or make immoral choices. Leaders ought to be conscious of how their behaviour, decisions, and judgments affect the educational institutions they represent (Basalla, 2022).

According to Morris (2019), one does not have to initiate a hunt in our universities for unethical individuals or unethical practices, we only have to look into our own relationships with people and systems and our own personal goals and activities to see close-up judgments and ethical concerns.

In a traditional HE setting, HE is clearly defined as tertiary education and "progressive third-stage learning at the diploma and degree levels". South African HE institutions are increasingly turning into difficult environments to govern, oversee, and control. Fiscal misconduct and accountability issues, nepotism, excessive power, opposing interests, and misappropriation funds are examples of calamities that directly affect objectives like student-centredness and excellent teaching and learning (Bhana and Bayat, 2020: 129).

With the increase of bad publicity in business, government and academia recently, there is an urgent need to focus on 'ethical decision-making' and moral conduct. As such, institutions of higher learning are answerable to the public to conduct themselves ethically and professionally (Morris, 2019). According to Catacutan and de Guzman (2015: 485), by functioning with "integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner" HE leaders encourage every student's achievement. HE leaders are expected to have an understanding of multiple legal ethical structures and ethical viewpoints to align with these requirements, to demonstrate commitment to incorporating ethical values into their decision-making process and to build a compassionate school culture. Iloka (2025: 161) maintains that "integrity serves as a foundational principle that guides individual behaviour and decision-making, fostering honesty, trust, and ethical conduct among students and educators alike". Prozesky (2007: 110) states that "integrity stands for wholeness and the absence of contradiction"; integrity is present when our words and actions are connected, when our words and actions are in alignment and in accordance with honesty and virtuousness.

Maintaining leadership integrity in universities is difficult because of a number of moral conundrums and competing interests. Leaders may experience conflicting expectations, budgetary limitations, and pressure from outside parties that can

jeopardise their credibility. Studies have examined the difficulties university administrators encounter in upholding their integrity and stressed the significance of ethical fortitude and moral decision-making (Brigue and Orlu, 2023).

According to some academics, ethical decision-making follows a linear process and failing to acknowledge a moral dilemma will result in not participating in the moral decision-making process. As a result, ethical consciousness has been viewed as a crucial component of moral decision-making, making it a necessary step for acting ethically (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022). Bonde and Firenze (2013) state that making good ethical decisions requires skilled understanding of ethical concerns and a correct procedure for examining the moral aspects of decisions and evaluating the processes that would affect a decision on the plan of action. It is critical to have a technique for decision making. By continuously applying this on a regular basis the approach is so well-known that it becomes instinctive in following the necessary procedures. Bonde and Firenze (2013) assert this is the reason we believe that we have a 'moral intuition' regarding an issue, although we have not consciously given the situation any thought. The authors further maintain that we are adept at making ethical decisions similar to the way we have learnt to play the piano. However, it is not always wise to go with our gut feel particularly in complex and difficult circumstance (Bonde and Firenze, 2013). Universities are traditionally known as places where individuals become educated in an holistic manner so as to be able to contribute to social and economic growth. Therefore, places of higher learning and stake holders have an "ethical responsibility to uphold standards" (Prisacariu and Shah, 2016:161).

Prozesky (2000, p.46) states:

Herein lies a special moral responsibility for our universities, namely to find ways to infuse education with moral values and to enrich moral values with knowledge at the cutting edge of intellectual advances. Is there a better way than this to honour our responsibility as academics to serve society and be accountable for the use we make of scarce funds and great liberty?

This chapter provides a brief overview of the context of the research, the problem statement, aims, objectives and research questions, a brief synopsis of the research methodology, significance of the study, and concludes with a brief outline of the

chapters to follow. The purpose of this study was to examine the decision-making practices of HE practitioners that influence teaching and learning at their institutions.

1.2 Context of the research

Decision making requires a number of thought processes and consideration of numerous areas to holistically understand the interconnections of various organisational structures that are fundamental to our core focus, teaching and learning. Making ethical decisions every day in an educational environment should be an ingrained habit that comes naturally (Burleigh, 2020). Lately academic scholars have undertaken research studies designed to explore the "thought process underlying ethical decision-making" (Latta et al., 2020: 75).

According to Basalla (2022) universities have an ethical responsibility to their learners. In the context of the university, these organisations do a lot more than just award degrees and diplomas. Leadership in higher learning has an opportunity to influence students' perspectives. Since many students will look to the campus to help them establish their own moral compass, ethical leaders are therefore a crucial component of the university's structure. Ethical leaders uphold their integrity by adhering to the university's policies (Basalla, 2022).

There is the epistemological tradition that the University should be a place devoted to enquiry and scholarship, free from utilitarian demands where the economic importance of HE is acknowledged (Mouton, Louw and Strydom, 2013: 285).

The function of an efficacious academic manager is similar to both a "spiritual leader" who assists in the growth and development of constituents' trust in the organisation and in their involvement, and to a "spirited artist" who delivers a moving production that inspires and motivates audience members (Gallos and Bolman, 2021: 122).

Governments everywhere have taken notice of the notion of a knowledge-based economy, and as a result, they have encouraged expansion of their HE institutions to accommodate an increasing number of the youth they envision becoming "knowledge workers" (Boughey and Mckenna, 2021: 3).

Vice-chancellors and principles have encountered unique difficulties at the level of institutional leadership. They must not only think about how their university can effectively support a globalised market that requires students to have the abilities that businesses require, but they also need to do so in an environment of tight budgets and accomplish previously unthinkable efficiencies. The stated need for greater accountability and openness is another way that neoliberalism has affected educational institutions. The idea here is that if the public provides funding—either through taxes or payments for goods or services—the organisations that supply those services must be held responsible for how the funds are used and the high standard of the services they offer (Boughey and McKenna, 2021).

The White Paper highlights four purposes for HE as laid out in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Purposes of HE as identified by the White Paper

To meet the learning needs of individuals in order to achieve self-fulfillment;
To provide the labour market with 'high skills';
To contribute to the development of critical citizenry; and
To contribute to knowledge creation, knowledge evaluation and knowledge dissemination

Source: Boughey and McKenna (2021: 41). Authors adaptation: 2025.

These four purposes acknowledge the contribution of HE to both the 'private good', that is for graduates to thrive in a society economically, intellectually and emotionally, and the 'public good', that is for society itself to prosper through HE's contribution to economic growth and, importantly, the critically deemed necessary in a new democracy (Boughey and McKenna, 2021: 41).

In this respect "globalization demands that countries produce skilled citizens who are able to effectively access available knowledge, internalise it, produce new knowledge, and employ it to the betterment of society as a whole", this is fundamental for the growth and progression and HE institutions reference. Hence Badat (2010, as cited in Mouton, Louw and Strydom, 2013: 288) asserts that there is a demand for major "restructuring of qualification and programmes" so that the curricula or programmes are consistent and aligned with the "knowledge, expertise and skills" necessary for the fluctuating market.

There should also be no pretense that, in terms of a HE response to labour market needs, it is a matter of establishing the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes that are required by the economy and society, generally, and by its different constituent parts, specifically (Badat, 2010, as cited by Mouton, Louw and Strydom, 2013: 288).

Boughey and Mckenna (2021) state that the pressure for high skills has definite impacts for HE. Considering all the institutions providing education and training, HE supposedly has the capacity to prepare the young minds with utmost proficiency and skillfulness.

The Durban University of Technology (DUT) is located in Kwa-Zulu Natal and has approximately 34 400 registered students. As a university of technology, it focuses on teaching and learning excellence by their commitment to ensuring that academic staff continue to pursue their academic growth. DUT developed from the merger of Technikon Natal and M L Sultan in April 2002. It was initially named Durban Institute of Technology then renamed Durban University of Technology, in alignment with the other universities of technology. "DUT – a member of the International Association of Universities, is a multi-campus university of technology at the forefront of HE, technological training research, and innovation". In upholding DUT's ENVISION 2030, the university hopes to see staff and students aspire to entrepreneurial and innovative. DUT comprises six faculties: Accounting and Informatics, Applied Sciences, Management Sciences, Engineering and the Built Environment, Health Sciences, and Art and Design (Durban University of Technology, 2024).

The upsurge of scandals in the educational, business and political sectors emphasises the importance of paying more attention on moral behaviour and ethical decision-making (Morris, 2019: 1). Corruption and fraud in HE can take many different forms, from plagiarism and certificate fraud to financial misappropriation, nepotism and favouritism in student admittance and staff employment (Kirya, 2019: 2). Favouritism and nepotism in the hiring and advancement of academic and non-academic personnel at institutions of higher learning "makes a mockery of meritocracy" and may have a detrimental impact on the "quality of teaching and research" (Kirya, 2019: 11). According to Catacutan and de Guzman (2015: 505), reports on corruption in the education environment draw attention to the pervasive nature of "patronage, nepotism,

and bribery" by school administrators, such as contracts for teaching appointments or textbook suppliers granted on the basis of political and family relations of candidates rather than individual merits. While most reports identify such cases in the general education domain, it is extremely likely that such activities are often applicable to higher learning institutions working in the same cultural context, raising a concern for university administrators regarding the principle of honesty and integrity in decision-making processes (Catacutan and de Guzman, 2015).

HE personnel in HE institutions are expected to make decisions about learning and teaching for the optimal engagement of teaching programmes. Various individuals occupying various roles at the DUT are tasked with making these important decisions that might or might not impact on the teaching and learning programmes, students and staff. The hierarchical composition of these individuals is as follows: executive management (vice-chancellors and deputy vice chancellors, executive deans and deputy deans) middle management (heads of departments). It's important that these teaching and learning decisions are free from vested interest and that the main purpose of these decisions are directed at student success and the learning environment, hence the importance of making ethical teaching and learning decisions.

This research is aligned with our DUT's values and principles as laid out in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Values and principles

Values	<i>Transparency</i> (be consultative with all staff before making decisions)
	<i>Honesty</i> (making decisions that are embodied with truth)
	<i>Integrity</i> (making sure one's actions and decisions are in alignment)
	<i>Respect and accountability</i> (respect of staff and students and being accountable for one's actions and decisions)
Principles	<i>Fairness</i> (treat all staff with fairness and decision made must suit the wider community not just one's own group of people)
	<i>Professionalism</i> (professionalism must be continuously present when making decisions)
	<i>Commitment</i> (being committed to what is right)
	<i>Compassion</i> (incorporating ethics of care when making decisions)
	<i>Excellence</i> (decisions made must emanate from a place of excellence)

Source: Authors adaptation of Durban University of Technology (2025)

1.3 Problem statement

Higher education is regarded as a place of knowledge growth embedded within ethical values and morals. It should be a place where students encounter role models of leaders that think and act ethically, so that they can act in this way when they become leaders.

Students invest significant time and money in their studies. Undergraduate and postgraduate courses involve commitments of several years. Many students take out substantial loans, to be repaid when they graduate and earn over certain limits. They need to know that their investment of time and money is worth it (Boughey and Mckenna, 2021: 73).

Prof. Jansen said that his heart was warmed when he saw scores of students waiting for their buses: "when I looked at those students, they didn't look wealthy. I imagined how hard it must be for them just to come to campus every morning when they don't know what they're going to eat. How can you then divert the resources of the University?" (Jansen, 2023: 5). Jansen goes on to add that some of these vice chancellors receive a substantial amount of money at the most underfunded universities. "How do you look after yourself without remembering that your role is to look after others? You start to see a different kind of university—one that truly prioritises students (Jansen, 2023: 5-6).

Students are the main focus in this trajectory of knowledge growth as future leaders in society. What kind of knowledge do we need to instill in them? Who are the important role players that will be part of their intellectual growth. Are these individuals equipped with the necessary acumen in making ethical decisions for the students and HE as a whole? Are the decisions made emanating from ethical thought or are the decisions egotistical or self-centred?

The findings of Prof. Jansen's research highlights that universities are now places where individuals go to obtain money rather than to deliberate or contemplate carefully about complicated issues. He further states that a university is not defined by its graduation ceremonies or the number of registered students. He defined a university as a setting where the agendas of senate and council meetings are the focus of academic initiatives, teaching and learning, research, and thinking (Jansen, 2023).

The problem addressed by the current study is the decisions and practices by individuals in HE relating to teaching and learning which have a major influence in the learning environment. Most times decisions made by HE personnel are for self-gain instead of the better good of the institution and others. Chapman and Lindner (2016) support this when they state that HE settings are more prone to corruption arising from important decisions taken by various personnel in the university that have major implications for staff and students.

It is hoped that institutions of higher learning exist to support and affirm the culture they are part of. By way of teaching, and the values and devotion of academic staff and students, universities build a societal asset, grooming students to support communities globally (Walker and Mclean, 2010).

1.4 Research aim and objectives

The aim of this exploratory study was to gain a deeper understanding of the thought processing mechanisms used in making fundamental teaching and learning decisions to develop a framework for ethically conscious decision making for HE. The objectives were:

1. To ascertain the moral decision-making processes that are being used for teaching and learning in HE.
2. To examine the ethical practices of HE practitioners with specific emphasis on decision making in teaching and learning.
3. To determine ethical dilemmas faced by educational practitioners pertinent to teaching and learning in higher education.
4. To explore the best ethical approaches suited to guide decision making in teaching and learning in HE.
5. To determine the decision-making framework that can be used to make ethically conscious decisions.

1.5 Key research questions

The following were the key research questions:

1. What are moral decision making processes for teaching and learning in HE?
2. What are the ethical practices of HE practitioners relating to teaching and learning?

3. What are the ethical dilemmas experienced by educational practitioners pertinent to teaching and learning?
4. What are the best ethical approaches suited to guide decision making in teaching and learning in HE?
5. What decision making framework can be used to make ethically conscious decision making?

1.6 Significance of the study

This study is important to assist HE practitioners to re-connect in their duties and focus as professionals. It will make them understand their role as educators and be mindful about the processes involved on making ethical and moral decisions. The findings drawn from the quantitative and qualitative data will help Higher Education improve its current policies or create new ones that will offer direction when making important decisions about teaching and learning. These ethical guidelines that are documented as a result of this research study will assist all higher learning institutions across the world to exhibit similar ethical decision-making tools for the enrichment of teaching and learning. According to Nejati and Shafaei (2018), ethical conduct is in the limelight currently and the public views it as a fundamental quality that should be observed in all organisations. It is important to realise the significance and enormity of ethical behaviour and how to nurture individuals to attain these ethical mind-sets. Institution of learning need to make a concerted effort in cultivating individuals' ethical practices.

The activities and behaviours of university leaders define a university's reputation. In addition to awarding degrees, HE administrators strive to build the university's reputation. When an institution's image is harmed by scandal or misfortune, leaders of that institution are asked to explain the university's schools' honesty and duty. As a result, university administrators have a higher ethical duty than other stakeholders of the academic community to respect their own moral principles and hold others to the similar standards (Basalla, 2022).

"In addition, many people see the university not only as means of accessing higher education but as a pillar of the community. This expectation obligates university leaders to be clear about their beliefs and bring those beliefs into practice every day, leading them to demonstrate honesty and trustworthiness. Through practice and routine, these demonstrations should become second nature" (Basalla, 2022: 6).

Higher education leaders must make moral decisions in the context of an array of ethical dilemmas. Conflict of interest, academic integrity, managing finances, inclusiveness and diversity, and resource management are a few examples of these difficulties. Research has looked at the particular moral dilemmas that university administrators encounter and emphasised the significance of moral decision-making procedures (Brigue and Orlu, 2023).

Academic institutions are responsible for cultivating a sense of social duty and dedication to the social good among academic staff and students because this is what is considered to be fundamental to the success of a "democratic and just society" (Walker and Mclean, 2010: 1). This is supported by Maxwell who states that businesses who are committed to doing things right and have an obligation to social responsibility and live by it are more prosperous than companies that are not committed to social responsibility (Maxwell, 2007). Thuli Madonsela states that there is a connection between moral and sustainable governance, Madonsela, uses an example of corporate directors extending 'bribes' in return for something they need (Quintal, 2012, cited in Robbins et al., 2016: 464). "You are safe sometimes – but one day you will be caught and everything goes down the drain". Leading ethically is the essence of sustainable governance in one's private, corporate and professional life (Quintal, 2012, cited in Robbins et al., 2016: 464).

1.7 Research methodology

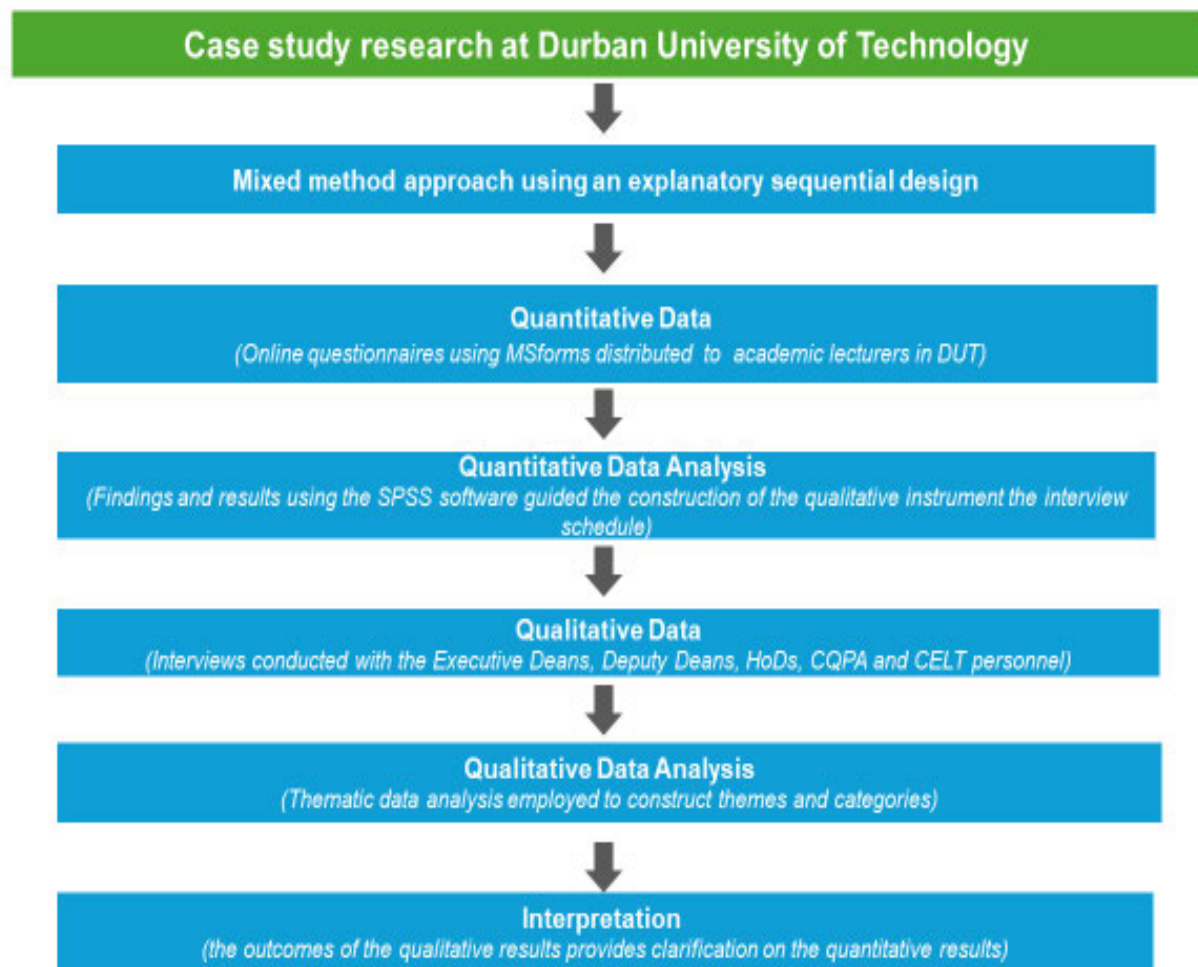
According to du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014), two of the most crucial things you should cover in the method you choose are how you will gather data and how you will analyse it after it has been acquired. Maree (2020) asserts research methodology encompasses the processes involved in the collection of data, analysing and describing the data and providing an explanation of the phenomena.

A mixed method approach using explanatory sequential design was employed for this study. Questionnaires and interviews were used for the collection of data. Questionnaires were distributed to all academic staff of DUT and interviews were conducted with executive deans, deputy deans, HoDs, Centre for Education Learning and Technology (CELT) and Centre for Quality Promotions Assurance (CQPA) personnel. The data received from these groups of people provided important information pertaining to ethical decision making in teaching and learning. The ethical

guidelines arising from this research study will assist all higher learning institutions across the world to exhibit similar ethical decision-making tools for the enrichment of teaching and learning.

Figure 1.1 is flow chart of the research methods.

Figure 1.1: Overview of research methods



Source: Authors adaptation, 2025

1.8 Scope and delimitations of study

This study was conducted at DUT. The study included all six faculties namely, Accounting and Informatics, Applied Sciences, Art and Design, Engineering and the Built Environment, Health Sciences and Management Sciences at both campuses, namely, Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The target population for the quantitative

approach comprised all academic staff and the qualitative data included senior academic management (executive deans, deputy deans, heads of department) and academic support staff (CQPA and CELT personnel). This study was a mixed-method approach comprising a quantitative aspect (questionnaire) and a qualitative aspect (semi-structured interviews). The number of questions in the interview schedules were restricted to avoid the burden of the respondents of answering too many questions as well as the time constraints regarding analysis of the data. There was a limitation on the number of respondents interviewed to lessen the burden on the researcher of the analysis of data.

1.9 Structure of the thesis

This study is presented in eight chapters which are structured as follows.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 includes a background and introduction to the study, provides a brief discussion on the context of the research, the significance and problem statement, objectives and research questions and a brief synopsis to the methodology undertaken for this research. It concludes with the scope and delimitation of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines and engages with academic literature on the aspects of ethical and moral decision making. Some of the areas that were looked at were ethical practices and leadership, ethical approaches in decision-making, ethical culture in organisations, challenges amongst various stakeholders in HE, institutions moral decision making in teaching and learning, unethical practices in HE and the erosion of academic credibility, ethical and moral dilemmas in HE administration and ethically conscious decision-making.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The various theories used that provided a guiding viewpoint on the philosophies of ethical decision-making was explored in this chapter. The deontological theory, normative theory, justice theory, ethics of care and virtue theory were the paradigms that underpinned the theoretical framework.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Chapter 4 presents the research design, research paradigm, the research approach employed, the population and sampling method. It further provides processes involved in the data analysis and the ethical consideration that was followed.

Chapter 5: Presentation of Findings, Interpretation of the Quantitative data

Chapter 5 presents the findings and analysis of the questionnaire which includes the quantitative data (the information provided by the academic staff from the completed questionnaire) and qualitative data (the information provided by the academic staff from the open-ended question). Chapter 5 concludes with a detailed structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis (Section 5.11), which validates the conceptual relationships among key ethical decision-making variables. This statistical analysis supports the framework developed in this study.

Chapter 6: Presentation of Research Findings: Qualitative Data

Chapter 6 presents the findings and analysis of data from the interviews conducted with the CQPA and CELT personnel, and data from the interviews conducted with the deputy deans and heads of department.

Chapter 7: Discussion of the Findings (Quantitative and Qualitative data)

This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion on the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data obtained. It also provides a compelling engagement with academic literature in relation to the data obtained from the respondents with regards to the research study being investigated.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

Chapter 8 presents the conclusions and recommendations emanating from Chapters 5, 6 and 7. The chapter also discusses the limitation of the study and briefly outlines recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a framework for ethical considerations for decision-making in teaching and learning in higher education.

1.10 Chapter summary

This chapter introduced the background to my research questions, provided an overview of the context of the research, problem statement, the rationale and significance of the study, the objective and key research questions and the research methodology. It also provided a brief synopsis of each of the chapters. The following chapter examines the literature on ethics and leadership to further place this research into context.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review provides a detailed discussion regarding what other academic scholars have written on the topic which provides the context for the research study and ascertains what models and theories to choose to underlie the study (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014: 101). A literature review also helps to establish what gaps exist in a particular area of study. Generally, a literature review provides a review of the latest and sometimes older, but still relevant, information that is pertinent to the research being undertaken (Maree, 2020).

The broad topic of ethics, often referred to as moral philosophy, focuses on answering the important question of "how should I live my life?" which may lead to further questions such as "What kind of person should I try to be? Which principles are crucial? Which values or ideals ought to guide my life?" (Shaw, 2014: 3). "Ethics can be defined as the form of knowledge that deals with the study of universal philosophies that determine right from wrong" (Bhana and Bayat, 2020: 130).

When John C. Maxwell, an authority on leadership and ethics, was approached by the chief executive officer (CEO) of Time Warner Book Group to write a book on business ethics, he responded

There is no such thing as business ethics – there's only ethics. People try to use one set of ethics for their professional life, another for their spiritual life, and still another at home with their family. That gets them into trouble. Ethics is ethics. If you desire to be ethical, you live it by one standard across the board (Maxwell, 2003: 3).

What signifies 'good ethical behaviour' is not clear, with the thread distinguishing right from wrong being unclear. Employees witness individuals around them involved in unethical conduct. Nominated officers inflate their expense accounts and are involved in bribes, company directors raise their profits so they enjoy profitable stock opportunities and institutes of higher learning do not question the conduct of the winning coaches when they urge the 'scholarship athletes' to register for easy modules

(Robbins et al., 2016). In these universal scenarios, there is clearly a lack of ethical practices and leadership.

Institutions of higher learning face varying degrees of unpredictability, instability, ambiguity and difficulty. Situations of financial constraints, decreasing enrollment figures and environmental calamities can add to the challenges in the university including our own work settings. Individuals endeavour to make decisions sometimes ethical decision in an environment that is not easy to take the appropriate action or make the best decision. "Even during times of relative stability, our ethical practice can falter" and amidst a tumultuous setting, making ethical decisions can be tough (Sam and Gupton, 2021: 81-82).

Lots of academic work concentrates on bigger ethical wrongdoing, but we need to note that there are also the minor/slighter everyday actions of ethical decisions that can take place in our professional career or work life, e.g. the choice of students we wish to mentor, the way we react to requests to extend deadlines and so on. There are also situations when our indecisiveness also has ethical consequences e.g. being a spectator to incidents of bullying or letting other colleagues take on more work. These minor actions form the greater composition of our work/job and if we avoid thinking on these decisions we could form and regularise "patterns of unethical practices" (Sam and Gupton, 2021: 82). Recent studies show that HE institutions that employ, promote and support ethical leaders are more likely to avoid unethical conduct (Basalla, 2022: 28).

Investigating these matters entails examining the lines between right and wrong. Moral philosophers who engage in critical thought process regarding ethics seek to comprehend a variety of topics, including the nature of morality, the significance of its fundamental ideas, the qualities of sound moral reasoning, the justification of moral judgments, and, the characteristics or attributes that set right from wrong behaviour. As a result, ethics addresses both personal morality and the moral guidelines that control and confine behaviour. It looks into issues of moral responsibility and the principles that ought to direct our behaviour, as well as issues of right and wrong, justice and injustice, accountability and responsibility, and fairness and unfairness (Shaw, 2014).

2.2 Ethical practices and leadership

In the ever changing and multifaceted world, the function of leaders in HE is critical. It is the duty of these leaders to initiate innovation, promote a 'culture of excellence' and shape the direction of education. Leadership which lacks ethical values, truth and honesty can bring about severe repercussions for both the university and society. The ethical standards and morals that direct leaders' behaviour and choices are known as leadership ethics. These entail being authentic, behaving honorably, openly, and responsibly while maintaining the common interests of the universities and the stakeholders (Brigue and Orlu, 2023: 456). The Indian monk and philosopher, Swami Vivekananda, suggested that true leadership starts with self-transformation. He thought that everyone had to make an effort to learn about their values, belief, and areas of strength and weakness. One can build strong character and a distinct sense of purpose by practicing being aware of oneself and introspection (Basalla, 2020).

In institutions of higher learning, ethical leadership is crucial because it is believed to establish the standard for moral behaviour, create a supportive work environment, and advance the goals of the institution. However, there are a number of obstacles to moral leadership in HE. Higher education institutions function in a complex political landscape which may present difficulties to moral leadership. Political factors (e.g. resource allocation and funding) which call for accountability can occasionally compromise the moral decision making of executives in HE. These tensions bring about conflicts of interest which can jeopardise leaders' capability in making choices that give precedence to moral conduct over political concerns (Brigue and Orlu, 2023).

The importance of ethical leadership in universities is widely recognised. Ethical leaders in these institutions set the tone for ethical behaviour and create a culture of trust, transparency, and accountability. They act as role models for faculty, staff, and students, demonstrating ethical decision-making and promoting the values of fairness, honesty, and respect. Leadership ethics in universities is essential for creating an environment that upholds ethical principles, fosters trust, and promotes the well-being of all stakeholders. Ethical leadership plays a crucial role in addressing ethical challenges, setting ethical standards, and promoting a culture of integrity and accountability within universities (Brigue and Orlu, 2023). According to Swami Vivekananda, developing character on the foundations of honesty, integrity, empathy

and self-control is crucial. He thought that leaders ought to be motivated by the well-being of people and have a solid sense of ethical values (Hashimy et al., 2023).

Leaders need to realise the importance of empowering others and having diverse perspectives and ideas, thus they should lead with intention and purpose. The results for the institution, teachers, staff, and students will be compromised if leaders base their objectives solely on themselves. No matter what drives a leader, their professional life should include morality, ethics, and integrity for ensuring the institution's growth and success both now and in the future (Basalla, 2022).

The practice of ethical leadership involves modelling normatively acceptable behaviour through one's own behaviours and interpersonal interactions, as well as encouraging followers to adopt similar behaviour through decision-making and dialogue. When it comes to staff career promotion, moral leaders follow the explicit rules and regulations outlined in the university's laws. They examine these policies on the basis of ongoing statutory revisions and contextual realities, consulting with pertinent authorities, in an effort to apply them equitably and consistently. Because of this, trustworthy managers care about the well-being of all staff members and foster an atmosphere that allows them to flourish, be effective in the workplace, and advance in their careers. Dialogue is a good way to handle this (Mbogoi, 2019).

The leader also needs to be open-minded in order to use what they have learnt and implement the best practices for all parties involved. Effective leaders are able to handle matters without intimidation, promote change, and act strategically and morally. The ethical leader becomes an advocate for change by helping people to think outside the box, allowing for a deeper level of awareness through an open mind, heart, and will (Basalla, 2022).

According to de Cremer and Vandekerchove (2017), ethical leadership can be described simply as the way the leader is able to be a role model in being a principled employee, while it is debated that moral leaders must display or communicate ethical standards through the various levels in the organisation (de Cremer and Vandekerchove, 2017). "Ethical leaders are known to establish an atmosphere that positively impacts employee goals and behaviour" (Bhana and Bayat, 2020: 130).

Establishing a culture that respects moral standards, builds trust, and advances the interests of all parties involved requires strong leadership ethics. Addressing moral dilemmas, establishing moral guidelines, and encouraging an honest and accountable culture in HE all depend heavily on ethical leadership (Brigue and Orlu, 2023).

We want to have faith that most individuals (including professors and seniors) want to act ethically and morally instead of being intentionally destructive, damaging and deleterious. This view is in line with studies which highlight that individuals are of the belief that they are principled, good, capable and worthy. However, the yearning to be 'good' and doing 'good' do not at all times concur with each other (Sam and Gupton, 2021).

According to Mbogoi (2019), acting fairly and, considering the well-being of others, and considering the ramifications of one's conduct, are all part of being ethical. But even if a person is raised with a strong moral sense, their sense of ethics can still be weakened by the unethical actions of others. Ethical leaders weigh both the immediate and long-term impacts in addition to the benefits when making decisions. Because they are committed to their own beliefs and principles, they are prepared to fight in a new market battle where doing the right thing is necessary (Mbogoi, 2019).

Leaders ought to demonstrate an ethical example for others by doing more than just talking the talk. This is particularly relevant when discussing strategic leadership. The development and use of strategies by leaders makes ethical behavior crucial. Strategic leaders are encouraged to act in a manner which will bring about an ethical culture in the work environment. Strategic leaders should develop initiatives to instill ethical practices throughout the organisation. All employees must, however, assume the duty of being a moral leader as well as disclosing any misbehaviour or violation of the code of conduct (Lazenby, 2022).

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) assert that educational leaders ought to be allowed the time and space to create their own personal codes of ethics, grounded in their own life stories and significant experiences. In addition, they ought to draft their own professional codes based on anecdotes and pivotal moments. Along with taking into account their personal codes, they should also develop their own professional codes based on the lessons learned and standards set by their workplaces. Knowing oneself and others is fundamental to such a process (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016).

Strategic leaders can employ the following actions. Lazenby (2022) developed actions to build an ethical work establishment in a corporate environment that can also be applied to strategic leaders in HE:

- Set clear objectives and convey them to explain the ethical norms of the organisation;
- Frequently update, review and circulate the code of conduct based on the organisation feedback from stakeholders;
- Establish processes to develop ethical guidelines; and
- Establish a workplace environment where everyone is treated with respect (Lazenby, 2022).

It is imperative that organisations attract individuals with moral standing who will make ethical decisions. It is futile to implement systems and techniques to aid in ethical conduct when employees in the organisation lack moral values. Individuals who embody ethics and morals conduct themselves with integrity, equality, inspire trust, and have a strong moral compass (Lazenby, 2022).

Acting with integrity entails having a clear vision of the objective and understanding that values should not be sacrificed. Therefore, the ethical leader's standing in the global community and the university where they lead is enhanced by their clear ideals, self-awareness, and drive to act (Koerner, 2020).

Mbogoi (2019) states that moral leaders are called upon to provide answers to possible hazards, noticeable inequalities, and associated career progression problems that are likely to obstruct the efficient operation of organisations. Acting fairly, considering the well-being of others, and considering the ramifications of one's conduct are all parts of being ethical. But even if a person is raised with a strong moral sense, their sense of ethics can still be weakened by the unethical actions of others. When making decisions, ethical leaders consider the short-and long-term effects as well as the advantages. This suggests that morally upright leaders will make an effort to establish efficient institutions which entails ongoing policy creation, explanation of norms, cautious application, and careful process monitoring and assessment (Mbogoi, 2019).

Brown and Hartman (2019, as cited by Basalla, 2022) investigated the effect of rules and regulations on academic integrity in public colleges. The studies highlighted that

professional misconduct and plagiarism were less common in universities with thorough policies and strong monitoring systems. Such regulations encouraged an environment of academic authenticity and integrity among students and faculty in addition to discouraging unethical behaviour. Policies and regulations are crucial for guaranteeing moral behaviour, but their efficacy depends on how well they are put into practice, how strictly they are enforced, and how often they are reviewed.

Universities must set up procedures for keeping an eye on compliance and dealing with infractions, as well as offer sufficient resources and training to inform their leaders and staff about these regulations. Policies and regulations are essential as they support openness, offer a framework for moral decision-making, and assist universities in resolving difficult moral dilemmas. Leaders can establish an atmosphere that promotes honesty, responsibility, and trust in their organisations by consulting pertinent policies and regulations (Brigue and Orlu, 2023).

Leaders are seen to be charismatic and a trustworthy ethical role model when perceived by employees as "both a moral being and moral leader". Ethical leadership stimulates or encourages staff relationship with the leader, work team and the organisation. It also builds trust between the leader and employees. It is imperative that all seniors acknowledge accountability and responsibility for overseeing or monitoring the ethical code of conduct (Bhana and Bayat, 2020: 130).

According to George and Rose (2023), leaders have to make choices. More significantly, they have to make the correct choices, frequently in difficult circumstances when the best course of action is unclear. Given the significance of education for both individuals and society as a whole, leadership in HE is essential. Considering the significant challenges and changes that HE faces, executive management in HE, and more especially the task of the vice-chancellor, has attracted much scrutiny. They further note that senior executives face the difficulty of bringing academic objectives closer in line with these outside factors of change. The conventional administrative approach to HE management also needs to evolve to adopt a more commercial, managerial, and customer-driven focus, requiring new leadership philosophies and competencies (George and Rose, 2023).

Many leaders in education have fought for fairness, criticism, and concern for the education of children and youth. As a result of their struggles, they have developed a

sense of personal and professional identity and beliefs. This entails resolving conflicts that may emerge between ethical rules and making moral decisions based on their most effective professional judgment, which prioritises the needs of the learner in all moral issues (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016). Ethical leaders are believed to be responsible in using the authority endowed to them to maximise the well-being for the greatest number of people over their self-serving aims. There is an expectation that leaders apply their judgement in making decisions as it is not possible for society to authorise or recommend everything by policy. There are circumstances that are not clearly defined and rules and regulations will not fully align for a resolution. Hence society hopes leaders and people in charge apply their judgement fairly in the decision-making process (Latta, 2020: 78).

According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016), HE leaders must consider ideas like what they believe to be right or wrong, reflect on who they are as people and the professional role they play, their decision-making skills, and why they make decisions the way they do in order to get to these understandings. The approach acknowledges that, given the diverse backgrounds of the students enrolled in universities today, preparing students to live and work in the 21st century requires very special leaders who have wrestled with their own personal and professional codes of ethics and reflected on various forms of ethics.

On a daily basis, managers must make decisions that quickly weigh a variety of private and professional considerations while assessing the possible effects on the organisation, company, or society. In addition to their demeanour or personality, the leader's character and ethical values influence their decisions (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016). Basalla (2022) explained the relation between leading and making decisions by pointing out that an individual's life situations characterise their leadership thoughts and opinions. The leader makes decisions based on their ethical and unethical actions (Basalla, 2022).

Higher education institutions in these situations require those in leadership positions to possess specific traits, such as the ability to plan strategically, adapt to changing circumstances, adaptability to handle opposing conflicts, ensure quality, and manage individuals as well as financial resources.

2.2.1 Leadership and decision-making when faced with challenges, using Covid-19 as an example

As of 12th April 2020 there were “1 699 595 confirmed Covid-19 cases in the world, with 106 138 confirmed deaths and the virus affected 213 countries” as stated by the World Health Organisation (Ali, 2020: 18). (Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1: Countries impacted by Covid-19

Source: Ali (2020: 18)

Numerous countries were impacted by Covid-19 (see Figure 2.1). Equally, a myriad of universities were closed for contact classes and moved to online and remote learning (Ali, 2020: 18).

Syllabus and course planning need to be deliberated upon and assessment activities needed to be re-examined or reviewed and substituted with assignments to replace contact main examinations. Agreement and conformity by all stakeholders alleviated resistance and allowed for the facilitation and execution of online and remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic (Ali, 2020).

Resulting from the closure of the educational institutions, prevailing disparities associated with various social and economic conditions intensified, largely due to the absence of resources, including accessibility to "educational technologies and the internet" (Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo, 2020: 3). Technological challenges were primarily related to a lack of internet connectivity and electronic devices. This problem may have

increased inequalities through uneven access to the technology needed by students and teachers. Indeed, not all learners had access to the necessary technologies to take advantage of online education such as a fast internet connection and a powerful computer (Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo, 2020).

They further stated that in rural areas, numerous obstructions and problems were encountered in gaining access to computers. The main issues were power and technology. Many learners utilised their phones in order to do their schoolwork. Although this was feasible, over time it had damaging consequences on the quality of education (Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo, 2020).

Disasters like Covid-19 impact an institution's core values. Leadership in organisations must make discretionary decisions during crises because they are unpredictable, chaotic situations. Management can act as their institution's moral voice in times of crisis, providing strength, support, flexibility and advice. It is thought that certain leaders in educational institutions might have not responded appropriately to the Covid-19 epidemic, and that the resulting "ethical tensions" stem from a lack of guidance or advice regarding how these organisations should address the global pandemic (Liu et al. 2021: 1). Ali (2020) agreed that the unprecedented situation in wake of Covid-19 brought about challenges to staff, students and administrators to adopt online learning despite certain shortfalls in its organisation and implementation.

According to Ali (2020), lecturers, students and academic support staff found it difficult to embrace online learning due to the unique circumstances after Covid-19, in spite of a few shortcomings in its design and execution. Taking into account the Covid-19 epidemic, The World Bank emphasised that the majority of students would find it extremely difficult to access online learning, particularly those who continue to have inadequate internet connectivity and face a host of other challenges (Ali, 2020).

The most apparent and extensively reviewed and deliberated point by "experts and policymakers is that socially disadvantaged groups face difficulties in meeting the basic conditions required by online learning" (Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo, 2020: 2). Institutions that still lack preparation and planning measures, need to implement these swiftly to avoid the excessive demands and tensions that come from adopting things reactively. There is a clear need for post-secondary online learning expertise in this

crisis and it should serve as a reminder that institutions need to cultivate this competency (Ali, 2020).

2.3 Ethical approach in decision-making processes

Commitment to proper ethical frameworks, guidelines, and rules, including solid organisational goals and beliefs, can aid organisations in managing crises. Creating plans that tackle moral dilemmas and providing training are crucial for resolving the difficult circumstances that arise during emergencies (Liu et al., 2021). This is supported by Lazenby (2022) who states that making ethical decisions is essential to strategic management. It is well established that if the various organisational procedures utilised in executing the goals of the business are founded on moral principles and judgment calls, their efficacy will rise. Ethics should play a major role in the organisation's decision-making process and be ingrained in the organisation's culture in order to affect the behaviour and judgment of its personnel (Lazenby, 2022).

The decisions made by leaders offer a chance to learn how they handle pressure and respond suitably to any negative issue or solution. Decision-making entails options, and leaders should base their decisions not only on their moral motive and ethical foundations but also on logical cognition (Basalla, 2022).

The framework highlighted in Figure 2.2 is represented by a spiral ladder. This suggests the mental capacity required to make choices in a top management role in an academic institution. In making decisions a moral leader will consider their intellectual, emotional and ethical principles to obtain the most suitable answer to the issue. The faculty dean makes decisions, they understand and adopt the lessons from each decision. These developmental values are consistent with the identity that is formed over generations (Basalla, 2022: 15).



Figure 2.2: Synergy of ethical leadership and moral compass in decision-making
Source: Basalla (2020: 15)

Various models of ethical decision making have been presented in the literature. The model that is most commonly referred to is presented in Figure 2.3.

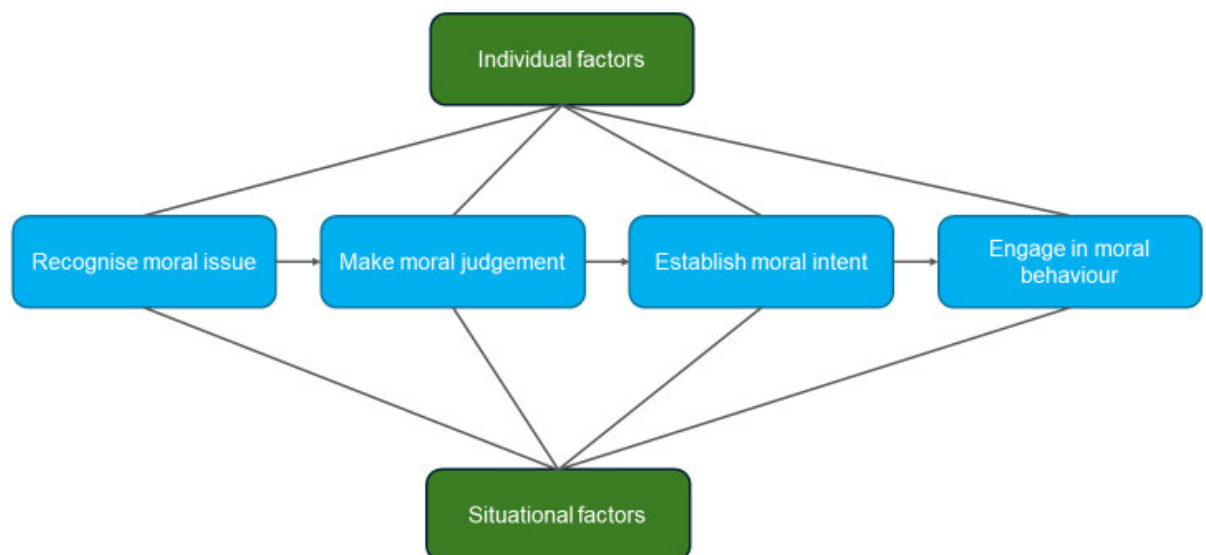


Figure 2.3: Model of managing ethical decision making
Source: Lazenby (2022: 49)

Figure 2.3 demonstrates the processes a person follows in making decisions that are ethical. The model differentiates between understanding what is the right thing to do and acting upon it. For instance a salesperson is aware that not being truthful to the customer is wrong ("moral judgement") but because they need to accomplish their target figure they omit to tell the truth ("moral behavior"). This approach is prompted by one's distinct characteristics "such as age, education, personality and attitudes, as well as by contextual factors such as job roles, reward systems and organisational culture" (Lazenby, 2022: 49).

Lazenby (2022: 49), suggests a 'key ethical model', explaining three kinds of ethical management located in an organisation (Lazenby, 2022: 49). These are explained in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Ethical model

Immoral management	Openly challenge what is considered ethical (making a profit no matter what it takes), are self-serving, and are solely focused on personal benefit. For instance, bribes and kickbacks from auto dealers are given to an executive of a car company.
Moral management	Follows the utmost standards of ethical conduct, emphasises profit only when it is within the bounds of legal requirements and sensitivity to ethical standards. An item that contains chemicals that are dangerous to workers may be discontinued by the producer.
Amoral management	Refers to the practice of treating people carelessly or seeing them as tools to further the financial goals of the company. No deliberate wrongdoing may be intended, nor consideration given to "moral behaviour or outcomes". For instance, the video game business creates titles that exalt extreme violence or misogyny without considering the potential for addiction in adolescents.

Source: Adapted from Lazenby (2022: 49)

According to Lazenby (2022) leaders and staff are regularly confronted with ethical quandaries. Four approaches for applying ethical decisions are recognised as supporting norms and values. They are the 'utilitarian, individualism, moral-rights, and justice approach' (Lazenby 2022) (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Four approaches for the application of ethical decisions

Utilitarian approach	In the utilitarian approach, moral behavior ought to benefit the greatest number of individuals. The decision-maker should weigh the implications of each option for all parties involved and choose the one that will maximise advantages for the largest number of individuals. People should therefore think about how their choices and actions may affect the organisation's ability to meet its financial obligations. Employees should aim to use resources to maximise profits, and all activities should be evaluated in terms of the business's performance. Monitoring employee internet, alcohol, and tobacco usage, or excessive gaming is one way to implement this strategy since these behaviours have an impact on the entire company.
Individualism approach	When an action serves the long-term best interests of the people, it is considered moral. Personal responsibility is crucial. In the long run, individuality is thought to produce truthfulness and authenticity because people who practice it behave in ways that align with the standards of behaviour they aspire to for themselves. The goal is not to make quick money, as the top executives of Enron and WorldCom attest.
Moral rights approach	People should not be deprived of their basic freedoms and rights by any one or group decision. The individual making the decision must uphold the rights of individuals impacted by the decision in order to be morally right. Among the moral rights that should be considered while making ethical decisions are the rights to life and safety, privacy, freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, and free consent. An employer breaches a worker's right to freedom of conscience if they spy on them, invade their privacy, or allow sexual harassment to continue.
Justice approach	Moral judgments need to be grounded in principles of objectivity, integrity, and equality. This method examines the fair distribution of expenses and rewards among individuals and groups. Distributive justice implies that, persons are not entitled to be treated differently based on subjective qualities and should be treated identically if they are comparable in pertinent ways. Male and female workers should not be paid differently for doing equivalent work, for example, but individuals who differ significantly—for example, in job abilities or responsibility—may be compensated differently.

Adapted from: Source (Lazenby, 2022: 49-50)

2.3.1 Rules based methods and codes of ethics

A plethora of standards, ethical declarations, and laws exist to advise vice-chancellors and senior management on appropriate behaviour in various HE domains. Furthermore, leadership may be guided by unwritten (and frequently overlooked) principles that are drawn from strategic requirements or beliefs, such as neoliberal managerialism. Although significant, rule-based methods of ethical reasoning are not without restrictions. It is not always obvious whether the regulations and guidelines are legitimate. A rule-based strategy also pushes HE leaders to delegate their ethical

reasoning since they are depending on regulations that have already been created. Additionally, conformity and acceptable behaviour are encouraged by rule book thinking. Liu et al. (2021) assert that creating a code of ethics is not enough to achieve positive results whilst George and Rose (2023) add that how the code is put into practice is more crucial. Since every decision in, for example, a public health emergency, has the potential to have a significant influence on both the community and individual outcomes, codes are essential for promoting consistent decision-making. As in health care, the same is true for institutions of HE where codes are required to ensure consistency in decision making.

People in organisations may act unethically for a variety of reasons – competitiveness for shareholder growth, leaders in pursuit of meeting their goals, looming fiscal loss, greed and most of the time lack of knowledge. The contravening organisation might possess a well-defined and thought-out organised code of ethics or declaration of ethics. The question arises as to the adherence to the ethical and unethical acts. It could be that there is a breakdown of 'ethical filter', preventing the principles upheld by the organisation's top management from reaching those in charge of organisational operations. Furthermore, senior executives and an organisation's code of ethics frequently have different perspectives; one cannot expect employees to constantly apply ethical conduct in the workplace if upper management members do not uphold their own code of ethics (Hegarty and Moccia, 2018).

A code of ethics is one approach to institutionalising/formalising guiding principles and ensuring that morality informs decisions in times of crisis. Codes can be very helpful in directing how an organisation responds to ethical problems since they clearly state its standards and principles (Liu et al., 2021). The biggest disadvantage of rule-based methods in the present unstable climate is the fact that rules do not instruct HE leaders on how to behave in unexpected circumstances, as the past Covid-19 outbreak, or whenever there is a dispute between rules. "Expanding the rule book" means creating new regulations or standards to address unclear situations. Therefore, the unstoppable expansion of rules and regulations may be excessive and occasionally provide direction only after the fact (George and Rose, 2023).

Several readings emphasises the significance of policies and regulations in encouraging moral behaviour in HE institutions. Well-constructed and effective

policies add to ethical decision-making and present a basis for creating an ethical environment within the institution. By providing leaders and staff with a point of reference, these regulations guarantee uniformity and equity in their behaviour. The impact of a particular conflict-of-interest policy in a HE institution context was investigated by Brigue and Orlu (2023); they discovered that by drastically lowering the frequency of conflicts of interest between administrators and faculty, this strategy enhanced stakeholder confidence and promoted more moral behaviour.

A different strategy is principle-based ethics, which is frequently used in the medical field. Principles such as placing or prioritising students at the core of decision making can serve as a guide for all HE leaders. But just like with rules, they are useless at providing direction when values diverge. A vice-chancellors decision-making could be influenced by these many methods of ethical reasoning. For instance, the choice to establish a campus abroad may be driven by strategic imperatives such as the need to increase revenue and the university's or leader's values, as well as emotional factors like self-gratification and the laws and regulations of regulatory agencies (George and Rose, 2023).

Thoughtful discussion is important for crisis readiness as well. Crisis management teams may benefit from ethical discussion through rule-based exercises as a means of preparing to make moral decisions and learn how to ask for aid when needed. Whether thoughtful discussion takes place in the preparation or response stages, the objective is to have conversations to enhance moral decision-making in emergency situations, not to reach a consensus (Liu et al., 2021).

In terms of better ethical decisions, judgements and actions, with sufficient information, and space for thought, it appears that most academics should be able to make moral judgments. The majority of conventional descriptive models of moral decision-making concentrate on how individuals make logical choices based on the most relevant information that is present: thoughtful, intentional and purposeful decision-making (Sam and Gupton, 2021: 86). Ethical decision-making and exercising ethics continuously in academia are applications that should be deep-rooted in academia (Burleigh, 2020).

People in leadership positions can make more informed decisions by directing behaviour and intent using the moral compass. Leaders who make decisions can

share details about their decision-making process to help others understand how they handle pressure when faced with a challenge that lacks a well-defined appropriate resolution. Furthermore, decision-making entails choice, and leaders use both their logical cognition and their ethical principles as drawn from experiences, family history, and life lessons. Ethical leaders are guided by their own lived events, which form the foundation of their life, to reflect, justify and assess options to challenging issues (Gallos and Bolman, 2021).

According to Swielande (2020: 3), we are forced to make snap decisions and rely solely on our intuition. This implies that we should follow our instincts and make the most of the pertinent facts at our disposal. This final comment is noteworthy because it emphasises that doing "our best with the relevant information at our disposal" should serve as the foundation for intuition.

2.4 Ethical organisations

Each company has a culture, while some are more efficient, and better performing than others. What is the foundation of a culture? Firstly, we need to recognise the forces or guidelines that shape any society. For example, values, which explain what is considered most significant, and ethics, which give us a sense of what is right or wrong, are the forces or guidelines that shape any society (Neal, Justice and Barron, 2019). Ethical environments allow employees to voice concerns and offer suggestions without fear of reprisal, fostering an adaptable workplace essential for thriving (Kihara, 2024).

Individual thinking and inquiry at all levels are encouraged in ethical cultures so that people are not scared to confront others when moral dilemmas emerge. Thus, a learning organisation's culture is comparable to what is required for moral decision-making (Smith, Barnes and Harris, 2015).

De Cremer and Vandekerchove (2017) state that since a lot of work is done in collaborative environments, we need to know if people will report misconduct when they witness careless or unethical behaviour that harms someone else. If this is the case, it will be simpler to create ethical cultures inside organisations where employees have an innate desire to uphold ethical conduct. They further argue that confidence

will be damaged by transgressions of widely held moral principles. The psychological condition of trust is characterised by people's belief that others will act benevolently.

2.4.1 Application of business ethics to institutions of higher education

The application of moral principles to commercial settings is known as business ethics. The study of company circumstances, actions, and choices while addressing morality in such actions and choices in order to protect stakeholder interests is also known as business ethics. Business ethics covers every facet of corporate behaviour, including accounting procedures, boardroom tactics, employee and supplier treatment, and sales methods. Beyond what is required by law, ethics is about making morally-driven choices and acting in a way that upholds a code of conduct for each member of an organisation (Lazenby, 2022). To this end, the field of business ethics offers insights that may be beneficial to the policies and procedures of HE institutions and therefore warrants further research.

Institutional beliefs, or the moral precepts and ideas that underpin a business's culture, play a vital role in defining an organisation's mission. Organisations create norms and expectations for behaviour through their values. Values inside an organisation are enduring and open to change. Strong organisational principles help organisations make moral decisions. Most people agree that having a clear company mission and values is crucial when handling emergencies (Liu et al., 2021).

2.4.2 Challenges amongst various stakeholders in higher education

Over time, a culture characterised by distrust and a fear of reprisals stifles innovation and adaptability, creating serious problems for businesses looking to adjust to changing market conditions and maintain long-term competitiveness (Kihara, 2024). A question arises regarding the kind of university work that will create a problem for ethical decision-making practice. It is argued that a mixture of institutional culture and context, along with academics' duties, tasks and commitments, adds to intentional or unintentional unethical practices in HE. In relation to an HE institution's ethos and setting, it is argued that using their 'positives and strengths' institutions can build their own ethos that can foster ethical behaviour more especially when institutions experience high levels of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (Sam and

Gupton 2021: 83). The task of HE institutions is to promote ethical values and to foster an ethical culture (Bhana and Bayat, 2020).

In an ideal world, academia should be envisaged as a collegiate and shared society. In actuality it could also be a setting whereby 'power dynamics' are common. People in leadership positions experienced more ethical challenges. Studies have indicated that people in positions of power validate their behaviour by self-serving or self-absorbed justifications at the expense of overlooking other individuals' anxieties, troubles and dilemmas. Therefore, Sam and Gupton (2021: 85) highlight that a leader's judgements and decisions could be questionable and therefore considerable precaution is needed.

People in leadership positions also enjoy "instant entitlement bias" whereby they have the perception that that they have earned more recompence or recognition arising from the position they hold. Examples of these incidents are evident in the authorship in staff-student collaborations whereby postgraduate students are at a definite disadvantage. This prejudice is also evident in faculty members holding positions of associate professors, professors etc., who make decisions that are not favourable for junior teaching faculty member as well as the way the faculty treat administrative staff (Sam and Gupton, 2021: 85).

Lack of an ethical committee to review their judgments may be the third ethical difficulty facing universities. Studies suggest that individuals are less likely to talk to their senior leaders about any challenges or issues they are having. Social network leaders frequently misjudge how many individuals concur with their moral judgments. Engaging with professors might make some people uneasy, especially if they are in precarious situations or have unfair power relations. Our collaborative and autonomous culture may discourage dissident voices, even among coworkers who have similar opinions (Sam and Gupton, 2021).

Even if a dean wants to improve the institution's reputation, they may run foul of the law if they publicly criticise or cast doubt on it. "The academic college dean's self-image plays a role in the changing facets of the university and student retention rates". Students will prefer to attend another university if they believe they cannot trust the administration (Basalla, 2022: 5).

It must be highlighted that anyone can engage in unethical behavior – not just senior academic members. Despite our greatest efforts, people do not always act in an ethical manner. Practically, one should draw attention to any underlying prejudices people may hold that might keep them from making moral choices. Hidden preconceptions, preference for one's own group, "conflicts of interest", and exaggerated praise are all examples of this (Sam and Gupton, 2021: 86).

We live in an information-driven culture and are continuously confronted with information, all regarded as being of equivalent value, leading to significant "superficiality in the area of moral discernment". We therefore need to offer a learning culture that instils rational and analytical thinking and encourages the growth of ethical principles (Kaufmann, 2018: 218).

According to Smith, Barnes and Harris (2015: 118), "Ethical organizations are frequently thought of as resulting from their cultures. Organizations possessing ethical cultures create and maintain a shared pattern of values, customs, practices, and expectations which dominate normative behaviour in the organization". Creating a feeling of connection where people are proud of and devoted to their companies is a crucial part of creating an atmosphere that is ethical. They are unlikely to take from them, disparage their fellow employees, or damage their image since they only care about what is best for their organisations (Smith, Barnes and Harris, 2014:119). They further assert that "an unethical culture will feel oppressive, as people resist acknowledging conflict and contradictions, and as individual members strive to hide misdeeds" (Smith, Barnes and Harris, 2015: 120).

2.5 Organisations moral decision making in teaching and learning

Educational leaders are responsible for more than their own moral behaviour. They are also accountable for the actions of those who they are charged with leading and so are required to establish an ethical environment in their schools. Additionally, leaders can serve as aspirational models of ethical behaviour for other members of the learning community. Ultimately "educational leaders have a moral responsibility to be proactive about creating an ethical environment for the conduct of education" (Cherkowski, Walker and Kutsyuruba, 2015: 4). Conversely, leaders can become products of their own creative and moral acts, as

“ethical climates promotes the moral development of leaders as well as followers, fostering their characters and improving their ability to make and follow through on ethical choices. Enacting moral agency contributes to establishing ethical climates that support and foster further ethical behaviour for both followers and leaders” (Cherkowski, Walker and Kutsyuruba, 2015: 4).

“Quality of education is closely linked to, and depends on, the ethical behaviour at a systemic level involving teachers, administrators in education, researchers and other stakeholders” (Prisacariu and Shah, 2016: 153).

HE may be more prone to corruption arising from important decisions taken by various personnel in the university that have major implications to staff and students (Chapman and Lindner, 2016). According to Prisacariu and Shah (2016: 153), an Australian vice-chancellor notes that on the basis of marketisation, organisations and top associations that represents HE “have lost their moral compass” as students are viewed as “customers purchasing a service”. Douglas, Moyes and Douglas (2016: 1) offer an alternative concept by maintaining that institutions of higher learning “offer a product by way of its degrees and awards”, therefore teaching and learning is a service activity. Disturbance in the learning environment must be handled efficiently to allow for a stimulating and supportive teaching and learning environment. If the management of HE neglects to oversee the situation efficiently, they are in jeopardy of customer dissatisfaction.

Prisacariu and Shah (2016: 161) further state that it is the duty of the leaders in HE to make sure that autonomous institutions are administered ethically and a culture of authenticity is present. They also have the duty to promote “national policies and strategies that are morally just for students and the wider stakeholders”. They further add that HE has an ethical responsibility to promote their policies in the best interest of the institutions rather than having self-invested interests (Prisacariu and Shah, 2016: 161).

A growing number of experts think that people have a moral compass that helps them make judgments since they are social creatures. One central aspect of leadership is still having a strong moral compass. This element provides moral leaders with the equilibrium they need to make the right decision, when others take a less honourable route. Unethical choices do not stem from one single factor. Frequently, a number of

elements come together to make the unethical decision attractive. Therefore, a solid moral compass and an accurate assessment of confidence can support the ethical leader in making decisions, communicating, and performing other tasks at work (Basalla, 2022). Institutions that are governed with high moral standards endorse this quality in educating students and developing principled and virtuous graduate (Prisacariu and Shah, 2016).

Additionally, moral leaders view failures as teaching opportunities and strive for both their own and others' development. This view allows for the opportunities of creative leaders. Creative leaders look for possibilities/prospects for novel and inventive ways to progress and research and are risk takers continuously making little victories and improving from setbacks (Basalla, 2022).

Prozesky (2000, cited by Naidoo, 2011: 26) believes that if HE institutions aim to play a role in building a culture of humanity, morality and ethics they "need to be ethically exemplary places themselves". The author proposes ethics audits of their performances to realise where their moral strengths and weaknesses lie, and what kind of behaviour is required to grow in moral standing.

2.6 Unethical practices in higher education and the erosion of academic credibility

Prior study has found that the education system can be as unethical as other aspects of the economy and government. The fundamental aspects that can be seen in the university structures are now skewed by the desires of particular people in the universities (Ishak, Haron and Ismail, 2019). In the backdrop of HE progression, economic decline and fluctuating priorities of government there is clearly a lack of focus or plan for HE. In some countries people have no faith in the government and HE is not top of their priority. Higher education's core focus has also changed to being a business and thereby concentrating more on growth and income generation (Prisacariu and Shah, 2016).

Higher education institutions are becoming accountable in making sure they provide quality and relevant academic programmes that respond to the evolving demands of industry and professions (Prisacariu and Shah, 2016). According to Singh and Blessinger (2024) HE institutions and industry should collaborate to better understand

the needs of employers while also making sure that graduates possess the knowledge, abilities, and other components of competence needed to fill the roles that the business requires. Additionally, constant contacts between employers and universities are necessary to develop, modify, and revise curricula in order to fulfill industry-required future competencies.

Businesses are frequently requesting excellent graduates with the necessary skills and attributes in the different occupations. The 'value for money' description for excellent positions compels universities to make sure that the programmes that are offered are satisfying the needs of industry and that the students are well equipped to find relevant employment and able to cope in various organisation with diverse settings (Prisacariu and Shah, 2016: 153). Singh and Blessinger (2024) agree that graduate competency is misaligned with employer expectations and this has been contributed to the growing issue of unemployed graduates. Candidates with a variety of capabilities are sought after by employers in order to boost and facilitate the organisation's production.

Since universities are not just the most resilient institutions of society but they are also evolving into a worldwide intellectual sector, it is crucial that they articulate their relationship with society. The challenge for a HE institution, however, extends beyond its ability to generate knowledge; it also involves its capability to connect it with citizens in a way that makes it crucial for organising the social and cultural aspects of an information driven society (Coelho and Menezes, 2021). Singh and Blessinger (2024) assert that in order to promote students' achievement in finding employment after graduation, educators and business experts should match the demands of the workplace with HE instructional programmes.

Documentation have shown incidents of dishonesty in institutions of higher learning. For example, political individuals have meddled with the procedure, processes and management in HE institutions. The majority of these operations deal with administrative duties of deans in terms of employing lecturers or support staff, enrolment of students and obtaining funds (Catacutan and de Guzman, 2015: 486). This is supported by Ishak, Haron and Ismail (2019: 408) who state that many aspects of intellectual dishonesty and deception in education have been investigated by previous research. In college, intellectual dishonesty or immoral conduct has also

been part of the issue facing HE in different parts of the globe. Problems such as theft and plagiarism, racism, fake research, misuse of power, abuse of authority and much more can be found. From a business point of view, unethical conduct to maintain one's self-serving interest consequently leads to dishonesty and deception (de Cremer and Vandekerchove, 2017).

The most prevalent forms of corruption in HE institutions described by Transparency International are bribery for passing a test and compulsory buying of textbooks written by lecturers and procurement and sale of diplomas (Ishak, Haron and Ismail, 2019). Other examples are many research papers of related material accompanied by replication, falsification and plagiarism. Desperate to be promoted, desire for earnings, and lack of dedication to the occupation are among the perceived factors in such cases (Ishak, Haron and Ismail, 2019).

In the literature on educational leadership, ethical decision-making in university management has recently gained expanded interest. A recent study also identified the rise of emerging dynamics in contemporary culture that threaten the university climate, leading to more difficult ethics questions facing university leaders. This has led to more challenging decision-making practices as leaders are continuously confronted with the need to align opposing interests of multiple parties when decisions are made (Catacutan and de Guzman, 2015).

Injustice or unfairness may arise regarding performance rating arising from biased treatment by the line manager. Previous studies highlight evaluation bias misrepresents scores arising from employee's race/ethnicity, gender, age and other factors. Unfairness complaints in the review process indicates numerous issues, involving incorrect or unfair evaluations, irregular submission of performance benchmarks and personal discord between senior management (Rubin and Edwards, 2020).

This issue arises frequently because it is simpler to assign high ratings than to put in the effort necessary to defend negative ratings, even when those low scores are necessary. Furthermore, when the results of performance reviews are linked to salary rises or other incentives, managers may view exaggerated ratings as a way to avoid awkward situations with employees or as a way to get the most for their employees (Lin and Kellough, 2019). Findings from previous studies indicate that inflated scores

are the common cited problem and weaken the integrity of the performance evaluation (Lin and Kellough, 2019).

Inflated scores are the result of systematic bias in evaluation reviews arising in incongruously high ratings. High scores arises from clemency that could happen when the seniors are not happy in providing low scores to employees and find it easier to rate employees with a high score. This method minimises the work and time involved in recording explanations for lower scores, hence it's much easier to 'inflate ratings (Lin and Kellough, 2019).

The inability to distinguish between high and low ratings shows incorrect evaluation data and allows for an insufficient base for decisions related to promotions, higher salary, etc. However, line managers do not have the strength, vigour, or drive to provide low ratings, although there may be a justification for a low rating. Numerous studies have indicated the performance appraisal are very seldomly utilised for developmental/corrective intentions or reasons. As a result high rating are often visible in performance evaluations (Lin and Kellough, 2019: 185). Pulakos, Mueller-Hanson and Arad (2018: 250) add that despite years of efforts to strengthen performance evaluation procedures, they continue to provide incorrect data and have achieved very little to enhance performance.

2.7 Ethical and moral dilemmas in higher education administration

Moral dilemmas are characterised in academic leadership sources as contradictory principles that underlie the decisions that a decision-maker has to make (Catacutan and de Guzman, 2016: 492). A moral dilemma is a dissonance arising from more than two values and beliefs that one feels very strongly about. Conduct, decisions or experiences that are appropriate but are at odds with each other or social norms are at the forefront of moral quandaries, which most times comprise ethical inferences, namely equality, authenticity and respect (Masudi, 2024).

A problem that forces decision-makers to use their moral compass in order to choose between two unfavourable possibilities is known as an ethical dilemma. In these circumstances, the assessment of right and wrong must take place. In order to make good choices when confronted with an ethical quandary, an individual should be

embodied with moral principles that directs them to well-considered and sound decisions (Basalla, 2022).

It goes without saying that the educational institution leader is in charge of fostering the university culture. However, educational leaders face a wide range of moral and ethical conundrums in their work life, most of which stem from internal psychological factors like perceptions of oneself. People's moral principles frequently clash with those of colleagues in an educational institution, creating a moral conundrum (Arar and Saiti, 2022).

Studies have attempted to establish whether leaders display consistency relating to moral and just beliefs as portrayed in the way they react or respond to a series of ethical dilemmas. When confronted with an ethical dilemma the ethical thought a leader considers is mainly built on the inclination toward any of the six ethical codes, namely duty, utilitarian, virtue, caring, egoism and justice (Latta, 2020).

The distinction between ethics and morals is that the former emphasises our shared values and beliefs, whereas the latter concentrates on individual ones. Educators are able to address ethical challenges, work to create ethical codes, create an "ethical school of justice, critique", and compassion, and create a caring school community because of this aspect of ethics (Sun, 2011: 23).

"Ethical dilemmas that arise in an organizational environment may seem simple or rational, but they are complex because moral judgements" (Arar and Saiti, 2022: 5) and are definitely influenced by emotional responses. While cognitive processes play a role, the emotional component often takes precedence. Emotions such as compassion or guilt often trigger quick, intuitive moral judgement, at times overshadowing deliberate reasoning (Arar and Saiti, 2022: 5). People frequently overestimate their capacity for moral behavior, thinking they would make moral decisions in difficult situations, yet there are frequently unexpected discrepancies between their words and actions (Basalla, 2022).

Deans experience values dissonance when they consider the protection of the people in their care as they recognise the unintentional damage they can inflict in the lives of these individuals while performing their official duties. Such scenarios highlight the level of uncertainty and ambiguity that describe the ethical dilemmas that result from

these conditions and highlight the ethical difficulties posed by decision-makers as they struggle with the severity and scope of their responsibility for their actions. These conditions naturally pose questions of ethical value: to what degree, for example, will an educator be accountable for the possible effects of their decision to expel a non-performing student struggling from persistent depression? And to what degree can an administrator, e.g., the dean of a college, consider themselves accountable for sexual harassment cases perpetrated by academic staff against students that they have appointed? Such circumstances highlight the level of ethical decision-making skills necessary by the decision-maker and focus on the possible challenges that a university administrator faces who may lack the required knowledge of the basic beliefs, ideologies and concept in ethics to successfully deal with dilemmas at this level of difficulty (Catacutan and de Guzman, 2016).

Ethical standpoints are difficult even in parts of life that are not dramatic. Do we blow the whistle on an employee who was part of a dishonest conduct and as a result might be dismissed from his job? The health arena is an environment that is laden with these moral dilemmas. Many lawsuits of misconduct are lost arising from the lack of convincing proof because the work friends cover up for each other "in the name of collegiality" (Ramphela, 2012: 70).

Robbins et al. (2016: 23) state that organisations hit by budget cuts, pressure of higher productivity and strong competition can explain why employees feel compelled to cut corners, do not adhere to rules and other dubious conduct. They are continuously confronted with ethical dilemmas and ethical choices where they are expected to detect right and wrong behaviour. Are they expected to blow the whistle if they discover unlawful actions in the organisation? Are they expected to take instructions which they do not approve of? Do they award an over-rated performance evaluation to a staff member they are fond of, so that the employee's job will be safe? Should they engage in politics for career growth?

The knowledge of practice advances the idea that by comprehending both "explicit and tacit knowledge", the practitioner – in this instance, the teacher – will be able to apply their professional skills in context when faced with circumstances requiring the application of moral judgment in the learning environment (Burleigh, 2020: 365). People make moral choices based on their increased awareness and comprehension

of ethical concerns (i.e., amoral issues/behaviors encountered and/or the associated negative implications). They then commit to responding appropriately, changing the situation, and mitigating any possible adverse consequences (Valentine and Godkin, 2019: 77).

By concentrating on affective traits that could be incorporated into elements of moral thinking, this research offers the potential to resolve these concerns (Valentine and Godkin, 2019). For example, an institutions decision-maker's personal attitudes (i.e., past experiences) towards the situation faced may have an impact on how important they view a moral dilemma to be (Valentine and Godkin, 2019). Similarly, it would seem that the moral assessments of the behaviours that take place in an ethical predicament and the drive to act morally in a different way are linked to comparable successful reactions to immoral conduct (Valentine and Godkin, 2019: 278).

According to Snellnow and Seeger (2020, as cited by Liu et al., 2021) a crisis presents a number of moral dilemmas and conflicts. These could include allegations of misconduct, how those who have been harmed are treated, concerns about equality and justice, queries over integrity and openness, and conflicts over monetary costs. Also, ethics are usually only taken into consideration subsequent to the occurrence of a wrongdoing instead of always being included in everyday planning functions (Liu et al., 2021: 2).

When values are ingrained in an individual's code of conduct, they have a strong desire to uphold the principle and refrain from conducting themselves in a manner that would be inconsistent with it. When one's own behaviour goes against that value, they are likely to feel guilty about it and to be critical of others whose actions do the same (Shaw, 2014). Choosing an ethical stand is not only a philosophical decision like choosing an economic or scientific theory. Instead, it also entails an urge to uphold that ideal for its own sake, the possibility of feeling bad about not upholding it, and an inclination to assess the behaviour of other individual in light of the relevant principle (Shaw, 2014).

Since ethics is about making the correct decisions, people at times have to make decisions that might conflict with morals and profit or private benefit and the public good. This gives rise to an ethical quandary which results in a mental conflict between moral imperatives. Is it moral, for instance, to carry out personal business during work

hours or to claim credit for the efforts of others? When something at work violates your personal ethics, morals, and values, you may find yourself in a difficult moral situation. It could be an action you are part of yourself or something one of your managers or co-workers is doing, or both. Moral dilemmas compel you to choose between being truthful and dishonest, or between doing what you believe is right or what is wrong (Lazenby, 2022).

Foster (1986 as cited by Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016: 1) state that "every decision made by administrators brings along with it a restructuring of people's daily existence: which explains why administration at its very core is the resolution of moral dilemmas", highlighting the gravity and significance of ethics in educational administration. It is further stated that, in this absurd, volatile, and morally divisive time, it is necessary to provide contrasting viewpoints in order to assist educational leaders in resolving real-world problems that they regularly encountered in their educational institutions and communities (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016: 1).

Complex quandaries in higher educational settings often necessitate the application of more than one perspective in order to resolve them. It appears more crucial now than ever for senior management in HE to go beyond 'self' and reflect deeper in order to try to learn about others, given the complexities of current environments and customs (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016: 7).

An example of decisions that trigger a moral dilemma is how we assist our students and its impact on the 'bottom line'. When the registration for student intake closes at a certain date, what is the situation of applicants who come "knocking on the door at the 11th hour"? What message are the universities sending out to learners that were refused entry? Are we saying that the universities do not care? The question to ask then is: is the university in a fiscal position to reject students? These important questions require a rational clarification (Neal, Justice and Barron, 2019: 101).

Individuals should be aware that their choice could have ethical ramifications for both themselves and other dependent parties before making a moral decision. Only then may judgments that are going against accepted moral standards be identified early on in the process and promptly stopped to avoid future ethical crises. Most people take a moment in their life to consider their personal moral standards and the practical effects of these standards. They may also consider what moral standards people should

uphold or which moral standards are most easily justified (Shaw, 2014). According to de Cremer and Vandekerchove (2017) individuals need to note the ethical dilemma for the moral decision-making process to proceed. This crucial component of conscious decision-making is only available, as was previously said, if people only make judicious decisions.

The complexity and ambiguity of moral dilemmas can make it difficult for leaders to decide on the best approach to take. Conflicted beliefs, divergent viewpoints, and unclear consequences are all possible components of ethical dilemmas. Leaders may find it difficult to determine and constantly apply ethical standards due to the lack of clarity around moral decisions (Brigue and Orlu, 2023). Knowing the limits of an issue entails using judgment to consider wider ramifications rather than just providing a one-time solution (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022).

Budget cuts, a lack of financing, and greater competition for resources are just a few of the resource limitations that public colleges sometimes confront. These limitations can bring about moral quandaries for leaders who may have to make morally challenging choices about resource distribution and allocation. Lack of resources can result in moral dilemmas like nepotism, favouritism, or sacrificing academic integrity in the name of monetary stability (Brigue and Orlu, 2023).

Handling conflicts of interest is a major obstacle for moral leadership in public universities. University administrators may have a variety of jobs and duties, including consulting, serving on business boards, and participating in extracurricular activities. Personal interests and the university's best interests may clash as a result of these outside involvements. In institutions of higher learning education leadership, conflicts of interest have the potential to erode credibility, transparency, trust, and the moral decision-making process (Brigue and Orlu, 2023).

2.8 Self-interest vs moral judgement and ethically conscious decision-making

Conscience is the hidden voice of ethics, of good and bad, of right and wrong. In seeking for a decent life, we might think of it as our integral support system. We have an unpleasant feeling when we utter a lie, act cruelly, cheat on someone, double-park, break a vow, or do some of the countless things we know are false. It is the sincere and honorable feeling that we receive when we do the correct thing i.e. supporting a

friend, being truthful to a team player or your partner, or to your company, giving of your time and being charitable to the under-privileged, or always seeking the truth particularly when it is at our cost (Prozesky, 2007). An ethical individual consistently acts on grounds of their conscience, not focused on opportunism. The decisions made are consistent, for every situation or condition. One's principles are the same whether "at work, at home, in public or alone" (Josephson, 2002: 13).

Ethics provides benchmarks that one may apply to and make decisions and to differentiate between what is good or bad. It is likely that ethical considerations can be at odds with moral commitments, which poses one with severe dilemmas. Should one obey one's belief even though it is in disagreement with one's culture or society's standards (Ramphela, 2012: 68)? Nair (2014: 230-231) asserts that ethics is concerned with what is 'good or bad' and 'moral duty and obligations'. "For generations, every culture and society across the world, has established for their members' an ethical code which is to be adhered and practiced". All business organisations are aware about ethical issues, but are they preserving an ethical environment or providing an outline of 'code of conduct'. A sincere person meticulously utilises open and unbiased procedures for the compilation and assessment of information required for decision-making. Honest people should not wait for the facts to come to them; before making major decisions, they first explore pertinent information, seek knowledge and contradictory opinions (Josephson, 2002: 17).

Ethical conduct can be self-centred, but not necessarily selfish. When one's conduct has adverse results for other people, but one only considers the benefits to oneself, this behaviour is self-centred and immoral (Rossouw and van Vuuren, 2017). Shaw (2014: 18) contends that you need to remember that if you only do what is right because you believe that it will be beneficial to you then you are not driven by moral concerns. To be moral entails the need to pursue the "principle for its own sake – simply because it is the right thing to do". If you do what is right only because you think you will benefit by it, you may well quite simply not 'do it' if it is not going to benefit you (Shaw, 2014: 18).

Researchers claim that moral leadership skill helps to seek agreement among stakeholders and create unity and trust. School leaders ought to become conscious of how they make ethical choices so that especially in a multicultural society there will be

mutual interest, and they can aspire to achieve a greater normative base for decision-making rather than enforcing their own principles on students and teachers (Cherkowski, Walker and Kutsyuruba, 2015).

When making decisions, responsible citizens consider the needs and preferences of others. They acknowledge that happiness, success, and the ability to achieve goals are among the 'core values' that almost everyone shares. Self-centred people just take into consideration their own needs and desires. Making the decision to adopt an "ethical point of view" entails accepting that other individuals and their underlying values are also deserving of respect (Quinn, 2017, 50).

Even those who hold an ethical perspective may disagree on the correct course of action to pursue in a given circumstance. At times the actual truth can be debated. In other instances, people have different views as a result of contrasting opinions on values resulting from opposing ethical theories. Therefore, it is important to acquire a basic knowledge of some of the more well-known ethical ideas (Quinn, 2017).

It is quite obvious to all that arising from businesses collapsing in the ethical sphere, a fundamental challenge for organisations is to fathom the reason why moral and principled norms are so naturally contravened and allowed. The downplaying of the ethical norms and absence of compliance to standards stopping unprincipled and immoral conduct and transgression put a strain on the credibility and success of the organisations. Ethical collapse is a critical reality for businesses, organisations and the public which is why there is an increasing concern on how to deal with and normalise these collapses. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend why self-interest causes many people in business to disregard moral and ethical behaviour (de Cremer and Vandekerchove, 2017).

Swami Vivekananda highlighted the necessity for people to rise above their limited self-interest and personal constraints. The cultivation of empathy and an inclusive worldview were among his favoured traits. Leaders can promote cooperation and togetherness by acknowledging and appreciating other points of view, which will advance the group's development (Hashimy et al., 2023).

The recent focus of attention at local universities across the US is the financial effects of business decision making. For example, the way the universities manage diversity,

late registration and credit versus non-credit offerings can have a major fiscal or monetary implications in the era of performance-driven funding. The possibility for a more profitable financial standing has increased the impacts on institutions of higher learning. We have to therefore make choices that not only adhere to regulations but also strike a balance between ensuring that every student succeeds and generating income for the university. The urge to concentrate only on income is mounting. "Funding models that reward institutions for headcount enrollment, credentials awarded, and course completion open the door for unethical game play to maximise the bottom line". Still, ethical leadership-built righteousness can still flourish (Neal, Justice and Barron, 2019: 99-100).

Being ethically responsible implies that organisations should conduct themselves in a manner that is not directly influenced by the law or its immediate financial interests. Management ought to make decisions that will benefit all stakeholders in the long run in terms of reliability, respectfulness, accountability, fairness, and care (Benedict et al., 2020: 92).

The sudden emergence in consciousness of a moral decision, including an "affective valence (good-bad, like-dislike)", clear of any conscious thought process, assessing verification, or deducing a conclusion, is how Haidt (2001: 818 cited by de Cremer and Vandekerchove, 2017: 440) characterises moral intuition. In other words, our moral judgments and choices are influenced by both rapid, emotionally charged processes and conscious, analytical reasoning processes. Organisations' ethical approaches need to consider moral intuition to know the reasons why it is so easy for personnel in businesses to digress from principled norms in their behaviours and decisions (de Cremer and Vandekerchove, 2017: 440).

Thus, there are situations in which human reason breaks down and we become partially oblivious to our own moral failings. Therefore, if we are to be serious about creating interventions that stop unethical behaviour from emerging, we also need to learn more about why and how rational approaches to ethics fall short and why irrationality exists in our ethical decision-making processes. Prescriptive and behavioural business ethics work well together to help us comprehend these kinds of issues (de Cremer and Vandekerchove, 2017).

Nguyen and Crossan (2022: 180) relate the story of the Ford Pinto debacle whereby leaders made no effort to recall the defective motor vehicle; the concern was not based on the incorrect ethical guidelines but instead emanated from the failure to identify the "ethical aspects of the decisions". The authors, affirm, therefore, that awareness is not one specific occurrence but rather an unfolding process that necessitates judgments about the stimuli and perhaps a rethink to awareness as the matter unfolds, frequently during subsequent moral phases. According to some academics, ethical decision-making follows a linear process, meaning that if one does not acknowledge the moral dilemma, one will not participate in the moral decision-making process. Accordingly, moral awareness has been regarded as a crucial stage in moral decision-making, making it a necessary aspect for acting in an ethical manner (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022: 180).

2.9 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the literature on the aspects of ethical and moral decision-making. Aspects honed in on included the relationship between ethical practices and leadership, the balance between ethical leadership and social responsibility, approaches used in ethical decision making, and organisational culture. The chapter discussed these topics areas in the context of HE institutions. The next chapter examines the development of the theoretical framework for this research using aspects from various pertinent theories on the philosophy of ethical decision-making.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 provided a discussion of literature and scholarly articles pertaining to this study's focus. This chapter unpacks the different theories utilised to provide a guiding perspective on the philosophies of ethical decision-making.

A theoretical framework is a particular set of ideas and theories pertaining to the topic we have chosen to study. It serves as both the conceptual foundation and the framework for our investigation. A photograph in a frame reminds us of a particular time in our life. In a similar way a theoretical framework is a framed snapshot of a specific issue that we choose and explain in relation to particular and linked theories (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014: 55).

According to Rajkoomar (2015) investigating specific issues is the goal of research, which is impossible without prior information. The researcher can formulate the study question with the help of the background information. Information must be interpreted by the researcher using a theoretical framework that positions the investigation.

"Theory allows us to 'see' the world in different ways. As with a pair of glasses, the types of lens will affect what we can see. We have to choose theory that will allow us to see what we need to see in order to answer our research questions" (Boughey and Mckenna, 2021: 20).

Many ethical theories were examined to gain an insight on the epistemic views on philosophy of ethics and ethical decision making. The paradigms/theories that this study engaged with and were considered to be applicable were: deontological theory, normative theory, justice theory, ethics of care and virtue theory (Figure 3.1).

By utilising the various paradigms, HE practitioners can become conscious about the viewpoints that they tend to adopt in addressing moral quandaries. If one has received a very spiritual upbringing, for instance, the guiding principle one may choose might be the ethic of care, which emphasises compassion and empathy, or the ethic of

justice, which places a great focus on rights and laws (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016: 7).

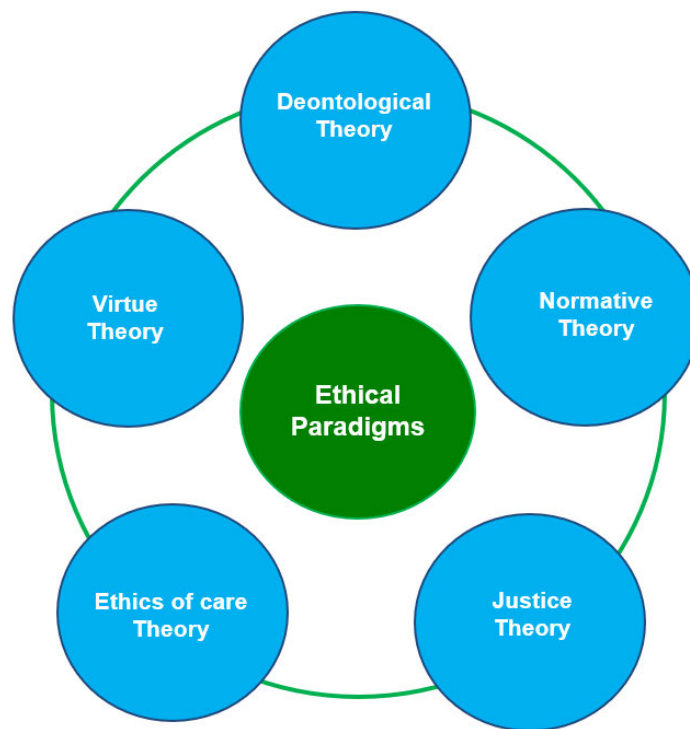


Figure 3.1: Ethical paradigms
Source: Authors adaptation, 2025

3.2 Immanuel Kant's deontological theory

The most well-known example of the deontological theory of ethics is that of the 18th century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Kant provides an excellent approach to ethics for organisations, business and individuals. He provides insight into the ethical decision-making processes required for an organisation to function responsibly. According to Kant's deontological theory, we can only know what we ought to do based on our own reasons and not by seeing what others do. Every action, in Kant's opinion, must have a pure intent, otherwise, it is deemed pointless. A person must always treat other people as their end, not just as a means; an action is moral if it is acceptable to all concerned reasonable parties (Benedict et al., 2020).

Kant held that moral laws should govern people's behaviour and that these laws were universal. He believed that any ultimate moral principles need to be grounded in reason for them to be applicable to rational human beings (Quinn, 2017: 67). Kant states that if you do not wish the act from 'a sense of duty' to be sincere and truthful,

your conduct lacks ethical value. Behaviour has moral worth only when it arises from an awareness of responsibility and a desire to fulfil it (Shaw, 2014: 54). A practical Kantian model "asks to decision maker to rule out prudential self-interest, greed and selfish motives by posing the questions, am I acting from the basis of reason alone? Can I rule out political influence, monetary influence, and pure self-interest?" (Bowen, 2005: 195).

According to Kant (as cited by Josephson, 2002:28), the moral character of an act relies entirely on the idea underlying it, not on the effects it causes. Ethical responsibilities are 'higher truths', which, regardless of the consequences, we all fulfil. Moral duties are absolute and do not qualify for deviations or mitigating situations. Simplicity is a major virtue of Kant 's duty theory; it does not need one to analyse or foresee the implications of a particular decision (Josephson, 2002: 28).

Kant's moral theory has three applications for an organisation:

Firstly, the categorical imperative requires one to obey strict rules of moral decision-making, rules which do not rely on conditions or outcomes and which do not accommodate specific concessions. Many acts are simply incorrect, no matter what the costs might be or who commits it.

An example is telling lies; although there may be lots of positive benefits arising from falsifying an item, calculated distortion is unacceptable. Likewise, it would not be right to subject workers that are not informed to certain occupational health risks on the basis that it expands medical information (Shaw, 2014: 57).

Secondly, Kant presents a crucial "humanistic dimension into business decisions" (Shaw, 2014: 47). Some of the basic challenges to egoisms and utilitarianism is that they encourage one to view human beings as means to ends. This is expressly forbidden by the ideals of Kant. It is implied that in business today respect for the intrinsic worth and integrity of the human being is very much required.

Kant's philosophy puts the focus of corporate decision-making on individuals. Organisations include people working in concert to deliver goods and services to other people. "The primacy Kant gives that individual reflects this essential aspects of business" (Shaw, 2014: 57).

Thirdly, Kant emphasises the significance of "motivation and of action on principle" (Shaw, 2014: 57). Kant states that it is not sufficient to do things correctly; an act has moral value if it is conducted with a sense of obligation and in an ethical manner. The significance of this aspect is often ignored. Occasionally people and businesses think that an act supports the welfare of all, they are essentially justifying doing what is good for them and only visualising that it will be beneficial for others in some way or another. Worse yet, they can support their actions as morally commendable when in actual fact they behave selfishly. They would not do the socially justifiable thing if they did not think it would benefit them (Shaw, 2014: 57-58).

It is likely that most of us have experienced being caught between doing what we should and what we want to do on several occasions. Kant would have us believe that our desires are unimportant. What we should do should be our main concern. We refer to our feeling of "ought to" as dutifulness. Respecting a moral code compels a responsible person to behave in a particular way. Therefore, our will ought to be based on an understanding of moral principles. The underlying moral principle determines an action's moral value. Thus, it is essential for us to have the ability to judge whether or not our activities are justified by a suitable moral standard (Quinn, 2017: 67).

The case for Kantianism:

It treats all persons as moral equals

The idea that "all human beings are made equal" is widely held, since it maintains that individuals in comparable circumstances ought to be treated similarly. Kantianism offers an ethical framework, moral foundation, to fight prejudice.

It gives all persons moral worth by considering them as rational, autonomous beings.

Every human being has intrinsic worth and dignity. Kant argues that people should always be viewed as ends in themselves rather than only as means to an end for this reason. This viewpoint supports the widely held belief that it is improper for one person to control another.

Everyone is held to the same standard

Kantianism holds that it is improper for you to make an exception for yourself from a rule that you want other people to abide by. For instance, it would be improper to

violate a legally binding agreement while simultaneously expecting that others in similar situations would uphold the terms of the agreement. This fundamental moral principle – 'what's good for the goose is good for the gander' – is a logical outgrowth of Kant's belief that all people are morally equal.

Kantianism produces universal moral guidelines

Many people's instinct that all individuals should be treated equally throughout history is supported by Kantianism. These rules enable us to form certain moral conclusions. One such statement could be: "It is wrong to sacrifice living humans in order to appease the gods." It was incorrect in South America in the fourteenth century, and it is incorrect in Europe in the twenty-first century (Quinn, 2017: 70-71).

3.3 Normative decision theory

Whilst philosophical ethics shows us the correct path in all facets of existence in life, a normative theory of business ethics endeavours to tackle the moral dilemmas in the corporate setting. As is generally known, individuals with training in information systems, computer science, engineering, and other business-related fields often lack instruction in ethics, philosophy, and moral thinking. It is challenging for industry specialists to have conversations that result in the creation of ethical decision-making standards if they lack a vocabulary to analyse and discuss what constitutes an ethical computing issue (Bose, 2012: 20).

Only interactions involving industry affiliations are the focus of the normative theory of business ethics. They differ from descriptive statements, which explain how the world "is", in that they are normative, outlining duties that managers "should" or "ought" to accomplish (Bose, 2012: 20). Bradley (2014) states that normative decision theory answers the issue of what actions they will take and how they should take them; how they should weigh the options before them, what parameters they will use and what measures they should adopt (Bradley, 2014).

A normative process to business ethics assesses the procedures required for ethical decision making in a business environment. By discussing normative approaches, we are actually engaging in a discussion on how organisational decision makers can handle a situation. The normative process in corporate ethics relates to the values of conduct within the company and the industry. Normative guidelines and policies are

built on individual moral values including the shared values of the business. A normative process for corporate ethics is focused on broad ethical standards applied in the organisation (Ferrell, Fraedrich and Ferrell, 2019: 126).

What choices should be made when facing a decision problem of this kind will depend on the circumstances the agent faces and in particular the amount of information they hold about its various features (Bradley, 2014). While Benedict et al. (2020: 84) concede that normative theories in the discipline of business ethics, as opposed to descriptive theories, exceed basic ethical situations and delve into the ideal condition of particular ethical situations. As a result, they form moral judgments that establish a predetermined benchmark for what constitutes an ethical norm (Benedict et al., 2020: 84).

3.4 Rawls's theory of justice

The ethic of justice was developed John Rawls (1971), based on justice and fairness, observing that decisions should be reached through "a veil of ignorance". A veil of ignorance implies that the decision making "should be blind to (or ignorant of)" prejudices and inequalities whilst getting the most gains for everyone. Additionally, Rawls's view of justice is based on two main tenets: (a) that all parties involved in or impacted by an action should be treated equally, and (b) that all parties ought to have fairly equal access to advantages and decision-making power, otherwise there will have been inequity and injustice. The fundamental tenet of Rawls's theory of justice is that the welfare of the society should never be sacrificed for individual liberty (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2005; Shapiro and Gross, 2008, cited in Wood and Hilton, 2012).

Rawl's justice theory seeks to discover principles to govern social and political life instead of individual behavior. However, it begins from an ethical source, as well as having significant effects for just ethical belief. The philosophy of Rawls is an elaboration of a basic idea, that a rational scheme of agreements is one that can be agreed to by the parties without knowing if it will directly benefit them. This is built into a fiction of an original situation in which, behind a "veil of ignorance", individuals prefer social values that hide their own prospective social roles and even their particular tastes and desires from them. "It does not conceal general propositions, such as the findings of the social sciences, so they have some information to work on, but no

information that enables any of them to discriminate in his or her own favor" (Williams, 1985: 78).

Rawls expands on what he asserts are moralities of justice with the use of an artificial device he refers to as the 'original position' whereby an individual chooses moralities of justice from behind a veil of ignorance. This veil does not allow people to see the truth about themselves so it does not allow them to customise principles for their own benefit (Rawls, 1971: 3).

Given that every individual's natural tendency would be to suggest ideas that would benefit themselves, how can individuals come to an agreement on what these principles of justice should be (Quinn, 2017)? Rawls suggests a thought experiment in which the rules are established from an initial position in which each individual is concealed behind a curtain of ignorance in order to stop people from self-servingly advancing their personal goals (Quinn, 2017). Before becoming aware of their role in society, people must accept the tenets, that they are unaware of their sexual orientation, race, origin, financial status, level of intelligence, physical capabilities, or limitations, and other factors (Quinn, 2017).

Agreements made based on this initial situation, according to Rawls, would appear reasonable since individuals wouldn't make decisions based on principles which could hurt them if they ended up in a position of disadvantage in society compared to others. He suggests that rational individuals hiding behind a curtain of ignorance would concur on the next two justice-related precepts (Quinn, 2017: 83).

Anyone can state a "fully adequate" number of fundamental freedoms, including the right to possess property, the right to feel safe from harm, the freedom of their beliefs and expression, and the right to association, given that these entitlements are in line with other people's claim to the similar privileges and dispensations (Quinn, 2017: 84). Two requirements must be met by any social or economic inequality: firstly, it must be connected to social roles that every person has an equal chance of undertaking and secondly it must "be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the difference principle)" (Quinn, 2017: 84).

John Rawls believed that an individual would arrive at a just decision if they were unaware of their role in any particular moral dilemma (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016:

216). Individuals achieving high scores on justice and low scores on utilitarianism would place more importance on conduct that is fair rather than what is beneficial to the majority when decisions are made (Latta, 2020: 75-76).

According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005, as cited in Wood and Hilton 2012), the ethic of justice is an ethical framework that posits problems, has faith in, and makes decisions based on the "rule of law and the more abstract concepts of fairness, equity and justice". According to this viewpoint, current laws, regulations, policies, codes, and procedures serve as a guide for leaders' judgments (Wood and Hilton, 2012).

3.5 The ethics of care

The ethics of care, as defined by Gilligan (1982 cited by Wood and Hilton, 2012), is compassion directed and focuses on how choices, problems, and situations can cause harm to other people. Accordingly, qualities like empathy, sympathy, and trust are characteristics of an ethic of care. In order to improve the viewpoint of others, leaders who use an ethic of care are urged to promote the awareness of various socio-cultural existence (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2005; Shapiro and Gross, 2008, cited in Wood and Hilton, 2012).

Developing out of the ethic of justice, the ethic of care which is linked to academia, is explained by Noddings (1992, cited by Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016: 16) who formed a new 'educational hierarchy' ranking care and stated that educational institutions must first care for their students. Learners remain in the core of the educational system and have to be properly fostered and supported, as stated by Noddings, and many of the other ethical scholars and experts who support the application of the ethic of care. This idea probably goes against the majority of those who want to prioritise achievement. Noddings deems that maintaining a competitive edge in success signifies that some students might perceive themselves as mere pawns in a country of difficult and indifferent grownups (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016: 16).

An ethic of care emphasises the significance of students and their growth, with a special emphasis on helping them reach their academic and professional objectives. Additionally, an ethic of caring is focused on the personal growth of workers (Wood and Hilton, 2012). The ethic of care is crucial for academics as well as educational leaders who every so often have to make ethical judgements. If ethic of care is applied

to solve problems, then it is essential to review the way educational leaders are coached. Previously these leaders were coached with the use of military and business models. This implied that they received instruction on the value of hierarchy, the necessity of obeying those in positions of authority, and the necessity of exercising control over subordinates. They took the lead in creating regulations, guidelines, computerised systems, SOPs and a range of less formal methods. These methods and guidelines might have been effective "when the ethic of justice, rights, and laws" served as the main foundation for moral judgments made by leaders, but they fall short when other ethical paradigms – like the ethic of care – are taken into account and demand that decision-makers take into account the opinions of many people (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016: 18).

When a caring ethic is upheld, educational leaders might develop into what Barth (1990: 513) called "head learner(s)" (cited by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016: 18). When faced with the need to make ethically important decisions, Barth used the word to describe the growth of exceptional leaders and learners who are open to hearing what others have to say. Thus, familiarity with diversity and cultures must be emphasised more in their training, along with teaching them how to listen, watch, and interact with others (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016: 18).

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) further state that an ethical code of behaviour that sets high expectations for all HE professionals must guide the professional conduct of leaders in HE. When making decisions, the educational leader always prioritises the education and welfare of the learners. It is consistent with ethic of caring, which prioritises students above all others in the educational system, and it reflects the worries of other critical theorists who believe that students' voices are being muffled. Furthermore, putting the needs of the student first aligns with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) professional standards, all of which start with the phrase "an education leader promotes the success of every student".

Consequently, the ethic of caring provides an alternative perspective and approaches for handling complex moral dilemmas that leaders in education have to deal with on a regular basis. One of the complex aspects of this lens is that it sometimes deals with emotions. This complexity was highlighted by educational ethicist Paul Begley, who questioned whether the ethics of care is a "rational or emotional model". After thinking

about this important problem, it is clear that although some features of this paradigm, such as providing students with attention and discipline, may be justified as rational, other aspects, such as empathy and sympathy for others, tend to show feelings. As a result, some features of this model are consistent with the expanding corpus of research on decision-making in general, where emotion and reason are closely intertwined (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016: 18).

When academics approach ethical quandaries from the perspective of care, it raises questions about how they may help youngsters satisfy their needs and wants. It also reflects answers that demonstrate consideration for others in the decision-making process. People are expected by this ethic to think through the effects of their choices and acts. It poses questions such as: "Who will benefit from what I decide?" to get young people thinking. Who would my actions harm? What consequences will a choice I make today have down the road? And if someone helps me today, what should I do to repay them later on or give back to society as a whole? Additionally, this paradigm challenges people to consider moral principles like trustworthiness, honesty and loyalty (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016: 18).

According to those who adhere to the ethic of care, taking care of your people is the quickest path to success as a leader. The ethic of care is founded on principles rather than using an outcomes-based approach to decision-making. The principles of an organisation guides it to care about people just as much as it does to for procedures, regulations, guidelines and outcomes (Neil, Justin and Barron, 2019: 101).

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005, as cited by Wood and Hilton, 2012) claim that ethical perspectives support moral decision-making in a number of ways. Paradigms assists leaders in analysing the 'frame' or modes of thought they are most likely to employ, reflecting on conduct that deviate from their normative actions and approaches, looking at more comprehensive methods to problem solving, and practicing reflexivity (Wood and Hilton, 2012).

3.6 Virtue ethics

One fundamental theoretical viewpoint that directs conversations about ethics in education is virtue ethics. Fundamentally, virtue ethics has its roots in ancient philosophical traditions; it emphasises the development of virtue-laden personality

traits like truthfulness, empathy, and integrity as the foundation for moral decision-making (Nthoesane, 2024).

Kantianism, utilitarianism, and social contract theory are criticised by some moral philosophers as ignoring facets of living an ethical life that are vital to them, such as teaching of ethics, moral wisdom, family and social ties, and the importance of emotions. During the last few decades, has seen an increase of attention to virtue ethics which is an ethical theory that takes into consideration each of these aspects (Quinn, 2017: 88).

Virtues and vices

Aristotle distinguished between two categories of virtues: moral and intellectual. Intellectual virtues are connected to 'reasoning and truth'. Present scholars refer to moral virtues as 'virtues of character' which are habitual tendencies formed by way of correct virtuous behaviour. For instance, by consistently stating what is true or engaging in other honourable deeds, you can cultivate the ethical virtue of integrity. The moral qualities are the main topic of discussion in this section (Quinton, 2017: 86).

A moral virtue is an ingrained quality of character. For instance, think about someone who embodies the virtue of honesty. Naturally, an honest individual will speak the truth; they will find it unpleasant to even consider acting dishonestly, and they will be uncomfortable when they are asked to participate in dishonest activities by others. Morally decent individuals continually do what they believe to be correct; it becomes a way of life (Quinton, 2017). By urging people to act morally and with integrity, virtue ethics integrates introspection. Certain academics have criticised virtue ethics on the premise that one cannot nurture one's character and behaviour by contemplating moral role models; rather, one must live virtuously and not only consider others who possess virtues (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022: 185).

Therefore, it's critical to identify the various components that can comprise a person's moral compass. This is where the virtue theory of Aristotle comes into the moral growth of people (Ross, 1959 as cited in Basalla, 2022: 34). Individuals, namely, HE leaders who possess the qualities that Aristotle deemed valuable ("courage, truthfulness and righteous indignation"), will eventually come together and form a group of like-minded people who will make decisions on behalf of the university system. Therefore, as

virtues develop into character traits, researchers need to look at how they become ingrained in the human mind and transcend everyday routines. People acquire these characteristics as a result of their experiences, viewpoints, and personal development (Basalla, 2022: 34).

Expanding on this notion, the virtue theory of Aristotle (Ross, 1959, as cited in Basalla, 2022: 3) can aid in the explanation of a leader's character. Virtue theory holds that people develop virtue into their personalities, which makes it simpler to determine what might be right or wrong in an ethical situation. "Virtue theory also explains the role of the individual's moral code, which is built over the lifetime through cognitive, emotional, and actionable experiences". These aspects of a person's personality are crucial when they take on leadership roles and are required to make morally right decisions, particularly when faced with challenging situations in institutions of higher learning (Basalla, 2022: 3).

Therefore, a moral virtue is not just an attitude to behave a certain way; it is also an attitude to feel a certain way. Aristotle asserted that you can learn a great deal about a person's character by seeing what makes them happy and unhappy (Quinn, 2017: 89). Virtue ethics is about inculcating the correct character attributes that will direct one to the correct act. However exemplary character is built over a period and "cannot be learned and or developed in a compressed format" (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022: 185).

Clearly certain moral virtues are more closely associated with feelings than others. One virtue that has a strong relationship with the emotions is courage. Being able to control your fear is necessary for courage (Quinn, 2017: 89).

Summary of virtue ethics

A righteous act is an act that another virtuous individual, acting in persona, would do in an identical situation. A virtuous individual is someone who embodies and lives out the virtues. The virtues are those personal qualities human individuals require in order to grow and be content (Quinn, 2017: 90). As in Kantianism and social contract theory, virtue ethics gives special consideration to the agent – the one carrying out the action – as well as the action itself and its results (as in utilitarianism). When acting morally,

one should do the right thing for the right reason at the appropriate moment (Quinn, 2017: 90).

The virtue ethics theory holds that moral judgments cannot be boiled down to following a set of rules on a regular basis. This is not to argue that 'rules of thumb' have no place. To cultivate the quality of reliability, for instance, it is a good idea to abide by the maxim 'keep confidences'. Nonetheless, there are situations in which maintaining confidentiality may not represent the best course of action. Rules come second to moral judgment or insight (Quinn, 2017: 91). Table 3.1 presents the case for virtue ethics.

Table 3.1: The case for virtue ethics

<i>Focusing on virtues rather than duties, rights, or ramifications makes more sense in many circumstances.</i> For instance, think about why it is immoral to steal in order to gratify a selfish need. Kantianism holds that the theft is immoral since the perpetrator does not view the victims as ends in and of themselves. Rule utilitarians hold that stealing is not right because everyone stealing constantly would have negative long-term effects rather than positive ones. From the standpoint of virtue ethics, the argument is much simpler: stealing is immoral because it interferes with one's growth of the 'virtue of honesty'.
<i>Close relationships can be morally related to making decisions.</i> The theories of utilitarianism, Kantianism, and the social compact demand that we treat every person equally and with total impartiality. The consequences drawn from this belief are difficult for most individuals to accept. When a couple is given an opportunity to feed 1 000 starving refugees for a month or use \$5 000 to take their children to Disneyland for a week, the calculus of utility would indicate that preserving 1,000 lives was the more beneficial option. From the standpoint of virtue ethics, the couple's relationship with their children matters morally when assessing the same decision. The fact that parents are expected to have a bias in favour of their own children can be considered while choosing the most suitable course of action.
<i>Virtue ethics acknowledges that our principled decision-making proficiencies grows over time.</i> Moral virtues are acquired by consistently performing the right actions. An individual's character takes time to develop. Moral wisdom is a quality of the mind that requires time to cultivate. Everyone is on their own journey from who I am, to the person I want to be and if I am unsure of what to do in a given situation, I can go ask someone who has already travelled that road. Hence, virtue ethics makes sense in our day-to-day lives. Whenever individuals genuinely want to do the right thing but are unsure about how to proceed, they frequently seek someone "older and wiser."
<i>There is an unsolvable moral conundrum.</i> Remember that one of Kantianism's weaknesses is that there's no way to select between ideal responsibilities when they contradict. This shortcoming does not exist in virtue ethics. A person with sufficient moral understanding can always discern what is the proper behaviour, even when distinct qualities might draw a person in different directions. This is not to suggest that problems do not exist. Decent people can have horrible things happen to them, and tragic situations might arise where there is no acceptable option.
<i>Virtue ethics acknowledges the significant function that emotions play in leading an ethical life.</i> Virtue ethics acknowledges that people are not cold calculating machines. They are physical beings with emotions, and when everything is going well, their emotions and thinking are aligned. Virtuous people, as previously noted, act morally upright at the appropriate times for the correct causes. They are content when they do good. They are greatly disturbed when confronted with tough choices.

Source: Adapted from Quinn (2017: 93)

A virtue-based lens aids in the discussion and evaluation stages that are necessary to solve ethical problems because of their situational complexity, unique nature, and absence of a single right answer (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022). A virtue-based standpoint asks how moral courage, integrity, or justice may be applied in the situation. A deontological standpoint asks whether a problem is legal, while a consequential standpoint considers the advantages and disadvantages of being vocal if an ethical line is being breached (e.g., whistle blowing and the loss of one's livelihood). Essentially, a person may know the circumstances and be competent to resolve the issue, but does that person possess the moral fortitude to act and the responsibility to deal with the outcome (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022: 173-174)?

Critical insights that can supplement and address critical concerns that a deontological or consequential perspective cannot are offered by a virtue ethics perspective in ethical decision making. In order to assess human behaviour, virtue ethics considers the specifics of the agent in goals, intents, habits and interactions in relation to the context (circumstances, relationships, community, and time) (Ferrero and Sison, 2014). As life is experienced, the role of judgment, also known as practical wisdom, which is essential to the entire decision-making process, changes with time in virtue ethics (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022: 175; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011).

Living a virtuous or a noble life involves reflection on and re-evaluation of what we want to aspire to and "who we are becoming while we are reflecting" (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022: 185).

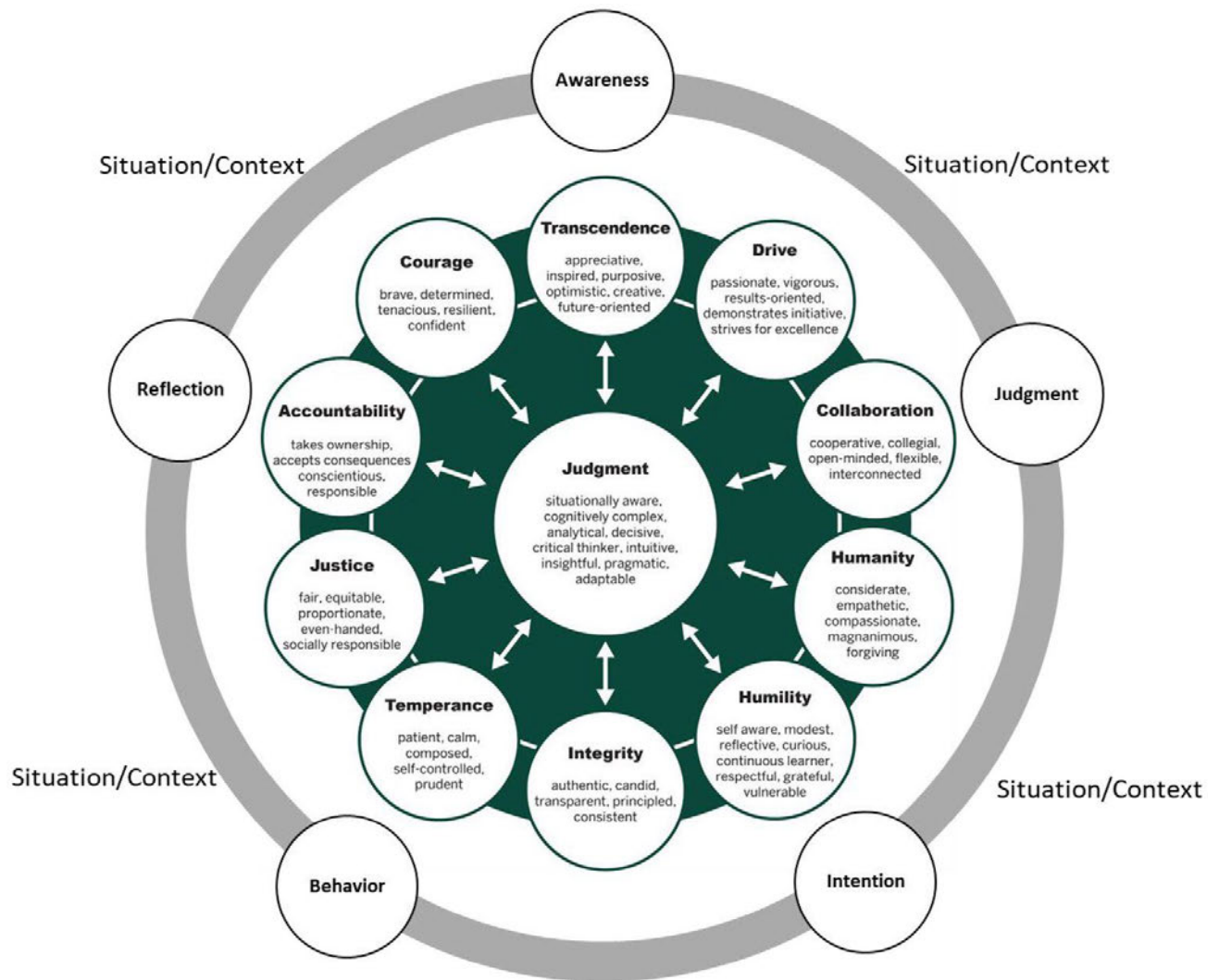


Figure 3.2: Character and Ethical Decision Making. The figure is a combination of Rest's (1984) EDM model and Crossan et al.'s (2017) character model
Source: Nguyen and Crossan (2022: 173)

Figure 3.2 highlights a conceptual overview, suggesting that explanations of ethical decision making should take into consideration the ambiguity and complexity of the larger field of judgment and decision making. The main idea is to show how recasting Rest's processes via a character lens significantly influences Ethical Decision Making (EDM) by adding a reflection stage (as well as a character-infused perspective) to Rest's four phases of EDM (including a reflective period suggested by Crossan et al., (2013 cited in Nguyen and Crossan 2022)). The authors wrap up by discussing the research and practical applications of a 'character-infused approach to EDM' (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022: 173).

The state attained by an individual who leads the proper human life—a result of practicing the virtues—is referred to by virtue theorists as "eudaimonia" (Ross, 1959, as cited in Basalla, 2022: 39). Aristotle placed more emphasis on developing one's character than on attempting to describe goodness or rightness in his discussion of virtue (i.e., virtue ethics) (Ross, 1959, as cited in Basalla, 2022: 39). Establishing virtue gives people a joyful and contented existence (Basalla, 2022: 39). When faced with tough ethical judgments, people are more inclined to take actions that lead to righteousness once they have reached this state of calm rather than run the danger of burdening oneself with the guilt of doing something incorrect. Only after establishing the fundamental elements of the ethics, principles, and convictions of rightness within their code of conduct can people begin this mental, psychological, and emotive path (Basalla, 2022: 39).

When contemplating a virtue-based ethics, one establishes a connection between the moral agent's past (encounters) and current (activity), and future (virtue based direction). Character thereby entails a thorough explanation of reflection and takes into consideration that it is not a one-way linear process but rather a changing tide that flows between intense concentration on a specific type of situation and being severely constrained by high levels of external pressure to respond. To gain an understanding and handle decisions in a progressively complex world entails a reflection of character, built with virtue ethics together with "traditional decision-making frameworks" to explain these dilemmas (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022: 187).

Aristotle's theories inspired scholars like Zagzebski (2004, as cited in Basalla, 2022) to create a theory of ethical reasoning that integrated human needs, instincts, logic, and aim with character, conduct, and personality characteristics. Although options are vague in every circumstance, according to Zagzebski (2004, as cited in Basalla, 2022), an upright individual who exhibits courage, tolerance, respect, devotion, respect for others and oneself, self-control, integrity, and sympathy is more likely to make consistent decisions and act morally than an unthinking individual. Therefore, ethical people are more prone to rely on cherished principles when faced with uncertainties (Zagzebski, 2004, as cited in Basalla, 2022). When a leader has to make judgments, choice is governed by these fundamental virtues. Morality and values will direct them even if they are unaware of the inner workings of their decision-making process. When

leaders make judgments, all of these various aspects of their personalities, moral identities, and ethics are taken into consideration (Basalla, 2022: 42-43).

3.7 Mapping of research to the theoretical frameworks

Mapping the research to theoretical frameworks ensures alignment with the research objectives. This is presented in Table 3.2. Each research objective and key question is aligned to the different theoretical framework employed as well as the usefulness in the different chapters which allows for the enhancement of significant conclusions relating to the current knowledge. *Kant's deontological theory* provides a notable ethical framework for businesses, organisations, and individuals. It offers insight into the moral decision-making procedures necessary for an organisation to operate in a responsible manner. Every action must have a pure intent otherwise it is useless. Kant believed that an activity is moral if it is acceptable to all reasonable persons involved; one must always treat others as their goal rather than only as a means to an end (Benedict, 2020; Quinn, 2017). *A normative theory of business ethics* aims to address the moral conundrums in the corporate environment and the transactions with industrial connections whereas philosophical ethics demonstrates the right course in all areas of life (Ferrell, Fraedrich and Ferrell, 2019). *Rawls justice theory* linked justice with fairness and supported the idea that decisions are made through a veil of ignorance which posits the ethics of justice. A veil of ignorance suggests that in order to maximise benefits for all, decisions are based on a lack of knowledge which promotes impartiality and fairness in decision-making. *Ethics of care theory* centres on how decisions, issues, and circumstances can hurt other people. Consequently, traits of an ethic of care include trust, empathy, and sympathy and compassion (Wood and Hilton, 2012). *Virtue ethics theory* highlights that moral judgments are more complex than just adhering to a set of rules consistently. This is not to say that there is no use for general guidelines. However, there are some circumstances where keeping information private might not be the best option. Moral judgment or insight takes precedence over rules. You can develop the ethical virtue of integrity by always speaking the truth or by performing other honourable actions. Morally upright people consistently follow their convictions; it becomes ingrained in their lives (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022).

In addition, to strengthen the theoretical foundation of this study, the relationships between these ethical paradigms and decision-making practices were empirically validated using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The SEM results, presented in Chapter 5.11, statistically confirm the theoretical assumptions and framework discussed in this chapter.

Table 3.2: Selecting a theoretical framework for ethical decision-making in teaching and learning in higher education

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK SELECTED	USEFULNESS TO THIS RESEARCH
To ascertain the moral decision-making processes for teaching and learning in HE.	Deontological Theory Ethics of Care	Construction of questionnaire/survey instrument and interview schedule Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8
To examine the ethical practices of HE practitioners with specific emphasis on decision-making in teaching and learning.	Deontological Theory Ethics of Care Virtue Theory	Construction of questionnaire/survey instrument and interview schedule Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8
To determine ethical dilemmas faced by educational practitioners pertinent to teaching and learning in Higher Education.	Deontological Theory Ethics of Justice	Construction of questionnaire/survey instrument and interview schedule Chapters 5,6, 7 and 8
To explore the best ethical approaches suited to guide decision-making in teaching and learning in HE.	Normative Theory Justice Theory Ethics of Care	Construction of questionnaire/survey instrument and interview schedule Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8

Source: Authors adaptation 2025

3.8 Chapter summary

This chapter provided a discussion on the different theories consulted with related to the study focus. The theoretical framework engaged with Kant's deontological theory, normative theory, Rawls justice theory, ethics of care theory, and virtue theory. The chapter provided a synopsis of the mapping of the research to the theoretical frameworks which aligns the chosen theory to the relevant research objective and the usefulness to the relevant chapters.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the existing knowledge base on ethical and moral decision making. This chapter provides a description of the research methods and design undertaken for this study. It further elucidates the research approach undertaken, the population and sampling, the data analysis, validity and reliability and ethical considerations. Maree (2020: 57) describes methodology "as the bridge that brings our philosophical standpoint (on ontology and epistemology) and method (perspective and tool) together". The author affirms that it is crucial to understand that the researcher journeys this 'bridge' during the process of research and one's methodology serves as a planned but flexible guide (Maree, 2020: 57).

The general research strategy used to carry out research is the focus of methodology, determining the approaches to be employed and aligned with the research plan. Clarity on the data collection methods is provided by the methods that are included and explained in the methodology. Methodology does not prescribe a particular approach to be taken; rather, it directs attention to the essence of the strategy used to accomplish the research's goal. Furthermore, methodology is not about the tools or ways of doing things; rather, it is about the design process for conducting research (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020: 40). The authors state that understanding the fundamental ontological and epistemological presuppositions is crucial for researchers, as is comprehending how these presumptions influence the methodology and techniques they choose, and how they relate to important research findings (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020: 40).

4.2 Research paradigm

A researcher's beliefs about the world they live in and desire to live in are reflected in their research paradigm. It is made up of the abstract ideas and precepts that influence a researcher's worldview, interpretation and behaviour (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017).

A paradigm is an array of presumptions of important facets of reality which forms a specific belief system and looks at vital beliefs acquired on faith, views on the "nature

of reality (ontology), the relationship between the knower and known (epistemology)" and the presumptions about method (Maree, 2020: 58).

According to Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014: 19) it is crucial to realise that by adhering to a certain paradigm or research tradition, researchers take a certain approach to examining phenomena that are pertinent to their discipline. Understanding the paradigm or tradition you adhere to as a researcher is crucial because it establishes what inquiries are deemed acceptable to be looked into and what procedures to be followed in order for the answers to these inquiries to be deemed acceptable (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014: 19).

Lincoln and Guba (1985: 15, as cited in Maree, 2020: 58) define paradigms in the following terms: Paradigms represent what we think about the world (but cannot be proven). Our actions in the world, including the actions we take as inquirers, cannot occur without reference to those paradigms: "As we think, so do we act". Kivunja and Kuyini (2017: 26) state that "paradigms are thus important because they provide beliefs and dictates, which, for scholars in a particular discipline, influence what should be studied, how it should be studied, and how the results of the study should be interpreted".

4.2.1 Pragmatic research

Research that uses both qualitative and quantitative techniques to try to solve particular issues is known as pragmatic research (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014). The perspective of pragmatic research sets it apart from other kinds of study. It chooses particular approaches in a complimentary manner to find answers and solutions to problems rather than merely using both qualitative and quantitative methods. It departs from the presumption that precise representations of objective reality are possible. In other words, because people always observe from a specific point of view and because everyone has a different perspective on the world, empirical observation by itself cannot represent objective truth (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014: 79).

Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014: 79) further state that regardless of philosophical inclination, pragmatic researchers are more inclined to encourage interaction among researchers. Pragmatic researchers are more equipped to employ

qualitative research to inform the quantitative section of research projects and vice versa if they have a favourable attitude towards both approaches. The focus of pragmatic research is on the investigation process itself which encompasses several observational methods.

According to Rajkoomar (2015), a pragmatic perspective is one that emerges from events, circumstances, and outcomes. No particular philosophical or realistic framework is embraced by pragmatics. Emphasising the research problem and using methods to comprehend it are the main focuses of pragmatism. The pragmatist focuses on the research problem's 'what' and 'how'. Creswell (2013: 11) asserts that pragmatism allows for multiple approaches, diverse worldviews, diverse presumptions, and diverse means of data collection and analysis.

The pragmatic paradigm was developed by philosophers who contended that neither the positivist paradigm's single scientific method nor the interpretivist paradigm's construction of social reality could provide access to the 'truth' about the real world (Ikram and Kenayathullal, 2022). There is no one worldview or reality system that pragmatics is devoted to. This concept is relevant to mixed methods research since researchers use a wide range of quantitative and qualitative presumptions in their work (Creswell and Creswell, 2023: 12).

4.2.2 Positivism

The theoretical position of scientists who work with 'observable reality' in society and produce generalisations is the foundation of positivism. In general, positivism emphasises the value of what is provided, with a more rigorous focus on taking into account just facts and data that are unaffected by human interpretation or bias (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020: 41). Positivism holds that reality is singular, concrete, and fragmented, and that social truths have an objective existence. Positivism is a suitable paradigm for quantitative research (Ikram and Kenayathullal 2022; Wijesinghe 2011).

4.2.3 Interpretivism

Criticism of positivism from a subjective point of view led to the development of interpretivism. Interpretivism is more focused on context-related variables and elements, and it views humans as distinct from physical phenomena because they

generate deeper meanings based on the premise that humans cannot be studied in the same way as scientific phenomena. Different social realities have developed over time, and interpretivism takes into account these variances as well as cultural and contextual factors. Instead of trying to establish clear, universal laws that can be applied to everyone, independent of certain important characteristics and aspects, interpretivism seeks to incorporate richness in the insights acquired (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020: 41).

Interpretivism's primary goal is to create meaning by knowing the outside world and human nature. Interpretivism's subjective ontological premise is that there are various realities and interpretations; relativism, on the other hand, holds that there are only local and particular created realities (Ikram and Kenayathullal, 2022). Bailey (2007: 53) asserts that the interpretative paradigm focuses on "meanings, symbols, beliefs, ideas", and emotions that individuals in the environment ascribe to various things, happenings, behaviours, and others.

For this study, a pragmatic approach was used together with the epistemological stances of positivism and interpretivism.

4.3 Research design

A research design describes the process of participant selection, data gathering and data analysis (Maree, 2016; Creswell, 2009: 3).

A mixed method approach using explanatory sequential design was undertaken for this study. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered regarding the ethical decision-making practices in HE and the influences these have on teaching and learning. Researchers that embark on the qualitative paradigm are keen on how individuals adapt to their surroundings and how they understand their settings through images, rites, social relationships and social norms and beliefs (Maree, 2016, 62). Using a mixed method approach helps the researcher understand the inconsistencies in the qualitative and quantitative findings.

4.4 Mixed method approach

The mixed method approach of this study will include questionnaires and interviews. A mix method approach was necessary for this research as it provided a more

comprehensive perspective on the problem being investigated. It added credibility and minimised bias. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018, cited in Maree, 2020: 331) define mixed method research "as a procedure for collecting, analysing and combining (or 'mixing') both quantitative or qualitative data within a single study or a series of studies to understand a research problem completely".

In a mixed method approach the researcher builds on knowledge regarding real-life concerns formed on the philosophy of pragmatism that emphasises the importance of acquiring answers to key questions than on approaches employed (Maree, 2020: 330). According to Creswell (2009: 18) a mixed method approach is beneficial when the quantitative or qualitative design alone is not sufficient to best fathom the research issue and the strong points of quantitative and qualitative research will assist in understanding the phenomena better.

Maree (2020: 334) identifies three core designs within the mixed method approach that differ in terms of the intent and sequence of the methods: convergent, explanatory sequential, and exploratory sequential. This study used an explanatory sequential design as it was the more appropriate approach for the design of this study (Figure 4.1).

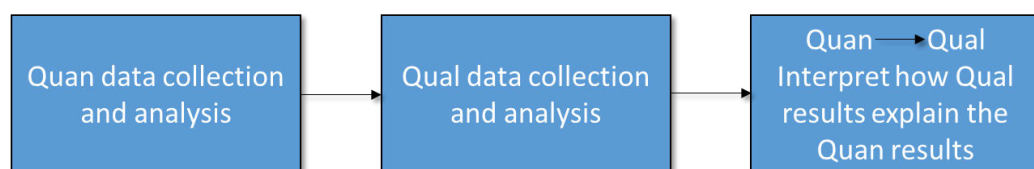


Figure 4.1: Explanatory sequential mixed methods design

Source: (Maree, 2020: 336).

In an explanatory sequential design the data is collected in two separate phases, the first phase being the gathering and analysis of the quantitative data. Thereafter, the quantitative results are used to plan a defined sampling approach or plan. The researcher then gathers and analyses the qualitative data (Maree, 2020: 338). The aim of this approach is to use qualitative findings to assist in clarifying and understanding pertinent quantitative outcomes.

4.5 A case study approach

A case study is a deep and a thorough account of a social occurrence that is present every day in a real-life setting. It further describes a real-world setting where the phenomenon happens (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014: 178-179). It is thus evident that a case is generally a bounded entity (a person, organisation, behavioural condition, event, or other social phenomenon) (Maree, 2020: 89). As stated by Henning, Gravett and van Rensburg (2010: 16), "we often express concerns about issues in our working lives and/or our professional practice, or we want to explore ideas about what we do in a more systematic way".

A case study approach was undertaken for this study as the issue being studied was a phenomenon experienced at DUT but may also be experienced at other HE institutions. The study looked at ethical practices and decisions made by various HE stakeholders that affect teaching and learning which is one of the core functions of HE.

4.6 The target population

Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014: 132) define a population as "the total group of people or entities [social artefacts] from whom information is required", while Sekaran and Bougie (2013: 262) describe a population as "the entire group of people, events, or things of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate". The target population for this study was all the academic staff from the six faculties of DUT.

These individuals play a major role in the teaching and learning environment and have relevant thoughts, experiences, dilemmas and concerns on ethics and ethical decision-making practices related to teaching and learning. This population was a rich source of data for the answering of the research questions and meeting the objectives of the study.

4.7 Sampling

A subset of the population is called a sample. It consists of a few chosen members. That is, a portion of the population from the sample is selected not all (Bougie and Sekaran, 2020: 223).

4.7.1 Sampling in quantitative approach

A simple random sampling method was used to gather data from all the academic staff from the institution. According to du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014: 133), simple random sampling means that every element of the population has an equal opportunity of being chosen to be part of the sample.

A record of all the people or objects in a specific population are required in order to develop a representative sample for a quantitative study (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014: 135). The total number of academic staff at DUT at the time of the study was 650. Sekaran and Bougie (2013) state that if the population is 650, a sample size of 242 is acceptable. Microsoft Excel software was used to create a table of all academic staff from the institution who were then randomly selected until the sample size for the study was attained.

4.7.2 Sampling in qualitative approach

A non-probability sampling (purposive sampling) method was employed to gather data from executive deans and deputy deans, academic Heads, CQPA and CELT personnel. The participants that were selected for this study based on their knowledge of the institutional policies, curriculum design and teaching and learning decisions. Purposive sampling relies on the researcher's judgement regarding suitability of participants (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014: 137). The sample selected for the qualitative phase of the study comprised three executive deans, three deputy deans, three academic heads from each faculty, four CQPA personnel and six CELT personnel. The total number for the sampling frame was 34. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) concurs that individuals chosen had in-depth knowledge about the phenomena under investigation by virtue of their professional role, power, access to networks, expertise and experience.

4.8 Measuring instrument

As a mixed method approach this study included a questionnaire (Appendix D) and interviews (Appendix E and Appendix F). "Instruments are the devices for collecting measures of variables" (Creswell and Creswell, 2023: 164).

4.8.1 Questionnaires

The questionnaire comprised open ended and closed questions (Appendix D).

Data was gathered online using MS forms. The questionnaire was emailed to academic staff and included a letter of information and consent form (Appendix B), and the permission letter to conduct research at DUT (Appendix A). The questionnaire included a cover page outlining the context of the study, the purpose of the questionnaire and further information on how the results of questionnaire would be used.

The questionnaire included a brief introduction informing the respondents why their views and perceptions were important for the study and that their responses would not be identified as their personal views. The questionnaire was further broken down into two sections as detailed below.

Section A: Demographic data (closed questions) regarding:

- Gender
- Age
- Faculty employed
- Years of service
- Designation
- Highest qualification

Section B: Likert rating scale statements and one open-ended question regarding respondents' views and perceptions on ethical decision-making processes that impact teaching and learning. The topics covered were:

- Moral decision making (8 questions)
- Ethical decision-making approaches (7 questions)
- Ethical culture (8 questions)
- General (4 questions)
- Respondents comments, believed to be important for the study (1 open question)

4.8.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with deans, deputy deans, heads of departments and personnel from CELT and CQPA. This group of participants play a critical role in teaching and learning and have a close interaction with senior management in their decision making in teaching and learning. Some of the questions included in the interview schedule emanated from the data analysis of the quantitative research (the questionnaire).

Participants to be interviewed were contacted telephonically or emailed to explain the purpose of the interview. Staff members had the option to be interviewed on MS Teams or face-to-face. The majority of the interviews were conducted on Teams. Date, time and place (for contact meetings) were at the convenience of the participants.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) state that although an interview is controlled it allows room for spontaneity and the interviewer is able to gather complete answers from the interviewee but can also probe for responses relating to complicated and difficult issues. Open-ended questions provide the following advantages:

- Flexibility as the interviewer is able delve into issues and clear up uncertainty or ambiguity
- Able to factor in respondents knowledge on the topic to be queried
- Allows interviewer to analyse what the respondent believes
- Open up unexpected answers or "unthought-of relationships or hypotheses" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007: 357).

The researcher enjoyed a vibrant and thought-provoking discussion with the participants. They were able to share their views, perceptions and experiences on the issues of ethical moral decision making. It was heart-warming and gratifying to sense the enthusiasm and passion the respondents displayed when sharing or discussing the issues relating to the study. Their sincere and genuine interest to my study made this study worthwhile and was a motivation for the researcher to complete the thesis. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007: 349), during interviews the interviewer and interviewees are able to talk through or talk about their understanding "of their world in which they live" and give their views in their positions or surroundings.

In this regard an interview is not only about gathering data points on life but also about getting a sense of the interviewees lived experiences.

The researcher notes that in some instances interviewees were so engrossed or passionate about answering the questions that they introduced material unilaterally related to questions that were set to be asked later. Bailey (2007) confirms the above scenario by stating that interviewees often answer a question before being asked by the interviewee. If so, the subsequent question is therefore skipped. "The flow of the interview rather than the order in the guide, determines when and how a question is asked. Depending on how the interview progresses a question previously planned for later in the interview might be asked earlier" (Bailey, 2007: 100). With the approval of the respondents, their responses to the questions were recorded. This ensured accuracy of information. It also allowed the researcher to concentrate on the answers provided by the respondents and gave the researcher the opportunity to be part of the dialogue.

4.9 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to analyse quantitative data. "Descriptive statistics is a collective name for a number of statistical methods that are used to organise and summarise data in a meaningful way" (Maree, 2020: 226). The data were analysed using SPSS version 29.0, employing both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques.

In addition to descriptive statistics, structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied to validate the relationships between the latent variables derived from the questionnaire data. This statistical technique allowed for a deeper understanding of how theoretical constructs interact and influence ethical decision-making practices in teaching and learning. The full SEM analysis is presented in Section 5.11.

For the qualitative data, content analysis was employed. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013: 385) content analysis "enables the researcher to analyse large amounts of textual information and systematically identify its properties, such as the presence of certain words, concepts, characters, themes, or sentences".

Questions were initially looked at individually and then grouped together based on the related answers of respondents eventually leading to the identification of common themes.

4.10 Validity, reliability and trustworthiness

The results of any research study must be believable, and the reader must trust that if another researcher conducts the same study, the findings will be comparable (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014).

4.10.1 Reliability in quantitative research

An instrument's reliability is based on the fact that the results would be the same if the same instrument was used at different periods or given to different respondents from the same population, i.e., the degree of repeatability and consistency of a measurement device is its reliability (Maree, 2020: 260). As stated by du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014: 254), "reliability refers to the fact that different research participants being tested by the same instrument at different times should respond identically to the instrument". Microsoft forms were used to structure the questionnaire, and were distributed via email to academic staff who were required to log on to the link provided to access the online questionnaire. Participants were able to complete the questionnaire at their convenience and their own safe space and they were aware that the study was voluntary. The Cronbach's alpha test was used to confirm reliability.

4.10.2 Validity in quantitative research

An instrument's validity is determined by the degree to which the chosen instrument accurately measures the things it is intended to measure (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014; Maree, 2020). If any part of the study is inaccurate then it is of no value. In qualitative data, validity may be answered by truthfulness, depth, intensity and nature of the data gathered, the participants approached, the degree of the triangulation and the researcher's disinterest or objectivity (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007: 133). Validity was ensured by pre-testing the instruments for this study.

A good question to ask in order to determine the validity of research is "do the findings reflect what is happening in the given situation?" (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014: 256). The content validity was ascertained by the alignment of the research objectives with the structure of the questionnaire. The validity of the instrument was determined by the pre-testing of the instrument with a small group of participants. It can be deduced that if the questions were administered at another time the results would be similar. Factor analysis was used to confirm validity.

4.10.3 Trustworthiness in qualitative research

Qualitative researchers employ various criteria to assess the credibility or dependability of research findings because they do not rely on numerical data as evidence. The goal of qualitative research is to advance knowledge of a specific phenomenon in a given setting, not to extrapolate findings to a larger population. Because participant responses are specific to each person's experience, it is impossible to repeat a qualitative study and have the same results (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014: 258). Therefore, it can be concluded that the interviewees' responses for this study represent individual, distinctive narratives of their experiences related to the study's focus.

4.11 Pre-testing

A pre-test is a small study conducted before the main research study (Brink, van der Walt and van Rensburg, 2012: 174). A pilot test helps to rule out any misunderstanding relating to the instrument being administered. A pilot study was conducted on a small group of participants from the population to put to the test the practical aspects and criteria of the study. These participants were not part of the main study. "No matter how carefully researchers design a data-collection instrument such as a questionnaire, there is always the possibility-indeed the certainty-of error. They will always make some mistake: an ambiguous question, question that people cannot answer, or some other violation of the rules discussed" (Babbie, 2020: 260).

The pre-test involved five DUT academic staff. They were informed of the purpose of the pilot study which was to provide feedback and clarity as to whether the questions were clear and unambiguous, to pinpoint any questions that were offensive and

provoking, notice any duplication or repetition of questions and highlight any questions that required further clarity and to assist in checking for grammar and spelling.

It was pleasing to note that some general comments received were that the questionnaire was well thought out, and that the issues in the questionnaire were important to staff with all the changes taking place. Overall the respondents felt that the questions were clear and unambiguous with just a few comments as noted below.

- Merge headings and use a bold font.
- Question 8.2 reads "*academic management ensures that students of DUT are equipped with the necessary computer technology and data to be part of the online platform*". Suggestion from a participant to separate this question as she believed that the institution did ensure that students received data, however there had been various queries about devices that some students did not obtain. The governmental body, NSFAS, who has a mandate to subsidise academic fees for students from lower income households, was tasked to procure and disburse laptops but this did not happen.
- Suggestion was also noted in the introduction section of the questionnaire to change the executive dean, deputy dean, head of department to initial caps.
- Question 9 (open ended question) suggestion to include more lines/rows.

The participants in the pilot study were not part of the main study (Table 4.2).

Table 4.1: Distribution of and response rate of the pilot study

Respondent	Questionnaire distributed	Questionnaire returned	Time taken to complete questionnaire (minutes)
Participant 1	1	100%	9
Participant 2	1	100%	7
Participant 3	1	100%	8
Participant 4	1	100%	10
Participant 5	1	100%	7
Total	5		

4.12 Ethical considerations

As per DUT stipulations and requirements, information letters and consent forms were emailed to the participants before they participated in the research study. The consent form informed the respondents that they would remain anonymous and the information

gathered would be held in strict confidence. The participants were also made aware that they had a right to withdraw from the studies at any time without any consequences to them. Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014: 291) state that "informed consent should also be sought, it is important to assure your reader that participation in your study will under no circumstances be under duress and that all participation will be on a voluntary basis only".

The respondents must be aware that they are part of the research study and must give their consent. They need to know the role they play in study, and that their names will not be divulged and understand how the final results will be used. This must be part of a written document and participants must sign giving their consent (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2014: 264).

4.13 Summary of chapter

This chapter provided an overview of research paradigms employed, namely, the pragmatic, positivist and interpretivist approaches. It also included narratives of the research design, incorporating the different research approaches and instruments used. It further provided a brief discussion on population and sampling and the processes involved in the analysis of the data. A brief account of the pre-testing was presented. Issues related to validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the research study were discussed and ethical considerations that protect the participants of this study were presented.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS, INTERPRETATION OF THE QUANTITATIVE DATA

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 provided a detailed description of the research design and research methods undertaken for this study. This chapter presents the results and discusses the findings derived from the statistical analysis of the questionnaire responses. The primary aim of the study was to explore the ethical decision-making practices and perceptions of academic practitioners across the six faculties. The questionnaire served as one of the tools for data collection, targeting respondents across various roles such as senior lecturers, lecturers, and junior lecturers.

The data were analysed using SPSS version 29.0, employing both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise and visualise the data, including frequency distributions, measures of central tendency (means), standard deviations, and cross-tabulations. Inferential statistics provided deeper insights, with techniques such as chi-square tests for associations between categorical variables, binomial tests for dichotomous outcomes, and Kruskal-Wallis tests for comparing group medians. Reliability of the survey items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and factor analysis identified underlying dimensions within the dataset. Correlation analysis was employed to measure relationships between key variables, with significance interpreted at the conventional threshold of $p < 0.05$.

5.2 The sample

In total, 234 questionnaires were distributed, and 156 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 67%. This level of response provides a robust dataset for analysis, ensuring representation across the target group of academic practitioners.

5.3 The research instrument

The research instrument consisted of 42 items with a level of measurement at a nominal or an ordinal level. The questionnaire was divided into 6 sections which measured various themes as illustrated in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Sections of the questionnaire themes

A	Biographical data
B	Ethical Decision-Making Processes
C	Online Learning and Technology Integration
D	Consistency and Ethical Standards
E	Performance Evaluations and Prioritisation
F	Institutional Ethical Culture and Values

5.4 Factor analysis

Factor analysis is a statistical method used to uncover underlying structures or dimensions within a dataset, particularly when working with survey data containing multiple related variables. According to Bougie and Sekaran (2020: 210) "Factor analysis [is] a multivariate technique that confirms the dimensions of the concept that have been operationally defined, as well as indicating which of the items are most appropriate for each dimension (establishing construct validity)". In this study, factor analysis was employed to identify the key constructs underpinning ethical decision-making practices among academic practitioners. By grouping related questionnaire items, this technique helps to simplify complex data and provides insights into latent factors influencing respondents' perceptions and behaviours.

The analysis was conducted on survey items measuring ethical decision-making, organisational culture, and related constructs. This process involved examining correlations between variables to determine patterns and extracting factors based on eigenvalues and loadings. The findings of the factor analysis contribute to a deeper understanding of the dimensions shaping ethical practices within the institution, addressing key research objectives.

Factor analysis was used to determine the structure of sections based on factor loadings.

Bartlett's test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy test (KMO) are widely used in the literature to determine the strength of relationships and evaluate the factorability of variables (Sürücü, Maslakçı and Yikilmaz, 2024: 952). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) is a statistic that indicates the proportion of variance in the variables that might be caused by underlying factors.

According to Sürücü, Maslakçi and Yikilmaz (2024: 953) the KMO is a measure of shared variance in items. If the KMO value, which ranges between 1 and 0, is 0.6 and above, this indicates a sufficient value for factor analysis. High values (close to 1.0) generally indicate that a factor analysis may be useful with the data. If the value is less than 0.50, the results of the factor analysis probably will not be very useful (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Interpretation guidelines for the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test

KMO Value	Degree of Common Variance
0.90 to 1.00	Marvelous
0.80 to 0.89	Meritorious
0.70 to 0.79	Middling
0.60 to 0.69	Mediocre
0.50 to 0.59	Miserable
0.00 to 0.49	Unacceptable (No factor)

Source: Sürücü, Maslakçi and Yikilmaz (2024: 953)

Bartlett's test of sphericity tests the hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which would indicate that the variables are unrelated and therefore unsuitable for structure detection. Small values (less than 0.05) of the significance level indicate that a factor analysis may be useful with the data. (<https://www.ibm.com/docs/de/spss-statistics/24.0.0?topic=detection-kmo-bartletts-test>)

Table 5.3 reflects the results of the KMO and Bartlett's tests which indicate the suitability of data for structure detection.

Factor analysis was conducted only for the Likert scale items. Certain components divide into finer components. This is explained below in the rotated component matrix (Table 5.4).

Table 5.3: KMO and Bartlett's tests

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.784
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1813.441
	Df	561
	Sig.	< 0.001

The suitability of the data for factor analysis was evaluated using the KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity. These tests assess whether the dataset meets the necessary conditions for factor analysis.

- Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy:
 - The KMO value for this dataset is 0.784, which exceeds the minimum threshold of 0.500, indicating that the data is suitable for factor analysis. A value closer to 1 suggests strong sampling adequacy, with the variables exhibiting sufficient correlations to justify factor analysis.
- Bartlett's test of sphericity:
 - The test produced an approximate chi-square value of 1813.441 with 561 degrees of freedom and a significance level (Sig.) of < 0.001. This result confirms that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix, fulfilling another critical condition for factor analysis.

These results confirm that the dataset meets the assumptions required for factor analysis. Therefore, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify the latent dimensions within the variables.

Factor analysis was conducted only for the Likert scale items. Certain components divide into finer components. This is explained in the rotated component matrix (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Rotated component matrix

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	
Processes and procedures involved in making ethical and moral decisions are considered before implementing a final decision	0.725	0.029	0.075	0.125	-0.083	B1
Decisions taken serve the interests of the students and staff	0.706	0.218	-0.053	-0.002	0.113	B2
The necessary skills and understanding relating to the ethical concerns of staff and students are in place	0.639	0.261	-0.181	0.015	0.260	B3
The consequences of decisions, including their impact on the university, are taken into consideration by academic management prior to effecting a decision	0.605	0.325	-0.049	0.007	0.026	B4
Academic management are equipped with the knowledge and skills to make decisions that are aligned with teaching and learning and the institution's goals	0.596	0.515	-0.018	0.021	-0.054	B5
Different cultural groups are considered when making ethical decisions	0.586	0.101	-0.066	0.095	-0.104	B6
Ethical conduct is clearly visible in all our actions and decisions	0.570	0.266	-0.045	0.032	-0.328	B7
The budget is utilised for the faculty and the students	0.527	0.138	-0.223	-0.008	-0.333	B8
DUT has a strong culture that supports ethical standards	0.517	0.550	0.063	-0.111	-0.158	B9
The quality of education is closely linked to ethical decision making in teaching and learning	0.482	-0.158	0.402	0.067	0.101	B10
Decision making regarding teaching and learning emanates from a moral thought	0.426	-0.032	0.334	0.042	-0.148	B11
The institution focuses on students achieving high marks and passing rather than on the holistic development of the student	0.355	0.294	0.126	-0.203	-0.229	B12
Academic management ensures that students are equipped with the necessary skills required in using the online platforms	0.168	0.788	-0.047	0.160	-0.060	C1

DUT has taken into consideration the challenges students experience with learning remotely and online teaching	0.263	0.733	0.024	0.141	0.122	C2
Academic management ensure that students of DUT are equipped with the necessary computer technology to be part of the online learning platform	0.076	0.638	-0.062	0.277	-0.173	C3
Academic practitioners ensure that the online learning platforms are working for all students	0.010	0.621	0.101	0.161	-0.153	C4
A culture of ethical teaching and learning exists at DUT	0.381	0.599	0.109	-0.141	-0.053	C5
Ethical values in relation to teaching and learning are not only advocated and talked about, but are also lived by all members of DUT	0.458	0.537	0.020	-0.168	0.109	C6
Staff members are satisfied that ethical concerns can be discussed without fear of reprisal	0.462	0.523	0.043	-0.197	-0.091	C7
The institution provides workshops for staff on ethical practices	0.127	0.469	0.157	-0.222	0.323	C8
Decisions taken by academic management are not consistent with all teaching staff	0.231	0.377	-0.152	-0.256	-0.285	C9
The absence of a strong ethical culture at the university has a major impact on teaching and learning	0.029	0.054	0.674	0.132	-0.153	D1
One of the reasons for the ethical breakdown in the institution arises from the organizational culture failing to encourage ethical practices and behaviour	-0.083	0.038	0.593	0.108	-0.057	D2
Decisions and practices relating to teaching and learning have a major influence in the learning environment	-0.026	0.006	0.563	0.101	0.058	D3
If decisions are made with the absence of ethical thought a tertiary institution will go through a phase of moral decay	0.039	-0.038	0.487	-0.201	0.176	D4
Academic management cannot make moral decisions if they themselves do not have moral values	-0.021	0.106	0.425	-0.146	0.084	D5
When faculty concerns are discussed in a safe environment, the staff are more happy to provide solutions	-0.071	0.328	0.335	-0.291	-0.257	D6
A low rated performance evaluation is given to staff members that line managers are negatively inclined towards	-0.186	-0.244	0.199	0.647	-0.010	E1
A high rated performance evaluation is given to staff members that line managers are positively disposed towards	0.014	0.080	0.108	0.624	0.078	E2
In view of the fact that Covid-19 has impacted on students learning, thorough research has been undertaken before arriving at the best decisions that can support students during this crisis	0.241	0.257	-0.264	0.477	0.036	E3
What is good for others rather than him/herself is given top priority	0.171	0.148	-0.069	0.476	0.028	E4
There is a lack of consistency in decisions taken for different staff members	0.057	-0.132	-0.004	-0.039	0.591	F1
The institutions core focus is business driven concentrating on financial growth instead of providing quality education	-0.287	-0.312	-0.092	0.169	0.558	F2
Decisions made arise from self-invested interest	-0.142	0.247	0.108	0.148	0.467	F3

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 9 iterations.

Factor analysis is a statistical technique whose main goal is data reduction. A typical use of factor analysis is in survey research, where a researcher wishes to represent a number of questions with a small number of hypothetical factors.

Table 5.4 shows that the principal component analysis was used as the extraction method, and the rotation method was Varimax with Kaiser normalisation. This is an orthogonal rotation method that minimises the number of variables that have high loadings on each factor. It simplifies the interpretation of the factors.

Factor analysis/loading show inter-correlations between variables.

Items of questions that loaded similarly imply measurement along a similar factor. An examination of the content of items loading using the higher or highest loading in

instances where items cross-loaded effectively measured along the various components.

The components can be identified by the following names assigned to them:

Ethical Decision-Making Processes (component 1 = B): Includes items reflecting ethical considerations, moral alignment, and procedures in decision-making (e.g., processes and procedures, decisions taken serve the interests of students and staff, consequences of decisions).

Online Learning and Technology Integration (component 2 = C): Focuses on the use of online platforms and addressing challenges in remote learning (e.g., DUT's consideration of challenges in online teaching, providing necessary skills and technology for online platforms).

Consistency and Ethical Standards (component 3 = D): Emphasises maintaining consistency in decisions and ethical standards (e.g., lack of consistency in decisions, ethical culture's impact, and staff satisfaction with ethical practices).

Performance Evaluations and Prioritisation (component 4 = E): Pertains to evaluation criteria, self-interest, and prioritisation of others in decision-making (e.g., high/low rated performance evaluations, prioritising others over self, impact of Covid-19).

Institutional Ethical Culture and Values (component 5 = F): Relates to the broader ethical culture and institutional focus on quality education versus financial growth (e.g., ethical culture's impact, workshops on ethical practices, business-driven focus).

5.5 Reliability statistics

Reliability analysis is a critical step in validating the consistency and dependability of a survey instrument. In this study, reliability statistics were calculated to evaluate the internal consistency of the questionnaire items, particularly those designed to measure ethical decision-making practices and related constructs.

The primary measure used in this analysis was Cronbach's alpha, which assesses how closely related a set of items are as a group. A Cronbach's alpha value ranges between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating greater reliability. Commonly, a value of 0.7 or higher is considered acceptable for research purposes, though slightly lower

values (0.6) may be acceptable for exploratory studies. According to Bougie and Sekaran (2020: 212) "the most popular test of interitem consistency reliability is Cronbach's coefficient alpha, which is used for multipoint-scaled items, and the Kuder-Richardson formulas, used for dichotomous items. The higher the coefficients, the better the measuring instrument".

This analysis ensures that the survey items consistently measure the intended constructs and provides confidence in the validity of the subsequent findings. By confirming the reliability of the data, the study establishes a solid foundation for more complex statistical analyses, such as factor analysis and inferential statistics.

Table 5.5 reflects the Cronbach's alpha score for all the items that constituted the questionnaire.

Table 5.5: Cronbach's alpha score

	Section	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
B	Ethical Decision-Making Processes	12	0.784
C	Online Learning and Technology Integration	9	0.754
D	Consistency and Ethical Standards	6	0.572
E	Performance Evaluations and Prioritisation	2	0.635
F	Institutional Ethical Culture and Values	3	0.341
All items included		32	0.768

Interpretation

1. Strong reliability:

- Ethical Decision-Making Processes ($\alpha = 0.784$) and online learning and technology integration ($\alpha = 0.754$) demonstrate strong internal consistency, exceeding the generally accepted threshold of 0.7. This indicates that the items within these sections are well-aligned and reliably measure their respective constructs.

2. Moderate reliability:

- Performance Evaluations and Prioritisation ($\alpha = 0.635$) has a moderately acceptable Cronbach's alpha. While slightly below the standard threshold of 0.7, this is considered acceptable for exploratory research and reflects some degree of consistency among the items.

3. Low reliability:

- Consistency and Ethical Standards ($\alpha = 0.572$) and Institutional Ethical Culture and Values ($\alpha = 0.341$) exhibit low reliability. The values suggest limited internal consistency within these sections, indicating that the items may not be adequately aligned to measure the intended constructs. This may require revisiting these items in future studies to improve their coherence and reliability.

4. Overall reliability:

- When all items are combined, the overall Cronbach's alpha is 0.768, reflecting acceptable internal consistency for the questionnaire as a whole. This suggests that while certain sections require improvement, the overall survey instrument is sufficiently reliable for further analysis.

The reliability analysis demonstrates that most sections of the questionnaire meet acceptable levels of internal consistency, supporting their validity in measuring the intended constructs. However, the low reliability in certain sections highlights areas for refinement in future research. This analysis establishes confidence in the results for sections with high reliability, while findings from less reliable sections should be interpreted with caution.

5.6 Section A: Biographical data

This section presents the biographical data of the respondents, providing a demographic profile that contextualises the study. The biographical information collected includes variables such as gender, age, faculty, years of service, designation, and highest qualification. This data is essential for understanding the characteristics of the participants and identifying patterns or trends in responses across different demographic groups.

The analysis of biographical data not only provides insights into the diversity of the sample but also facilitates comparisons between subgroups. Such comparisons can reveal potential differences in perceptions or practices related to ethical decision-making and other constructs measured in the study. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, are used to summarise this information, ensuring a clear and comprehensive presentation of the respondents' demographic attributes.

5.6.1 Gender distribution

Table 5.6 describes the overall gender distribution.

Table 5.6: Gender distribution

	Frequency	Percent
Female	80	51.3
Male	76	48.7
Total	156	100.0

Overall, the ratio of males to females is approximately 1:1, with females comprising 51.3% of the respondents and males accounting for 48.7%. This near-equal distribution ($p = 0.749$) ensures balanced representation of gender in the study, allowing for meaningful comparisons and insights into gender-related trends in ethical decision-making and other constructs explored.

5.6.2 Age

Figure 5.1 describes the age distribution of the respondents.

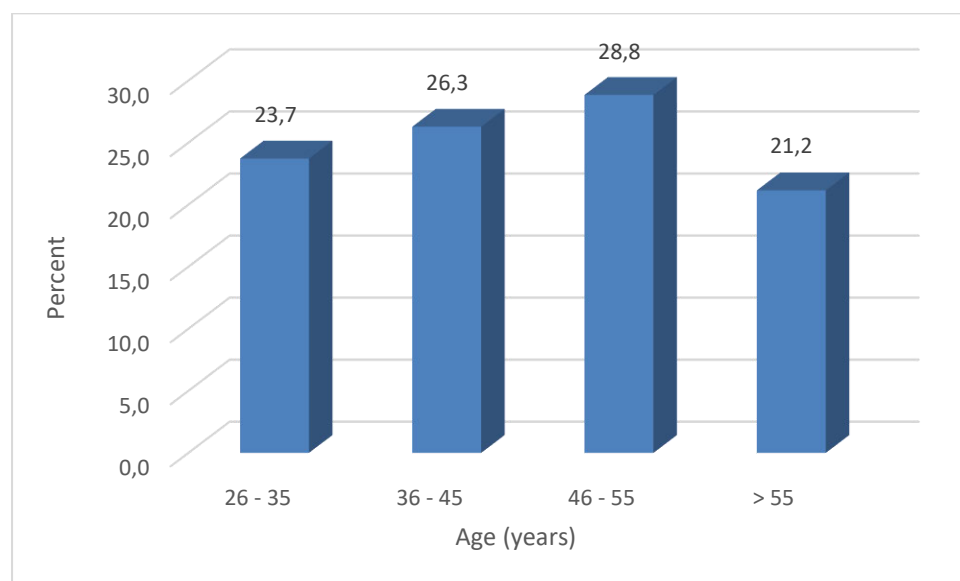


Figure 5.1: Age

The majority of respondents fall within the 36 to 55 years age range, representing a combined 55.1% of the sample. The largest single age group is 46 to 55 years (28.8%, $n = 45$), followed closely by 36 to 45 years (26.3%, $n = 41$). The younger age group (26 to 35 years) accounts for 23.7% ($n = 37$) of the participants, while the smallest proportion (21.2%) comprises respondents aged over 55 ($n = 33$).

This distribution suggests a predominantly middle-aged sample, which is likely reflective of the professional demographic engaged in ethical decision-making processes within the institution. The balanced representation of age groups ($p = 0.562$) provides a basis for analysing trends and differences in responses across varying levels of professional experience and maturity.

5.6.3 Faculties of employment

Figure 5.2 indicates the faculties that respondents belonged to.

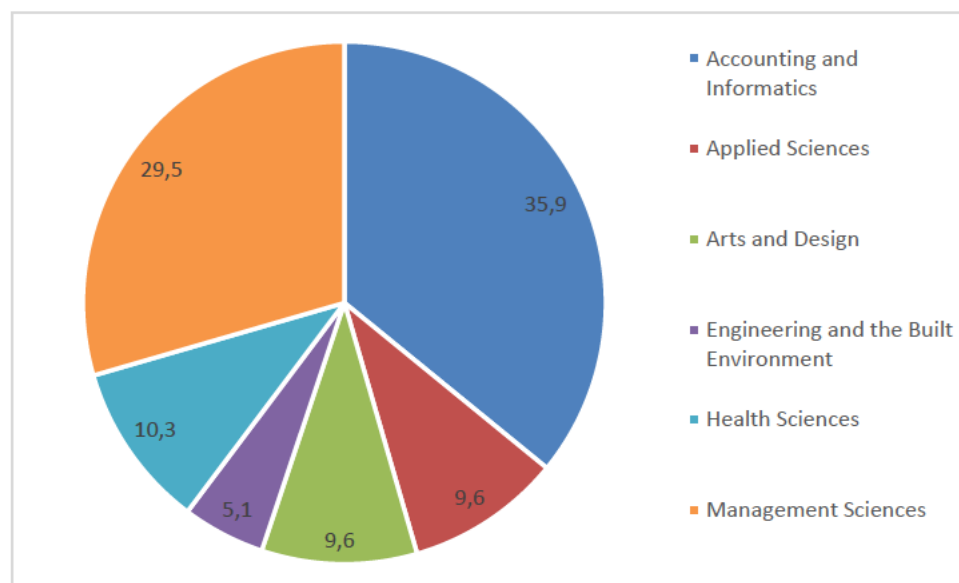


Figure 5.2: Faculties of employment

The largest proportion of respondents belong to the Faculty of Accounting and Informatics (35.9%, $n = 56$), followed by the Faculty of Management Sciences (29.5%, $n = 46$). Other faculties, including Applied Sciences (9.6%, $n = 15$), Arts and Design (9.6%, $n = 15$), and Health Sciences (10.3%, $n = 16$), have similar representation. The smallest group is from the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, contributing only 5.1% ($n = 8$) of the sample ($p < 0.001$).

This distribution reflects the diverse academic backgrounds of the respondents while highlighting the higher representation from faculties with larger academic practitioner populations, such as Accounting and Informatics and Management Sciences. This diversity provides a balanced view of ethical decision-making practices across various disciplines.

5.6.4 Years of service distribution

Figure 5.3 summarises the distribution of respondents based on their years of service:

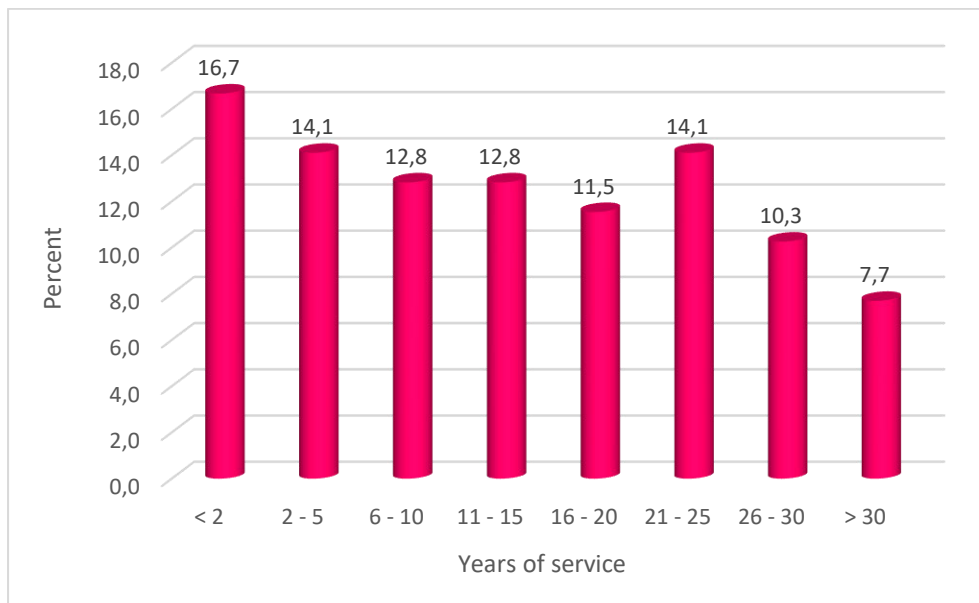


Figure 5.3: Years of service

The majority of respondents have less than 15 years of service at the institution, with 16.7% ($n = 26$) having fewer than 2 years and 14.1% ($n = 22$) between 2 and 5 years. Those with 21 to 25 years also form a significant portion (14.1%, $n = 22$). Meanwhile, respondents with over 30 years of service comprise the smallest group (7.7%, $n = 12$) ($p = 0.487$).

This distribution highlights a diverse range of experience levels among the respondents, from newcomers to those with extensive institutional tenure. This range supports an analysis of perspectives on ethical decision-making practices across varying levels of professional experience.

5.6.5 Designation

Table 5.7 summarises the distribution of respondents based on their designation.

Table 5.7: Respondents designation

	Frequency	Percent
Head of Department	2	1.3
Senior Lecturer	35	22.4
Lecturer	115	73.7
Junior Lecturer	4	2.6
Total	156	100.0

The majority of respondents are lecturers, comprising 73.7% ($n = 115$) of the sample. Senior lecturers form the second-largest group, making up 22.4% ($n = 35$). The proportion of junior lecturers is minimal, at 2.6% ($n = 4$), while only 1.3% ($n = 2$) of the respondents are heads of department ($p < 0.001$).

This distribution reflects the primary composition of academic practitioners involved in teaching and learning decisions, with a significant representation from lecturers and senior lecturers.

5.6.6 Highest qualification

Table 5.8 summarises the distribution of respondents based on their highest qualification.

Table 5.8: Qualification

	Frequency	Percent
Master's Degree and below	106	67.9
PhD	50	32.1
Total	156	100.0

The majority of respondents hold master's degrees or lower qualifications, representing 67.9% ($n = 106$) of the sample. Respondents with a PhD account for 32.1% ($n = 50$) ($p < 0.001$).

This distribution indicates a substantial presence of highly qualified academic practitioners, with nearly one-third of the sample holding doctoral-level qualifications. This mix provides a balanced perspective from individuals with varying levels of

academic achievement, contributing to the study's exploration of ethical decision-making practices.

5.6.7 Summary of the biographical distribution of the respondents

The biographical distribution of the respondents reveals a diverse and balanced sample. Gender representation is nearly equal, with 51.3% (n = 80) female and 48.7% (n = 76) male. In terms of age, the majority fall within the 36 to 55 years range, accounting for 55.1% of the sample, with the largest group being 46 to 55 years (28.8%, n = 45). Faculty representation highlights that the Faculty of Accounting and Informatics (35.9%, n = 56) and Faculty of Management Sciences (29.5%, n = 46) are predominant, while smaller contributions come from faculties such as Applied Sciences (9.6%, n = 15) and Engineering and the Built Environment (5.1%, n = 8). The years of service distribution shows a mix of experience levels, with the majority having under 15 years of service but significant representation from longer-serving respondents, such as those with 21 to 25 years (14.1%, n = 22). Most participants are lecturers (73.7%, n = 115), followed by senior lecturers (22.4%, n = 35), while junior lecturers (2.6%, n = 4) and heads of department (1.3%, n = 2) are fewer. Regarding qualifications, 67.9% (n = 106) hold master's degrees or below, while 32.1% (n = 50) possess a PhD, reflecting a strong academic profile within the sample. This diversity in demographics provides a robust basis for analysing ethical decision-making across various subgroups within the institution.

5.7 Section analysis

This section provides a detailed analysis of the survey responses, focusing on the key thematic areas identified in the questionnaire. Each section represents a distinct dimension of ethical decision-making and related constructs, including processes, consistency, performance evaluations, organisational culture, and the integration of online learning and technology. The analysis aimed to uncover patterns, trends, and variations in responses, offering insights into how these constructs are perceived and practiced by academic practitioners.

Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, were used to summarise the central tendencies and variability of responses within each section. Inferential statistics, where applicable, were employed to identify relationships or

differences across demographic groups. This comprehensive approach ensured a nuanced understanding of the data, supporting the study's objectives of exploring ethical decision-making practices and their implications in the academic environment.

To determine whether the scoring patterns for each statement significantly differed from a defined cut-off value of 3, a binomial test was conducted. The null hypothesis posits that respondents were equally likely to score below or above the cut-off value for each statement. Conversely, the alternate hypothesis asserts that there is a significant difference in the distribution of scores above and below the cut-off.

The results are presented in Table 5.0, where significant p-values ($p < 0.05$) are highlighted. These values indicate that the observed distributions of scores differed significantly from the expected balance around the cut-off. In other words, respondents displayed distinct patterns of agreement or disagreement with the statements, providing insights into their perceptions and attitudes.

The results are also represented graphically using box-and-whisker plots, which summarises the scoring patterns for each statement across all sections (Figure 5.4). These graphs provide a visual representation of the distribution of responses, highlighting the variability, central tendency, and range for each item.

- The box represents the interquartile range (IQR), which contains the middle 50% of the data, with the horizontal line inside the box indicating the median (50th percentile).
- The whiskers extend to the minimum and maximum values within 1.5 times the IQR, capturing the spread of the majority of responses.
- Blue triangles indicate the mean for each statement, providing an additional measure of central tendency to complement the median.
- Outliers, if present, are depicted as points beyond the whiskers.

These visualisations are useful in identifying patterns, such as whether responses are skewed, clustered, or exhibit high variability, thus providing deeper insights into the perceptions and practices of respondents regarding the themes of the study.

5.7.1 Section B: Ethical Decision-Making Processes

This section focuses on the analysis of ethical decision-making processes within the institution. The statements explore various dimensions of ethical practices, including

the consideration of procedures, the interests of students and staff, the availability of necessary skills and understanding, and the cultural and moral aspects influencing decisions. These elements are essential for evaluating how academic practitioners perceive and engage with ethical decision-making that has an impact on teaching, learning, and administrative contexts.

Table 5.9 and Figure 5.4 summarise the scoring patterns of this section.

Table 5.9: Ethical Decision-Making Processes

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Maximum	Minimum	Binomial Test p-value (cut-off = 3.0)
Processes and procedures involved in making ethical and moral decisions are considered before implementing a final decision	B1	156	3.27	1.04	4.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.379
Decisions taken serve the interests of the students and staff	B2	156	3.14	1.12	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.168
The necessary skills and understanding relating to the ethical concerns of staff and students are in place	B3	156	3.10	1.04	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.018
The consequences of decisions, including their impact on the university, are taken into consideration by academic management prior to effecting a decision	B4	156	2.86	1.08	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
Academic management are equipped with the knowledge and skills to make decisions that are aligned with teaching and learning and the institution's goals	B5	156	3.28	1.13	4.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.630
Different cultural groups are considered when making ethical decisions	B6	156	3.02	1.07	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.003
Ethical conduct is clearly visible in all our actions and decisions	B7	156	3.07	1.07	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.002
The budget is utilised for the faculty and the students	B8	156	3.25	1.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.123
DUT has a strong culture that supports ethical standards	B9	156	3.22	1.02	3.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.168
The quality of education is closely linked to ethical decision making in teaching and learning	B10	156	3.83	1.03	4.00	3.00	5.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
Decision making regarding teaching and learning emanates from a moral thought	B11	156	4.01	0.83	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	2.00	< 0.001
The institution focuses on students achieving high marks and passing rather than on the holistic development of the student	B12	156	2.34	1.18	2.00	1.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001

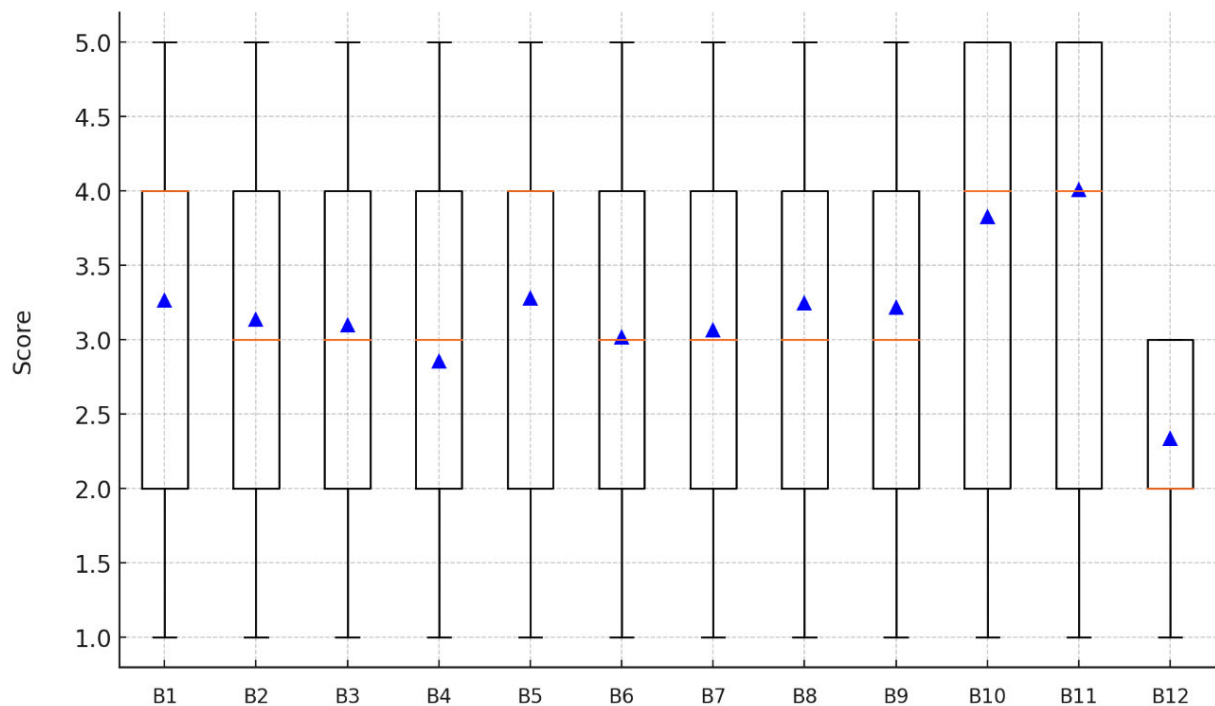


Figure 5.4: Ethical Decision-Making Processes

The analysis of ethical decision-making processes reveals diverse patterns in how respondents perceive and engage with different aspects of ethics in teaching, learning, and institutional practices. Most statements have mean scores slightly above the cut-off value of 3.0, indicating general agreement or neutrality. For example, the statement on whether "Processes and procedures involved in making ethical and moral decisions are considered before implementing a final decision" (B1) has a mean of 3.27, with a median of 4.0, showing slight agreement. Similarly, respondents slightly agreed that decisions "serve the interests of the students and staff" (B2, mean = 3.14, $p = 0.168$).

Notably, significant differences were observed for some items when compared to the cut-off value of 3.0. For instance, the statement "The necessary skills and understanding relating to the ethical concerns of staff and students are in place" (B3) had a mean of 3.10 but a p -value of 0.018, indicating variability in responses. The statement "The consequences of decisions, including their impact on the university, are taken into consideration by academic management prior to effecting a decision" (B4) has a mean of 2.86 and a significant p -value (< 0.001), reflecting notable disagreement or mixed perceptions about the thoroughness of decision-making.

Cultural inclusivity and ethical conduct also elicited varied responses. For "Different cultural groups are considered when making ethical decisions" (B6, mean = 3.02, $p = 0.003$) and "Ethical conduct is clearly visible in all our actions and decisions" (B7, mean = 3.07, $p = 0.002$), the significant p -values highlight differences in perceptions among respondents. While these means suggest slight agreement, the variability underscores inconsistency in experiences or views.

On the other hand, strong agreement is observed for statements emphasising the moral foundation of decision-making. For instance, "Decision making regarding teaching and learning emanates from a moral thought" (B11) has a high mean of 4.01, a median of 4.0, and a significant p -value (< 0.001), indicating widespread consensus. Similarly, respondents agreed that "The quality of education is closely linked to ethical decision making in teaching and learning" (B10, mean = 3.83, $p = < 0.001$), showing a strong perception of the connection between ethical practices and educational outcomes.

Conversely, the statement "The institution focuses on students achieving high marks and passing rather than on the holistic development of the student" (B12, mean = 2.34, $p = < 0.001$) reflects significant disagreement, indicating concerns about prioritisation of academic metrics over student well-being.

Overall, the data highlight areas of agreement, such as moral grounding in decision-making, while also revealing inconsistencies in perceptions of inclusivity, ethical practices, and institutional priorities. These insights underscore the need for more consistent ethical frameworks and practices within the institution.

5.7.2 Section C: Online Learning and Ethical Teaching Practices

This section focuses on the analysis of online learning and ethical teaching practices within the institution. The statements explore how academic management and practitioners ensure students are equipped for online learning, address challenges associated with remote learning, and maintain ethical teaching standards. These insights are crucial for evaluating the institution's ability to support students and uphold ethical practices in a rapidly evolving educational environment. Table 5.10 and Figure 5.5 summarise the scoring patterns of this section.

Table 5.10: Online Learning and Ethical Teaching Practices

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Maximum	Minimum	Binomial Test p-value (cut-off = 3.0)
Academic management ensures that students are equipped with the necessary skills required in using the online platforms	C1	156	3.03	1.14	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.106
DUT has taken into consideration the challenges students experience with learning remotely and online teaching	C2	156	3.07	1.16	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.332
Academic management ensure that students of DUT are equipped with the necessary computer technology to be part of the online learning platform	C3	156	2.80	1.11	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
Academic practitioners ensure that the online learning platforms are working for all students	C4	156	3.70	0.98	4.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
A culture of ethical teaching and learning exists at DUT	C5	156	3.29	1.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.809
Ethical values in relation to teaching and learning are not only advocated and talked about, but are also lived by all members of DUT	C6	156	2.86	1.02	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
Staff members are satisfied that ethical concerns can be discussed without fear of reprisal	C7	156	2.63	1.04	3.00	2.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
The institution provides workshops for staff on ethical practices	C8	156	3.18	1.09	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.573
Decisions taken by academic management are not consistent with all teaching staff	C9	156	3.73	0.90	4.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001

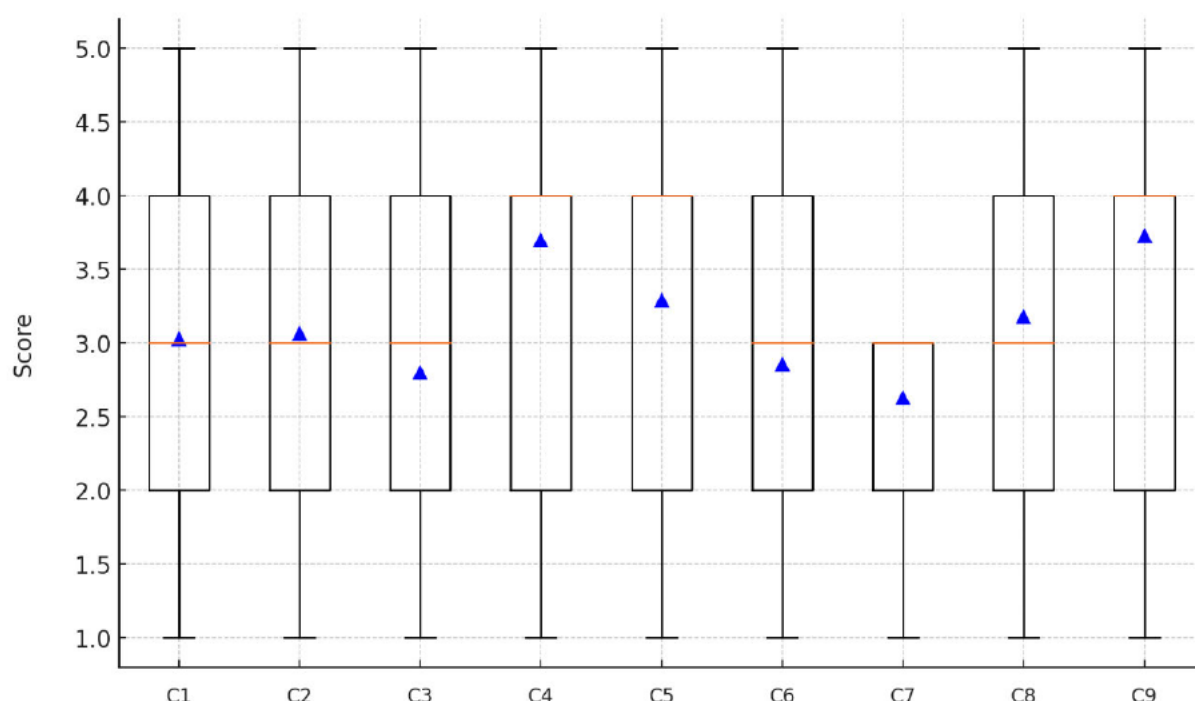


Figure 5.5: Online Learning and Ethical Teaching Practices

The analysis reveals a range of perceptions regarding the institution's online learning and ethical teaching practices. Respondents appear neutral on whether academic

management ensures students are equipped with the necessary skills to use online platforms (C1), with a mean score of 3.03 and a non-significant p-value (0.106). This suggests variability in opinions, as some respondents may believe sufficient efforts are being made, while others perceive gaps in skill-building initiatives. Similarly, responses to whether the institution has addressed challenges of remote learning (C2) indicate neutrality, with a mean of 3.07 and a p-value of 0.332, reflecting a lack of consensus.

In contrast, a significant concern emerges regarding the provision of necessary computer technology (C3). With a mean score of 2.80 and a highly significant p-value (< 0.001), respondents express disagreement, highlighting a perceived inadequacy in providing students with the required technological tools for online learning. Conversely, there is strong agreement that academic practitioners ensure online platforms function effectively for students (C4), as indicated by a mean score of 3.70 and a significant p-value (< 0.001). This suggests that, while institutional support for technology may be lacking, practitioners actively mitigate these challenges by maintaining platform accessibility. Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo (2020: 3) assert that, in spite of the crises arising from COVID-19, online learning allowed students to continue with the teaching and learning programme without disruption.

Responses to statements related to the ethical culture of the institution provide further insights. For example, respondents slightly agree that a culture of ethical teaching and learning exists (C5), with a mean of 3.29 and a non-significant p-value (0.809), suggesting general consistency in perceptions. However, significant concerns are raised about whether ethical values are practised consistently (C6). The mean score of 2.86 and a p-value of < 0.001 highlight discrepancies between advocacy and actual implementation of ethical practices, indicating room for improvement in aligning values with actions.

Further issues arise with the ability to discuss ethical concerns freely (C7). The mean score of 2.63 and a highly significant p-value (< 0.001) suggest dissatisfaction and fear of reprisal when raising ethical issues, which could undermine trust and transparency within the institution. Regarding the provision of workshops on ethical practices (C8), respondents slightly agree, with a mean score of 3.18 and a non-significant p-value (0.573), indicating that while these workshops may exist, their

effectiveness or reach might be limited. Finally, responses to whether decisions taken by academic management are consistent across teaching staff (C9) reveal significant concerns. With a mean score of 3.73 and a highly significant p-value (< 0.001), respondents perceive inconsistencies in decision-making, raising issues of fairness and transparency.

Overall, the analysis highlights strengths in practitioner-led efforts to maintain online learning platforms and a general agreement on the existence of an ethical culture. However, significant challenges remain, particularly regarding technological support, consistency in ethical practices, freedom to discuss ethical concerns, and perceived fairness in decision-making.

5.7.3 Section D: Organisational Culture and Ethical Decision-Making

This section focuses on the influence of organisational culture and ethical decision-making on teaching and learning within the institution. The statements explore the impact of ethical culture, organisational behaviour, and decision-making practices on the overall learning environment and the moral foundations of academic management. These dimensions are crucial for understanding how organisational ethics shape institutional effectiveness and staff satisfaction. Table 5.11 and Figure 5.6 summarise the scoring patterns of this section.

Table 5.11: Organisational Culture and Ethical Decision-Making

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Maximum	Minimum	Binomial Test p-value (cut-off = 3.0)
The absence of a strong ethical culture at the university has a major impact on teaching and learning	D1	156	3.84	1.00	4.00	3.00	5.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
One of the reasons for the ethical breakdown in the institution arises from the organizational culture failing to encourage ethical practices and behaviour	D2	156	3.65	0.98	4.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.003
Decisions and practices relating to teaching and learning have a major influence in the learning environment	D3	156	4.36	0.69	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
If decisions are made with the absence of ethical thought a tertiary institution will go through a phase of moral decay	D4	156	4.29	0.93	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
Academic management cannot make moral decisions if they themselves do not have moral values	D5	156	4.47	0.83	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
When faculty concerns are discussed in a safe environment, the staff are more happy to provide solutions	D6	156	4.00	0.81	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001

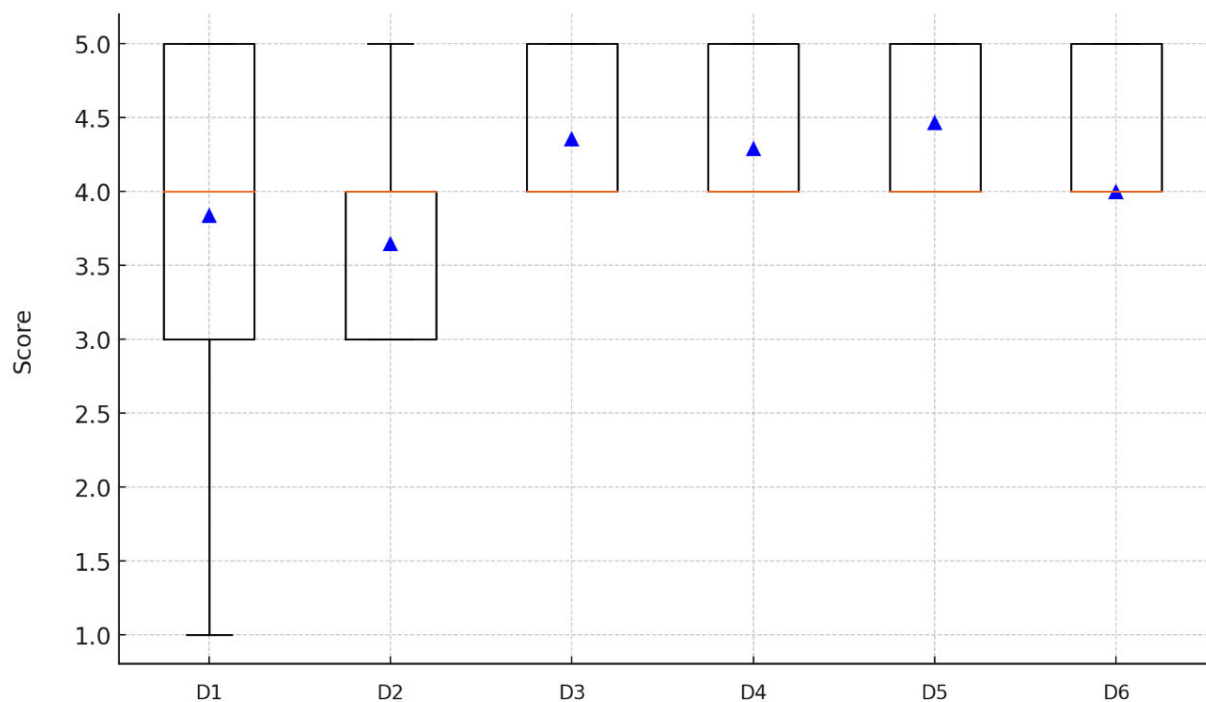


Figure 5.6: Organisational Culture and Ethical Decision-Making

The analysis underscores the significant role organisational culture and ethical practices play in shaping teaching and learning. Respondents strongly agree that the absence of a strong ethical culture at the university has a major impact on teaching and learning (D1), as evidenced by a mean score of 3.84, a median of 4.00, and a highly significant p-value (< 0.001). This indicates widespread recognition of the critical relationship between ethics and educational outcomes. Similarly, the statement that an ethical breakdown can arise from an organisational culture that fails to encourage ethical behaviour (D2) also receives agreement, with a mean of 3.65 and a significant p-value (0.003), highlighting concerns about institutional culture influencing ethical failures.

Decisions and practices related to teaching and learning are perceived to have a profound influence on the learning environment (D3). With a high mean score of 4.36 and a significant p-value (< 0.001), respondents strongly agree that ethical decision-making is pivotal to fostering a positive and effective learning context. Additionally, the belief that a lack of ethical thought in decision-making can lead to institutional moral decay (D4) resonates strongly with respondents, with a mean score of 4.29, further reinforcing the importance of ethical leadership.

The moral integrity of academic management emerges as a key concern. Respondents overwhelmingly agree that academic management cannot make moral decisions without possessing moral values themselves (D5), reflected by the highest mean score in this section (4.47) and a significant p-value (< 0.001). This finding highlights the need for leadership to exemplify strong moral standards to inspire ethical practices throughout the institution. Al Halbusi et al. (2020: 160) state that leaders are required to display a strong level of moral conduct and possess exceptional ethical standards in their behaviour, actions and decision-making. This is important by way of being a good role model to one's employees.

Lastly, the provision of a safe environment for faculty discussions appears essential for encouraging solutions and fostering satisfaction (D6). With a mean score of 4.00 and a significant p-value (< 0.001); respondents agree that staff are more inclined to contribute solutions when concerns are addressed in a secure and respectful manner. This result underscores the importance of creating a supportive organisational culture to improve engagement and collaboration.

Overall, the findings in this section reveal strong agreement among respondents on the critical role of organisational culture and ethical practices in driving institutional success. The significant p-values across all items indicate widespread consensus on the importance of fostering a robust ethical culture, empowering academic management to lead with moral values, and ensuring a safe and collaborative environment for faculty. These insights highlight the need for sustained efforts to strengthen ethical foundations and improve organisational practices to support teaching, learning, and institutional integrity.

5.7.4 Section E: Performance Evaluations and Decision-Making During Crises

This section explores respondents' perceptions of performance evaluations and decision-making within the institution, particularly in times of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The statements examine whether fairness and objectivity are upheld in performance evaluations, and whether decisions prioritise the well-being of others and are supported by thorough research. Table 5.12 and Figure 5.7 summarise the scoring patterns of this section.

Table 5.12: Performance Evaluations and Decision-Making During Crises

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Maximum	Minimum	Binomial Test p-value (cut-off = 3.0)
A low rated performance evaluation is given to staff members that line managers are negatively inclined towards	E1	156	3.20	0.82	3.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
A high rated performance evaluation is given to staff members that line managers are positively disposed towards	E2	156	3.17	0.90	3.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
In view of the fact that Covid-19 has impacted on students learning, thorough research has been undertaken before arriving at the best decisions that can support students during this crisis	E3	156	2.79	1.08	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001
What is good for others rather than him/herself is given top priority	E4	156	3.00	1.02	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	< 0.001

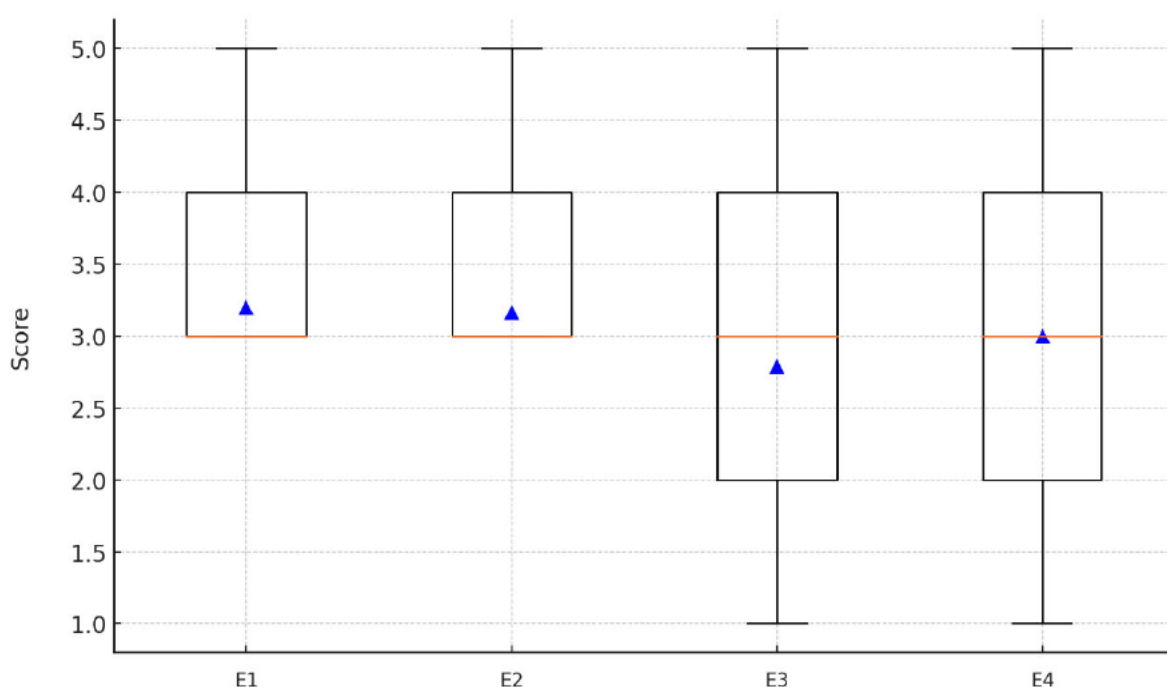


Figure 5.7: Performance Evaluations and Decision-Making During Crises

The analysis of performance evaluations highlights significant concerns about bias in the process. Respondents agree that staff members negatively inclined towards their line managers are more likely to receive lower performance ratings (E1), with a mean score of 3.20 and a highly significant p-value (< 0.001). Similarly, the perception that staff members positively disposed towards their line managers receive higher performance evaluations (E2) is also supported, with a mean score of 3.17 and a

highly significant p-value (< 0.001). These results suggest that many respondents perceive the performance evaluation process to be influenced by personal bias rather than objective metrics, raising concerns about fairness and transparency. Rubin and Edwards (2020: 3) concur with the findings by stating "discrimination complaints in the appraisal process can suggest any myriad of problems, including inaccurate or biased ratings, inconsistent application of performance standards, and/or interpersonal conflict between the manager and the employee".

In the context of decision-making during the Covid-19 pandemic, respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the adequacy of research conducted to support students during this crisis (E3). This statement received a mean score of 2.79 and a significant p-value (< 0.001), reflecting a perception that institutional responses lacked the thoroughness required to address students' needs effectively. The variability in responses, indicated by a relatively high standard deviation of 1.08, suggests differing experiences among respondents.

The statement "What is good for others rather than him/herself is given top priority" (E4) received a neutral response, with a mean score of 3.00 and a significant p-value (< 0.001). While neutrality might indicate balanced perceptions, the significant p-value suggests that respondents' views on whether institutional decisions prioritise collective well-being are not consistent. This variability underscores a need for clearer communication and alignment between institutional actions and ethical principles.

The findings in this section highlight critical concerns regarding the fairness of performance evaluations and the adequacy of decision-making during crises. Perceptions of bias in performance reviews suggest a need for greater objectivity and transparency in evaluating staff. Additionally, dissatisfaction with the institution's crisis response indicates an opportunity to strengthen research and planning processes to better support students. These insights emphasise the importance of aligning institutional practices with ethical standards to build trust and equity within the academic community.

5.7.5 Section F: Institutional Priorities and Decision-Making Consistency

This section explores perceptions of decision-making consistency and institutional priorities. The statements examine whether decisions are applied uniformly across

staff, whether the institution prioritises financial growth over educational quality, and whether decisions are influenced by self-invested interests. Table 5.13 and Figure 5.8 summarise the scoring patterns of this section.

Table 5.13: Institutional Priorities and Decision-Making Consistency

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Maximum	Minimum	Binomial Test p-value (cut-off = 3.0)
There is a lack of consistency in decisions taken for different staff members	F1	156	3.58	1.12	4.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.006
The institutions core focus is business driven concentrating on financial growth instead of providing quality education	F2	156	3.41	1.19	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	1.000
Decisions made arise from self-invested interest	F3	156	3.14	1.13	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	0.468

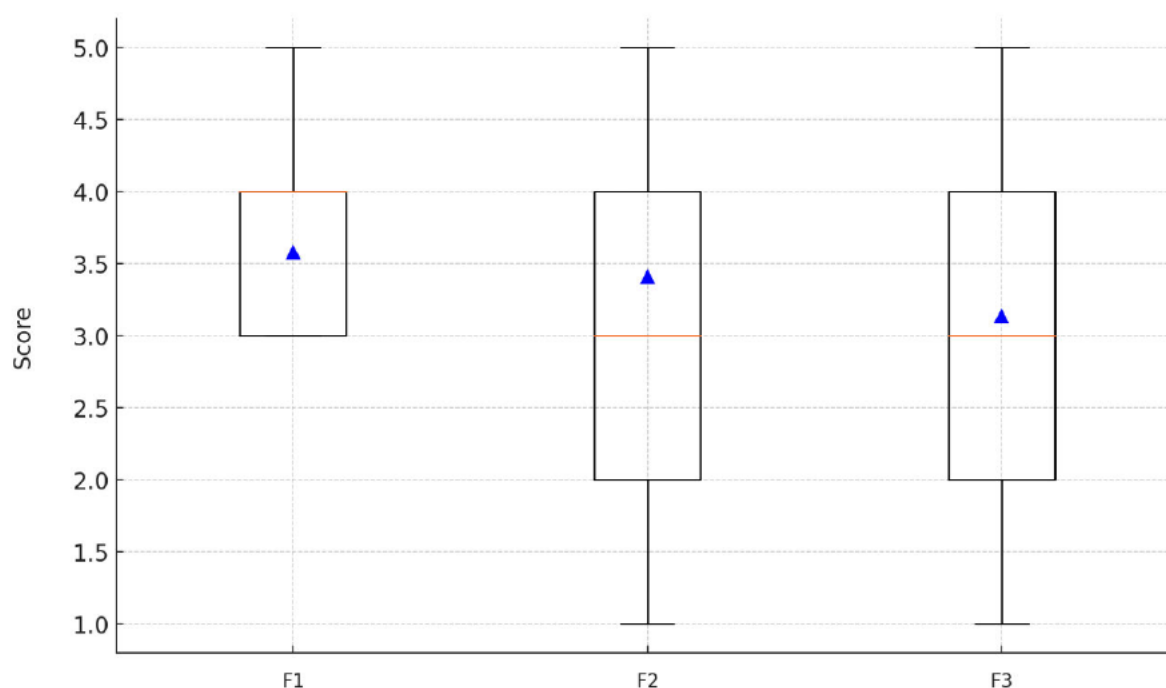


Figure 5.8: Institutional priorities and decision-making consistency

The responses indicate significant concerns regarding consistency in decision-making. The statement "There is a lack of consistency in decisions taken for different staff members" (F1) received a mean score of 3.58 and a significant p-value of 0.006, suggesting agreement among respondents that decisions are not uniformly applied. The median of 4.00 supports this observation, indicating that many respondents perceive inequities in how decisions are implemented across staff.

On the institution's core focus, respondents appear neutral about whether the institution prioritises financial growth over providing quality education (F2). This statement has a mean score of 3.41, a median of 3.00, and a non-significant p-value of 1.000, suggesting no strong consensus. While some respondents may view the institution as prioritising financial growth, the variability in responses (as reflected by a standard deviation of 1.19) highlights differing perspectives within the academic community.

Similarly, perceptions regarding the influence of self-interest on decisions (F3) are neutral, with a mean score of 3.14, a median of 3.00, and a non-significant p-value of 0.468. These results suggest that while some respondents may feel that self-invested interests influence decisions, there is no overwhelming agreement or disagreement on this issue, indicating a balanced perspective overall.

The findings in this section highlight mixed perceptions regarding the institution's decision-making consistency and priorities. While there is notable concern about a lack of consistency in decisions applied across staff members, respondents exhibit neutrality regarding whether financial growth takes precedence over educational quality or whether decisions are driven by self-interest. These results suggest that while consistency is a significant area for improvement, the institution's priorities and decision-making processes may not be viewed universally as ethically misaligned, though variability in perceptions indicates room for further alignment and communication.

5.7.6 Overall section analysis

This section provides a summarised analysis of the overall thematic areas covered in the study, including ethical decision-making processes, online learning and technology integration, consistency and ethical standards, performance evaluations and prioritisation, and institutional ethical culture and values. The analysis explores the aggregated perceptions of respondents, highlighting central tendencies, variability, and areas of significant agreement or concern (Table 5.14 and Figure 5.9).

Table 5.14: Overall section analysis

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Maximum	Minimum	Binomial Test p-value (cut-off = 3.0)
Ethical Decision-Making Processes	B	156	3.21	0.66	3.33	2.83	3.67	4.83	1.09	0.002
Online Learning and Technology Integration	C	156	3.15	0.62	3.14	2.78	3.56	5.00	1.44	0.036
Consistency and Ethical Standards	D	156	4.11	0.50	4.17	3.83	4.50	5.00	2.33	< 0.001
Performance Evaluations and Prioritisation	E	156	3.04	0.61	3.00	2.75	3.25	5.00	1.00	0.030
Institutional Ethical Culture and Values	F	156	3.38	0.76	3.33	3.00	4.00	5.00	1.33	< 0.001

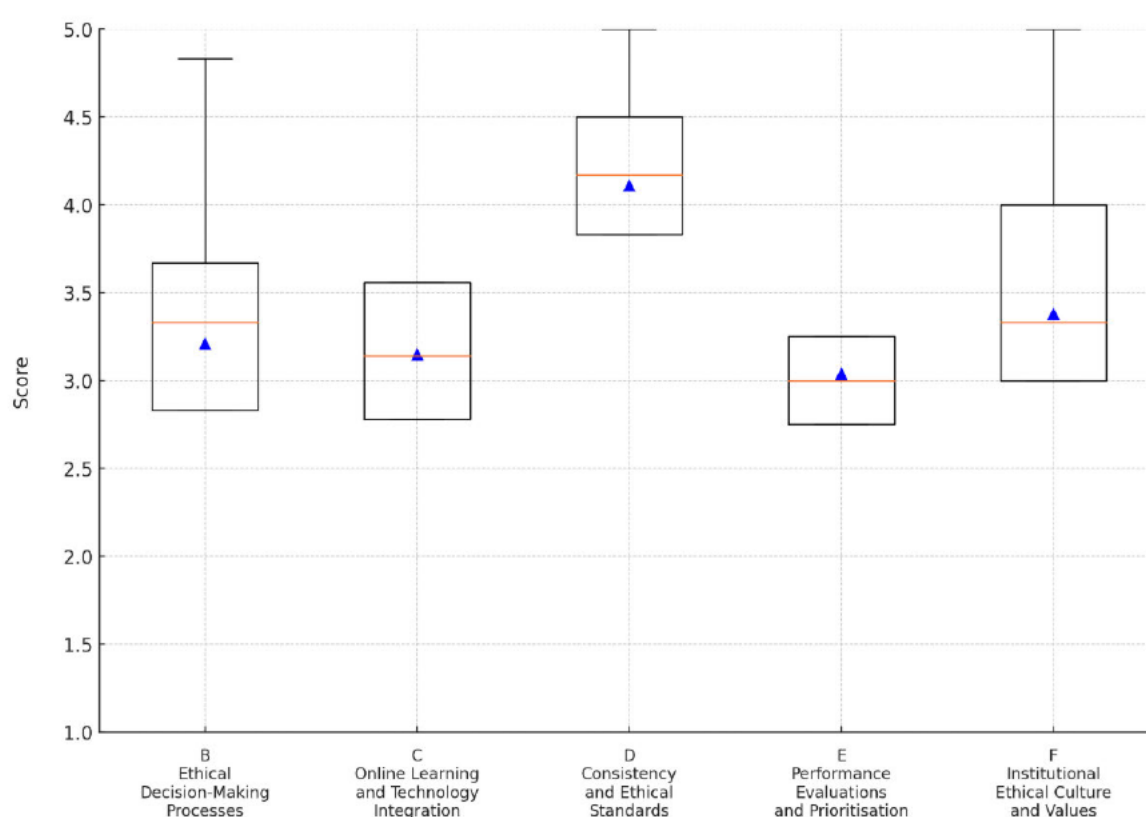


Figure 5.9: Overall section analysis

The aggregated results reveal varying perceptions across the thematic areas, with some sections indicating strong agreement on ethical practices while others reflect neutrality or concerns. Ethical Decision-Making Processes (B) received a mean score of 3.21, a median of 3.33, and a significant p-value (0.002), indicating slight agreement among respondents that ethical decision-making processes are in place but with variability, as shown by the standard deviation (0.66). This suggests that while ethical decision-making is somewhat evident, there are inconsistencies that warrant attention.

Online Learning and Technology Integration (C) received a mean score of 3.15 and a p-value of 0.036, indicating slight agreement but with a broader range of perceptions. The median score of 3.14 highlights neutrality among many respondents, reflecting the need for improved institutional support for online learning initiatives. The relatively higher standard deviation (0.62) compared to other sections underscores variability in respondents' experiences and views.

The section on Consistency and Ethical Standards (D) shows strong agreement among respondents, with the highest mean score of 4.11 and a highly significant p-value (< 0.001). The median score of 4.17 and low standard deviation (0.50) suggest widespread consensus on the importance of ethical consistency and its positive impact on the institutional environment. This indicates that ethical consistency is an area where the institution is perceived to perform well.

In contrast, Performance Evaluations and Prioritisation (E) received a mean score of 3.04, reflecting neutrality, with a p-value of 0.030 indicating some significant concerns. The median of 3.00 and a standard deviation of 0.61 point to variability in perceptions, highlighting areas for improvement in the fairness and objectivity of performance evaluations, especially during challenging circumstances like the Covid-19 pandemic.

Lastly, Institutional Ethical Culture and Values (F) garnered a mean score of 3.38, a median of 3.33, and a highly significant p-value (< 0.001). This suggests moderate agreement among respondents that an ethical culture exists within the institution. However, the relatively higher standard deviation (0.76) reflects differing experiences and perceptions across respondents, indicating potential gaps in the alignment between institutional values and practices.

The overall analysis highlights key areas of strength and concern across the thematic sections. Strong agreement is evident in areas like consistency and ethical standards, where the institution is perceived to perform well. However, neutrality or variability in other areas, such as online learning, ethical decision-making, and performance evaluations, indicates room for improvement. Institutional ethical culture shows moderate agreement but significant variability, suggesting the need for efforts to bridge gaps between ethical values and their practical application.

5.8 Kruskal-Wallis tests

The Kruskal-Wallis test, a non-parametric statistical method, was applied to determine whether significant differences exist in the perceptions of respondents across demographic categories, including gender, faculty, qualifications, and years of service. This test evaluates differences in the distribution of responses for key dimensions such as ethical decision-making, online learning, consistency in ethical standards, performance evaluations, and institutional ethical culture. The results provide insights into variations across demographic groups, informing targeted recommendations to address disparities in perceptions.

The tables below reflect only the significant differences observed for each of the biographical variables by dimension.

5.8.1 Gender: Online Learning and Technology Integration

Table 5.15: Gender: Online Learning and Technology Integration

Biographical Variable	Dimension	Categories	Hypothesis Test Summary Mean	p-value
Gender	Online Learning and Technology Integration	Female	3.03	0.013
		Male	3.28	

For gender (Table 5.15), the dimension of Online Learning and Technology Integration revealed a notable disparity in perceptions between male and female respondents. The mean rank for males (3.28) was higher than that for females (3.03), indicating that males perceived this dimension more positively. This difference was statistically significant, as indicated by the p-value (0.013).

These findings suggest the need for tailored interventions to address gender-based perceptual differences, particularly in technology adoption and online learning environments. Such disparities might stem from differing access to resources, levels of familiarity with technology, or varying support systems. Recognising and mitigating these gaps is essential to fostering a more inclusive and equitable institutional culture.

Table 5.16: Age: Ethical Decision-Making Processes and Online Learning and Technology Integration

Biographical Variable	Dimension	Hypothesis Test Summary p-value	Pairwise Comparison		Categories	Mean
			Categories	p-values		
Age (years)	Ethical Decision-Making Processes	0.001	> 55-26 - 35	0.007	26 - 35	3.27
			> 55-46 - 55	0.002	36 - 45	3.37
			> 55-36 - 45	< 0.001	46 - 55	3.27
					> 55	2.86
	Online Learning and Technology Integration	0.001	> 55-46 - 55	0.016	26 - 35	3.33
			> 55-26 - 35	< 0.001	36 - 45	3.32
			> 55-36 - 45	< 0.001	46 - 55	3.14
					> 55	2.78

5.8.1 Age: Ethical Decision-Making Processes and Online Learning and Technology Integration

The Kruskal-Wallis test and subsequent pairwise comparisons were conducted to identify significant differences in perceptions across age groups for two dimensions: Ethical Decision-Making Processes and Online Learning and Technology Integration (Table 5.16). These comparisons provide a deeper understanding of the disparities in responses across age categories, highlighting areas where targeted interventions may be required.

5.8.2 Ethical Decision-Making Processes

The overall test revealed a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.001$) in perceptions of ethical decision-making processes across age groups. Pairwise comparisons showed that:

- Respondents aged >55 consistently perceived ethical decision-making less favourably (mean = 2.86) compared to other age groups:
 - Significant differences were noted between >55 and 26–35 ($p = 0.007$; mean = 3.27).
 - >55 also differed significantly from 36–45 ($p < 0.001$; mean = 3.37).
 - Similar disparities were observed between >55 and 46–55 ($p = 0.002$; mean = 3.27).

These findings suggest that older respondents (>55) may view institutional ethical decision-making processes less positively than younger cohorts. This could reflect generational differences in expectations or experiences with organisational ethics.

5.8.3 Online Learning And Technology Integration

For this dimension, the Kruskal-Wallis test also indicated a significant difference across age groups ($p = 0.001$). Pairwise comparisons revealed that:

- Respondents aged >55 perceived online learning and technology integration less positively (mean = 2.78) compared to:
 - 26–35 ($p < 0.001$; mean = 3.33),
 - 36–45 ($p < 0.001$; mean = 3.32), and
 - 46–55 ($p = 0.016$; mean = 3.14).

These differences suggest that older respondents (>55) may face greater challenges with adapting to online learning environments and integrating technology compared to younger groups, who generally rated this dimension more favourably.

5.8.4 Faculty: Performance Evaluation and Prioritisation

Table 5.17: Faculty: Performance Evaluation and Prioritisation

Biographical Variable	Dimension	Hypothesis Test Summary p-value	Pairwise Comparison		Categories (Faculty)	Mean
			Categories	p-values		
Faculty	Performance Evaluations and Prioritisation	0.013	Engineering and the Built Environment-Health Sciences	0.028	Accounting and Informatics	3.18
			Engineering and the Built Environment-Accounting and Informatics	0.006	Applied Sciences	2.95
			Arts and Design-Accounting and Informatics	0.008	Arts and Design	2.83
			Management Sciences-Accounting and Informatics	0.020	Engineering and the Built Environment	2.56
					Health Sciences	3.25
					Management Sciences	2.97

The Kruskal-Wallis test and subsequent pairwise comparisons were applied to examine perceptions of Performance Evaluations and Prioritisation across faculty groups (Table 5.17). The analysis identified statistically significant differences ($p =$

0.013) in how faculties perceive this dimension. Below is a summary of the pairwise comparisons and the respective means.

Significant pairwise comparisons

1. Engineering and the Built Environment vs. Health Sciences

- A significant difference ($p = 0.028$) was observed, with Health Sciences reporting a higher mean (3.25) compared to Engineering and the Built Environment (mean = 2.56).

2. Engineering and the Built Environment vs. Accounting and Informatics

- The mean for Accounting and Informatics (3.18) was significantly higher than that for Engineering and the Built Environment ($p = 0.006$).

3. Arts and Design vs. Accounting and Informatics

- Arts and Design (mean = 2.83) perceived performance evaluations less favourably compared to Accounting and Informatics ($p = 0.008$).

4. Management Sciences vs. Accounting and Informatics

- Respondents in Management Sciences (mean = 2.97) reported significantly lower perceptions compared to Accounting and Informatics ($p = 0.020$).

5. Applied Sciences vs. Accounting and Informatics

- Applied Sciences (mean = 2.95) had lower perceptions compared to Accounting and Informatics ($p = 0.006$).

The results reveal distinct differences in perceptions of performance evaluations across faculties. Faculties such as Health Sciences and Accounting and Informatics hold more favourable views, possibly reflecting better-structured or more transparent evaluation systems. In contrast, Engineering and the Built Environment and Arts and Design report less favourable perceptions, suggesting a need for improvement in the processes or communication around performance evaluations within these faculties.

5.8.5 Years of service: Ethical Decision-Making Processes

Table 5.18: Years of service: Ethical decision-making processes

Biographical Variable	Dimension	Hypothesis Test Summary p-value	Pairwise Comparison		Categories (Years of Service)	Mean
			Categories	p-values		
Years of service	Ethical Decision-Making Processes	0.010	> 30-6 - 10	0.020	< 2	3.60
			> 30-< 2	0.002	2 - 5	3.09
			26 - 30-< 2	0.006	6 - 10	3.34
			21 - 25-< 2	0.005	11 - 15	3.28
			2 - 5-< 2	0.006	16 - 20	3.23
					21 - 25	3.04
					26 - 30	2.93
					> 30	2.89

Significant pairwise comparisons

1. >30 years vs. 6–10 years

- A significant difference ($p = 0.020$) was observed, with respondents in the 6–10 years group reporting a higher mean (3.34) compared to those with > 30 years of service (mean = 2.89).

2. >30 years vs. < 2 years

- Respondents with < 2 years of service (mean = 3.60) reported significantly more favourable perceptions compared to those with > 30 years ($p = 0.002$).

3. 26–30 years vs. < 2 years

- The < 2 years group also reported significantly higher perceptions compared to the 26–30 years group (mean = 2.93; $p = 0.006$).

4. 21–25 years vs. < 2 years

- The 21–25 years group (mean = 3.04) perceived ethical decision-making processes less favourably than the < 2 years group ($p = 0.005$).

5. 2–5 years vs. < 2 years

- A significant difference ($p = 0.006$) was noted between the 2–5 years group (mean = 3.09) and the < 2 years group.

The results indicate that perceptions of ethical decision-making processes decline as years of service increase (Table 5.18). Respondents with < 2 years of service report the most favourable perceptions, while those with > 30 years perceive these processes less positively. This trend could suggest a diminishing level of trust or satisfaction with

organisational ethics over time, potentially due to unmet expectations, perceived stagnation, or dissatisfaction with institutional changes.

5.9 Correlations

The study performed bivariate correlation analysis to examine the relationships between key dimensions, including Ethical Decision-Making Processes, Online Learning and Technology Integration, Consistency and Ethical Standards, Performance Evaluations and Prioritisation, and Institutional Ethical Culture and Values. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the strength and direction of these relationships. Positive correlations indicate that an increase in one dimension is associated with an increase in another, while negative correlations reflect an inverse relationship. Statistically significant correlations are marked with ** ($p < 0.01$) or * ($p < 0.05$). The findings provide insights into how these dimensions interact, guiding recommendations for organisational improvement.

5.9.1 Discussion of trends observed

1. Ethical Decision-Making Processes and Online Learning and Technology Integration

- A strong positive correlation was observed ($r = 0.610$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that improvements in ethical decision-making processes are closely linked to better integration and management of online learning and technology. This relationship underscores the importance of ethical frameworks in adapting to technological advancements in educational settings.

2. Online Learning and Technology Integration and Consistency and Ethical Standards

- A weak but statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.159$, $p < 0.05$) was found. This indicates a mild association between technological integration and maintaining consistency in ethical standards, suggesting that improved technological practices can support ethical consistency.

3. Ethical Decision-Making Processes and Performance Evaluations and Prioritisation

- A modest positive correlation ($r = 0.184$, $p < 0.05$) was identified, indicating that ethical decision-making aligns with how performance

evaluations are conducted and prioritised. This suggests that ethical considerations play a role in performance-related decisions, potentially enhancing fairness and transparency.

4. Institutional Ethical Culture and Values

- A significant negative correlation was found between Institutional Ethical Culture and Values and Ethical Decision-Making Processes ($r = -0.277$, $p < 0.01$). This inverse relationship may indicate perceived shortcomings in ethical culture when decision-making processes are not perceived as robust or aligned with institutional values.
- Other correlations involving Institutional Ethical Culture and Values were not statistically significant, suggesting limited direct associations with the other dimensions.

5. General observations

- Most dimensions showed positive correlations, reinforcing the interconnectedness of ethical practices, decision-making, and institutional operations.
- Negative correlations involving Institutional Ethical Culture and Values warrant further investigation to understand underlying factors, such as gaps in alignment between institutional ethics and individual or departmental practices.

The correlations reveal significant interdependencies among key dimensions of organisational functioning, particularly the positive links between ethical decision-making, online learning, and performance evaluations. However, the inverse relationship involving Institutional Ethical Culture and Values highlights potential areas for improvement in aligning institutional ethics with decision-making processes. These findings underscore the need for strategies to foster a cohesive and transparent ethical culture across all dimensions.

5.10 Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Ethical decision-making processes and online learning integration

Null hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between ethical decision-making processes and online learning and technology integration.

Alternative hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant positive relationship between ethical decision-making processes and online learning and technology integration.

Results:

A strong positive correlation was observed ($r = 0.610$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that improvements in ethical decision-making are associated with better integration of online learning. This finding supports the alternative hypothesis (H_1), highlighting the interconnectedness between ethical frameworks and technological adoption.

Hypothesis 2: Gender differences in perceptions of online learning

Null hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant difference in perceptions of online learning and technology integration between male and female respondents.

Alternative hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant difference in perceptions of online learning and technology integration between male and female respondents.

Results:

The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in perceptions of online learning between males (mean = 3.28) and females (mean = 3.03), with a p-value of 0.013. This result supports the alternative hypothesis (H_1), indicating gender-based perceptual differences that may require targeted interventions.

Hypothesis 3: Age and ethical decision-making perceptions

Null hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant difference in perceptions of ethical decision-making processes across different age groups.

Alternative hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant difference in perceptions of ethical decision-making processes across different age groups.

Results:

The Kruskal-Wallis test showed significant differences ($p = 0.001$) across age groups, with respondents over 55 years reporting lower mean scores (2.86) compared to younger age groups (e.g., 26–35 years, mean = 3.27). Pairwise comparisons confirmed significant differences between these groups ($p = 0.007$). These findings support the alternative hypothesis (H_1), suggesting generational disparities in perceptions of ethical decision-making.

Hypothesis 4: Faculty and perceptions of performance evaluations

Null hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant difference in perceptions of performance evaluations and prioritisation across faculties.

Alternative hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant difference in perceptions of performance evaluations and prioritisation across faculties.

Results:

The Kruskal-Wallis test identified significant differences ($p = 0.013$) between faculties. Health Sciences had the highest mean perception (3.25), while Engineering and the Built Environment had the lowest (2.56). Pairwise comparisons confirmed significant differences between these groups ($p < 0.05$). The alternative hypothesis (H_1) is supported, emphasising disparities in performance evaluation perceptions among faculties.

Hypothesis 5: Institutional ethical culture and values

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between institutional ethical culture and values and other dimensions such as ethical decision-making processes.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant relationship between institutional ethical culture and values and other dimensions, such as ethical decision-making processes.

Results:

A significant negative correlation was observed between institutional ethical culture and values and ethical decision-making processes ($r = -0.277$, $p < 0.01$). This finding supports the alternative hypothesis (H_1), suggesting that perceived shortcomings in institutional ethical culture may inversely impact ethical decision-making.

5.11 Structural equation modelling analysis

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to evaluate the complex relationships among the study's core constructs (Ethical Decision-Making Processes [EDMP], Online Learning and Technology Integration [OLTI], Consistency and Ethical Standards [CES], Performance Evaluations and Prioritisation [PEP], and Institutional Ethical Culture and Values [IECV]). This statistical technique allowed for the simultaneous examination of both measurement and structural models.

The measurement model examined how well the observed questionnaire items (measured via Likert scale) represented their respective latent constructs. The structural model, on the other hand, assessed how these constructs influenced one another within the institutional context (Figure 5.10).

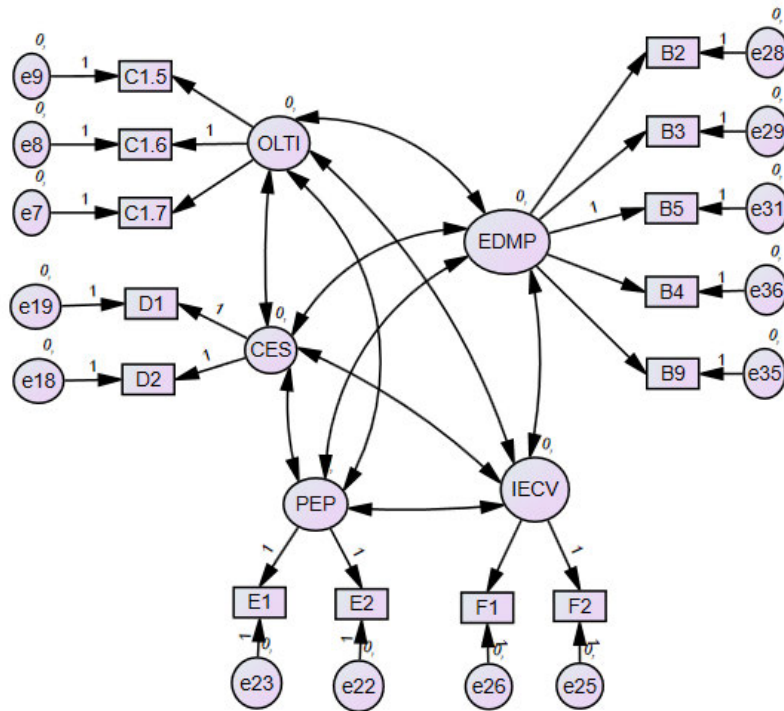


Figure 5.10: Structural equation model illustrating relationships among latent constructs

5.11.1 Model fit assessment

The model was tested using maximum likelihood estimation. The chi-square statistic was significant ($\chi^2 = 157.941$, $df = 69$, $p < 0.001$), which is common in SEM studies due to large sample sizes. Although a non-significant chi-square is preferred, other model fit indices indicated an acceptable level of fit:

- Relative chi-square (CMIN/DF) = 2.289 (acceptable if < 5)
- Comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.880
- Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.886
- Incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.867
- Normed fit index (NFI) = 0.886

- Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.090
 - 90% CI = [0.072, 0.110]
 - PCLOSE = 0.000

These values suggest that while the model does not demonstrate a perfect or "close" fit, it remains within acceptable limits, especially for complex models involving multiple constructs.

5.11.2 Measurement model: reliability of indicators

The standardised regression weights (factor loadings) revealed that most indicators were strongly associated with their latent constructs:

- OLTi: All items showed good loading (C1.6 = 0.797, C1.7 = 0.737, C1.5 = 0.701)
- CES: D2 (0.604) and D1 (0.612) showed acceptable loadings
- PEP: E2 (0.642) and E1 (0.743) indicated strong reliability
- EDMP: All five items loaded well, ranging from 0.643 to 0.760
- IECV: F2 showed strong loading (0.774), while F1 was weaker (0.240)

Although F1 did not meet the minimum recommended threshold (≥ 0.60), it was retained for theoretical completeness, ensuring the construct was not under-represented conceptually.

5.11.3 Structural model: Path relationships and interpretations

The structural model tested hypothesised relationships between the five latent constructs. The analysis revealed the following significant relationships:

- Negative paths:
 - EDMP $\rightarrow$ PEP (Estimate = -0.134 , $p = 0.014$; $r = -0.279$)
 - EDMP $\rightarrow$ OLTi (Estimate = -0.577 , $p < 0.001$; $r = -0.877$)
 - EDMP $\rightarrow$ IECV (Estimate = -0.404 , $p < 0.001$; $r = -0.540$)

These negative correlations suggest that strong emphasis on ethical decision-making may sometimes conflict with prioritisation practices, technology integration, and institutional values, possibly due to procedural rigidity or cultural barriers.

- Positive paths:
 - CES → PEP (Estimate = 0.105, $p = 0.034$; $r = 0.293$)
 - OLTi → PEP (Estimate = 0.146, $p = 0.008$; $r = 0.304$)
 - OLTi → IECV (Estimate = 0.319, $p < 0.001$; $r = 0.429$)

These relationships indicate that consistency in ethical standards and effective use of online technology contribute positively to institutional prioritisation and culture.

- Non-significant paths:
 - EDMP ↔ CES ($p = 0.532$)
 - PEP ↔ IECV ($p = 0.124$)
 - CES ↔ IECV ($p = 0.116$)
 - OLTi ↔ CES ($p = 0.367$)

These insignificant paths suggest that some inter-construct relationships are weak or inconsistent, requiring further investigation or contextual interpretation.

5.11.4 Summary and theoretical implications

Despite the significant chi-square value, the overall model was found to be statistically adequate based on supplementary fit indices. The standardised loadings were generally strong, indicating that most measurement items reliably represented their underlying constructs. Where weak items existed (e.g., F1 under IECV), theoretical rationales justified their inclusion.

The SEM analysis confirmed the theoretical framework and aligned closely with findings from the earlier Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Key conclusions include:

- EDMP may conflict with operational or technological priorities in some institutional settings.

- Strong ethical standards and technological integration reinforce institutional effectiveness.
- Online learning and technology integration emerged as a pivotal construct, influencing both prioritisation and ethical culture.

These findings highlight the multifaceted and sometimes conflicting nature of ethical, technological, and institutional dynamics in modern academic and organisational environments.

5.12 Qualitative responses from the academic staff questionnaire (open-ended question)

This section provided the results of final part of the questionnaire which included one-open ended question which requested respondents to add any further comments/remarks pertaining to moral and ethical decision-making by academic management that they feel may be important for this study. A thematic analysis process was used to analyse the qualitative data resulting from this question. The qualitative findings support the aim of the study which was to examine the views, perceptions and feelings of academic practitioners regarding the ethical decision-making practices that impact teaching and learning.

The responses from the staff members were grouped in different themes and aligned to the objectives of the study.

5.12.1 Objective 1: Moral decision-making processes

Responses from staff relating to Objective1, moral decision-making processes are discussed under the theme, 'policies and implementation'.

5.12.1.1 Policies and implementation

Several respondents highlighted the absence of effective policies to address key issues such as online cheating and academic integrity. The lack of robust measures in this area has reportedly led to rampant cheating, undermining both the institution's credibility and the efforts of staff who strive to uphold ethical standards. According to Moriarty and Wilson (2022), a consistent and balanced approach is aligned to maintaining academic integrity and an institution's broader values.

Due to Covid-19 and opting for online teaching and assessments, the standard of quality education has dropped and is not a true reflection of a student's academic worth. Respondent 34

Respondents also called for clearer, universally understood frameworks for ethical decision-making, noting that the current policies are often ambiguous and inconsistently applied. According to Basalla (2022: 18) "universities encompass an intricate framework of individuals who work to establish their status within the community and uphold the rules, regulations, and procedures that sustain the community" (Basalla, 2022: 18). Furthermore, the need to emphasise student responsibility was frequently mentioned, with respondents advocating for a stronger partnership between staff and students in maintaining academic integrity.

One of the core purposes of higher education is to ensure that morals and values are imparted to students and graduates so that they will carry it through to the workplace and the real world, as well as to ensure that the process by which such education is imparted and the facilitators of such process maintain the highest standards in terms of morals and values, not just to accredit the institution, but to ensure a society and a world with such qualities. Respondent 10.

5.12.2 Objective 2: Ethical practices of higher education practitioners

Responses from staff relating to Objective 2, ethical practices and of HE practitioners are discussed under the theme, 'ethical concerns'.

5.12.2.1 Ethical concerns

Respondents expressed varied perspectives on the implementation of ethical standards within the institution. While ethics are regularly discussed and promoted, concerns persist about the actual application of these principles in practice. Many noted that ethics are inherently individualised, shaped by personal character and background, which complicates universal implementation.

Moral and ethical values and decisions made come from within yourself. These actions and decisions should be made even at your expense but for the betterment of all levels of society. Respondent 14

Respondents noted that this challenge is compounded by the broad and often ambiguous nature of ethical decision-making. Suggestions to improve ethical practices included providing workshops and training; however, respondents questioned whether such interventions could have a meaningful impact on individuals whose personal values differ from institutional expectations.

The institution may provide workshops and discuss the importance of morals and ethics (which is good) BUT this may not have a positive effect on all staff members morals and ethics as morals and ethics first come from a person's character and background. Some may be positively impacted by institutions morals and ethics and some may not be impacted in a positive way, it depends on the willingness of a person to change. Respondent 53.

More workshops on ethics will improve ethical standards. Respondent 64.

The emphasis on throughput, pass rates, and metrics-driven decision-making was criticised for undermining ethical practices, as it prioritises quantifiable outcomes over the quality of teaching and learning.

However, the emphasis on throughput, pass rates and the listing of bottle neck modules (the culture that there is something wrong with the module or lecturer if students do not succeed) does not create a healthy work environment for staff. Perhaps we should be asking ourselves instead if we are accepting the appropriate student type (students with the skillset for self study and development) into tertiary education or just desperately scrabbling to meet first time entry enrolment targets. Respondent 62

To address these issues, respondents suggested tools such as moderation for fairer outcomes and contextualised interviews to better understand the ethical challenges faced in decision-making processes.

Ethics is an individualised action. While the institution may take steps to educate academics on ethical considerations in teaching and learning, it does not mean that these skills are actioned. The use of moderators both internal and external to monitor ethics in the marking of students work, which assists in fair outcomes for student projects. Respondent 6

The following are some of the more pertinent responses shared by the participants.

It is essential for management to promote ethical behaviour, practice ethical behaviour and also monitor ethical behaviour. Just providing staff with training and not ensuring that this is followed through, is detrimental to the success of the institution. Respondent 7

Sadly, it seems more and more that the institution is becoming a business which focuses on increased financial growth year on year. Hence the growing pressure to publish journal articles, creative outputs, research based outputs and the close monitoring of student pass rates. Quality of education cannot thrive in an environment that is finance focused, staff are too busy ticking management boxes on performance management reviews in case they receive a slap on the wrist to focus on what they are paid to do, teach. Respondent 62

Teaching and learning as the core business has been neglected. Academic staff are left to carry the burden because management has failed to acknowledge and therefore find solutions to problems. Management is disconnected from the reality on the ground! Respondent 27

Student's responsibility for their own studies needs to be emphasised. When I had failures, who had not attended a single lecture, the dean at the time asked me what I was doing to physically get them to lectures. Unfortunately, academia often comes with ego about personal promotion and not a passion for educating the students with the graduate attributes that make gainful employment likely. Respondent 9

There is a culture of favouritism in the organisation. People are promoted, awarded based on who they know and are friends with. Inconsistency in application and awarding of promotions, funding for conferences, workshops etc. Respondent 29

Management should continue staff training on issues of morals and ethics. Decision-making should include inputs of academic staff and students. Respondent 39

5.12.3 Objective 3: Ethical dilemmas in teaching and learning

Responses from staff relating to Objective 3, ethical dilemmas in teaching and learning, are discussed under the theme, 'teaching and learning'.

5.12.3.1 Teaching and learning

The responses revealed significant concerns about resource allocation and its impact on teaching quality. Many criticised the institution's focus on financial gains and research funding, which many respondents felt detracted from the core business of teaching and learning.

Decisions are informed by financial gains. Teaching receiving less attention as it does not attract lucrative funding as research does. Respondent 36

The institution's drive towards being a leading research university is having repercussions in that academic staff are likely to compromise the standard of output for teaching and learning. Respondent 3

High staff workloads, large class sizes, and inadequate support were identified as major challenges that hindered the delivery of quality education.

High staff workloads and large class sizes negatively impacting quality. Respondent 36.

Additionally, the shift to online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic was criticised for lowering educational standards and failing to accurately reflect students' academic potential.

The absence on a policy on online cheating and minimum standards for online assessment has been devastating (my dept had 100% pass rate for over 1/3 of modules for 2021). This is a disservice to the students and university. Due to Covid-19 and opting for online teaching and assessments, the standard of quality education has dropped and not a true reflection of a student's academic worth. Respondent 34

Despite these challenges, some respondents highlighted the dedication of faculty members who continue to adhere to ethical teaching practices, even in a resource-constrained environment.

Majority of academics within our faculty adhere to ethical teaching practices.
Respondent 32

Here are a few more pertinent responses related to the theme 'teaching and learning'.

The problems that originate from poor connectivity crippled online teaching learning. Data supply also is also a very disturbing issue when it comes to effective online teaching and learning. Respondent 20

Management should be proactive in terms of the challenges academic staff face online rather than viewing the negative points only. Respondent 13

5.12.4 Objective 4: Ethical decision-making approaches

Responses from staff relating to Objective 4, ethical decision-making approaches, are discussed under the theme, 'management issues'.

5.12.4.1 Management issues

Management was perceived as disconnected from the daily realities of staff and students, with respondents calling for leadership that is more attuned to on-the-ground challenges.

If top management were considering ethics in their decisions then they would be visible. I am yet to see a member of top management on our campus, visiting students, visiting staff, seeing the challenges that we encounter every day. You cannot run an institution ethically when you have no idea about the running's on the ground. Respondent 55

Many respondents emphasised the importance of consultation and inclusivity in decision-making processes, urging management to involve all stakeholders to ensure comprehensive and equitable solutions.

The decisions made by academic management have a huge impact on the staff, learners and the institution as a whole. In their thoughts and decision-making processes, consultation with all stakeholders is key to ensure that a multitude of views are considered before the final decision. Respondent 4

The management imposes things without consultation with staff on the ground.

Respondent 26

The lack of clear performance evaluations and over-complicated administrative systems were seen as significant barriers, contributing to low morale and inefficiencies. Policies such as the mandatory vaccination policy were described as divisive and poorly communicated, leaving some staff feeling marginalised. Additionally, ambiguities in roles and responsibilities, such as questions about the definition of 'academic management' or 'academic practitioner' highlighted the need for clearer delineation of duties and expectations within the institution.

Ethics (with compassion) should come above everything else. Respondent 9

It is difficult to comment on others' ethical decision-making unless you are witness to it or have experienced it in some way. I would also question whether everyone has the same understanding of ethical decision-making. Respondent 35

The unique circumstances of both employees and students should always be considered in the ethical climate of the university. Although, there isn't a one size fits all solution, challenges experienced must be identified, fully explored and considered in formulating solutions. Respondent 30

5.12.5 General complaints

A recurring theme among respondents was dissatisfaction with the institution's handling of infrastructural and technological needs. Many highlighted delays in replacing essential equipment such as laptops and air conditioners, which affected their ability to work effectively.

My experience at DUT: I waited eleven years for a brand-new, high-quality laptop. Other employees' laptops were replaced every three to four years. I also had to wait 8 years for my office air conditioner to be replaced. Respondent 63.

The respondents further believed that these logistical frustrations were exacerbated by a perceived lack of consistency and fairness in resource allocation, with some employees feeling neglected compared to others. Furthermore, the institution's values were described as vague and poorly defined, creating a sense of uncertainty about

the moral and ethical direction of the university. Overall, the feedback reflected a need for greater transparency, equity, and responsiveness in addressing staff concerns.

Apart from the recent short-sighted dismissals, the ethical strength within the institution is up to par. Respondent 12

You really don't want to know. Whatever I say is not going to change anything. I just have to let all the accumulated injustices go to become a better person.
Respondent 59

There is a general long-standing distrust between staff and academic management. Lived Values without visible changes in daily actions means very little. Respondent 23

Staff-student ratios ignored in some departments. Respondent 36

Dictatorship rising at an alarming level. Respondent 36

Values are not clearly defined, nor are they acted upon. Respondent 44

Teaching and learning takes a back seat. Respondent 21

5.13 Conclusions

The results of the study highlight significant patterns and disparities in ethical decision-making practices, institutional culture, and the integration of online learning technologies. Across the thematic areas analysed, it was evident that respondents' perceptions were influenced by their demographic and professional characteristics, such as gender, age, faculty affiliation, and years of service. For instance, the findings revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.610$, $p < 0.01$) between ethical decision-making processes and online learning and technology integration, underscoring the importance of ethical frameworks in enhancing technological adoption. However, disparities in perceptions across biographical variables, such as gender and age, suggest that the institution's ethical practices and technology initiatives are not experienced uniformly.

Significant gender-based differences were noted in perceptions of online learning, with male respondents rating this dimension higher than their female counterparts ($p = 0.013$). This disparity suggests potential differences in access, familiarity, or support

systems, warranting targeted strategies to bridge the gap and foster inclusivity. Age-based analysis revealed that respondents over the age of 55 years consistently reported less favourable perceptions of ethical decision-making processes and online learning integration, compared to younger cohorts. These generational differences may reflect varied expectations or experiences, pointing to the need for tailored interventions that address the unique challenges faced by older employees in adapting to institutional changes.

Faculty-wise, the results revealed substantial disparities in perceptions of performance evaluations and prioritisation ($p = 0.013$). Faculties such as Health Sciences and Accounting and Informatics held more favourable views, while Engineering and the Built Environment reported significantly lower perceptions. This suggests that some faculties may benefit from more structured and transparent evaluation systems. Furthermore, significant concerns about the institutional ethical culture were evident, with a negative correlation ($r = -0.277$, $p < 0.01$) observed between institutional ethical culture and ethical decision-making processes. This indicates that perceived shortcomings in institutional ethics may adversely impact respondents' perceptions of decision-making fairness and consistency.

Overall, the findings highlight strengths, such as the alignment between ethical decision-making and online learning, while identifying areas for improvement, such as decision-making consistency, faculty-specific disparities, and institutional culture. These results underscore the need for the institution to strengthen its ethical frameworks, ensure equitable support across demographics and faculties, and foster a cohesive organisational culture. Addressing these gaps will not only enhance ethical decision-making and institutional effectiveness but also contribute to a more inclusive and equitable academic environment.

5.14 Summary of chapter

This chapter presented the findings and interpretation of the quantitative data. It includes the statistical analysis of the questionnaire responses. Descriptive statistics was used to visualise and interpret the data whilst inferential statistics was used to draw out deeper insights and correlation analysis was used to determine relationships between the key variables. The analysis explored the aggregated perceptions of respondents across the following thematic areas: ethical decision-making processes,

online learning and technology integration, consistency and ethical standards, performance evaluations and prioritisation, and institutional ethical culture and values. The results indicated areas of significant variability, agreement and concern. Furthermore, the findings from the open-ended question brought to life several themes including robustness of policies particularly during Covid, ethical concerns on the management of students and the manner in which staff appraisals are conducted, complaints on deteriorating infrastructure and technology. Chapter 6 presents the findings of the semi-structured interviews.

CHAPTER 6: : PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 presented the results and findings stemming from the statistical analysis of the responses gathered from the questionnaire, which comprised closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. Following from this, Chapter 6 presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews. The qualitative findings support the aim of the study which was to examine the views, perceptions and feelings of academic practitioners regarding the ethical decision-making practices that impact teaching and learning.

A mixed method approach using explanatory sequential design was undertaken for this study whereby data was collected in two separate phases. The quantitative data was collected first and analysed. The results from the quantitative data were used to construct the semi-structured interview schedule (the qualitative design). This approach allowed for the researcher to use the qualitative findings to aid in clarifying and substantiating the quantitative results. The presentation of the findings emanates from the objectives of the study and the key research questions.

6.2 Study objectives and key research questions

Objectives:

- To ascertain the moral decision-making processes for teaching and learning in higher education.
- To examine the ethical practices of higher education practitioners with specific emphasis on decision-making in teaching and learning
- To determine ethical dilemmas faced by educational practitioners pertinent to teaching and learning in Higher Education.
- To explore the best ethical approaches suited to guide decision-making in teaching and learning in higher education.
- To determine the decision-making framework that can be used to make ethically conscious decisions.

Key research questions:

- What are moral decision-making processes for teaching and learning in higher education made?
- What are the ethical practices of higher education practitioners relating to teaching and learning?
- What are the ethical dilemmas experienced by educational practitioners pertinent to teaching and learning?
- What are the best ethical approaches suited to guide decision-making in teaching and learning in higher education?
- What decision-making framework can be used to make ethically conscious decision-making?

6.3 Presentation of research findings: Qualitative analysis

A thematic analysis process was adopted to analyse the qualitative data. According to du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014: 102), "thematic reviews focus on different schools of thought and group the literature into differing views, perspective or themes". The qualitative data analysis was drawn from the interviews conducted with CQPA and CELT personnel and the executive deans, deputy deans and heads of departments. There were two interview schedules constructed for the two groups of staff members (Appendix E and Appendix F).

6.3.1 Interviews: CQPA and CELT personnel

This section provides the results of the findings of the qualitative data that emerged from analysis of the responses of the interviews with the CQPA and CELT personnel.

6.3.1.1 DUT teaching and learning policies as a guiding instrument in making ethical decisions

Regarding this question posed to the interviewees, "**as policies guide us in making ethical decisions, does DUT have a teaching and learning policy?**", all the respondents were in agreement that they do have a teaching and learning strategy document which act as policy/guidelines.

So, in terms of, teaching and learning, as far as I'm aware, there is a teaching and learning strategy document which is provided from the CELT division of the university. So, I wouldn't say that there is a policy as such, but from what I know, there is a teaching and learning strategy document". Participant 1 (Academic Support Staff – Quality).

6.3.1.2 Individuals responsible for developing a teaching and learning policy

In a subsequent question **"whose responsibility is to develop a teaching and learning policy?"**, all the respondents agreed that it was CELT's responsibility to develop a learning and teaching policy or guidelines.

I think across the universities, all centres for teaching and learning should be responsible for these policies, the guidelines, the strategies to have input. Participant 3 (Academic support staff – Quality)

Furthermore, one participant added that that deputy vice chancellor (DVC) for teaching and learning and CQPA also provide input to the teaching and learning document.

My thinking it would be a CELT responsibility. I think it would be the DVC teaching and learning and under the DVC it would be CELT. Participant 2 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

6.3.1.3 Ethical considerations to be included in the policy documents

A follow up question was posed to the interviewees: **"what ethical consideration should be part of this policy?"**. The majority of the respondents stated that the policy should address the problem of plagiarism.

We are going to look at issues of plagiarism... what are we putting in place to circumvent plagiarism ... Participant 3 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

Ethics around things like plagiarism – integrity of assessments in terms of copying or cheating. Participant 4 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

Participants were of the view that the topics of social justice, equity, and access to relevant resources and services should also be a top priority, particularly as South Africa is a developing economy. Furthermore, policies need to consider professional development that will guide lecturers coming from industry.

Creating opportunities for lecturers to have some sort of development process would help, because if we have academics coming in, let's say from industry, there is a need for professional development on that front. It's an ethical issue to make people aware of the challenges [and] what to anticipate when they go into the classroom. Participant 1 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

6.3.1.4 Monitoring of departments to ascertain that the curriculum design captures the student learning proficiency

In response to the question: **"How are the departments being monitored in making sure that their curriculum design captures the student learning proficiency in their respective modules and ascertaining that there is a balance of teaching methods/approaches which meets the necessary module aims and outcomes?"**, the respondents stated that in terms of monitoring for compliance, mid-term audits are conducted by CQPA. The CQPA identifies challenges, best practices, and gaps. Thereafter, recommendations are suggested, and departments have a time frame to resolve issues. This is monitored by the quality promotion officer (QPO) in the respective faculty to ascertain whether the curriculum design is aligned with student learning.

So in this way we are able to monitor to make sure that the curriculum design captures the student learning proficiency and we also check to see that there's a balance of teaching methods and approaches and this is based on the feedback that we get from the students, the staff, as well as the programme alignment checks that are carried out before the audits. Participant 1 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

The respondents indicated that CELT provides direction and guidance and developmental workshops for lecturers that intend changing their practices and approach. They further believed that it was important for lecturers to reflect on their teaching practices and methods.

... I was wondering whether if you are thinking of a variety of teaching methods, you know that as lecturer might understand his or her students quite well and realised this approach is not working. There's some degree of flexibility in his

or her teaching methodologies and approaches so that you are willing to try different approaches. Participant 2 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

I think not only monitoring with the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the professional body requirements, but you also monitoring [to make] sure that your module design is in alignment with all these expectations which incorporates change and incorporates a variety of teaching methods that you could engage in with your students. Participant 2 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

There is a pre-programme review evaluation conducted by CQPA, during which a committee that includes CELT representatives, student representatives and industry/advisory board representatives comment on teaching and learning practices.

So it's a PRE-programme review and evaluation where the programme is evaluated and monitored by CQPA. And I think they've got a stunning programme, where they invite academics from other departments and they invite an external expert as the chair of the committee. And then us as CELT reps who can comment on teaching and learning, their student reps as well. So we get a voice from the students, from lecturers, from external, from the Liaison Committee as well. So you know that kind of information, the rich information that is coming through. Participant 3 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

Lecturer Evaluation Questionnaires (LEQs) and Student Evaluation Questionnaires (SEQs) completed by students provide a developmental tool for lecturers and insights in the teaching of their respective modules.

CQPA also does the LEQS and SEQs so students comment about the lecturer's strategies and practice and then comment about the module as well. Participant 3 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

6.3.1.5 Contingencies plans/policies to move students to online learning during the pandemic

This question was posed to interviewees: **"When making the decision to go the route of online learning during the pandemic, were there existing contingencies plans/policies in place to move students to online learning. If yes, how did it**

cater for accessibility (laptops, data, connectivity issues)? If no, are there plans to develop policies in the case of future emergencies/disasters (e.g. contingency funds to cater to student needs, etc.)?" The respondents reported that this was an unanticipated emergency, and systems were not in place. Post the pandemic, they were unaware of any plans in place for if there is a recurrence or similar event. CELT and the E-Learning unit were commended in having systems in place at the onset of Covid-19, and for being very instrumental introducing MS teams and in providing intensive training in assisting lecturers and students on the online platform.

The participants were not aware of contingency funds for the future to cater for the students' needs, they believed this was an important discussion to have. DUT's remote teaching guide was developed and was available during Covid-19 which guided lecturers on conducting remote teaching and learning classes.

I think it's going to be quite a challenge to have a separate fund for emergencies, but maybe the university has a contingency fund in general and then we could tap into that depending on the nature of the emergency and the need. But whether there is a separate contingency fund for [an emergency] should face to face teaching and learning come to a halt? I'm not too sure about that. Participant 2 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

And in terms of contingency plans and so on and funds like you say? Actually, no! I don't actually know of that. I'm not actually aware of that. Actually, a good question. Participant 4 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

Data challenges were experienced with students not having wi-fi or mobile data or insufficient data as well as connectivity issues. They were unable to attend online lectures and working on their assessments (assignments and projects) was a challenge.

You know, if the wi-fi was down, then they were unable to connect. And if they didn't have their own laptops, then by providing them with data was meaningless. Because how were they, in any case, going to connect? So these were the different types of challenges that were faced. Participant 1 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

The integrity of online assessments became questionable.

... with online assessments, one needs to question the validity and the integrity of the online assessments ... during the COVID period and with the online assessments, the results that the students had obtained were quite high, so the pass rates and the throughput rates were extremely high, also resulting in many students receiving a cum laude, and that for me is questionable. Participant 1 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

The university has been looking at different software i.e., a proctoring system which has been piloted for use in online assessments. In terms of providing students with laptops there are no plans in place to provide students with laptops. During the pandemic, students did not have access to devices, they used their cell phones. However, it was important that they had access to computers/ laptops for their assignments.

6.3.1.6 Students equipped with the necessary skills required in using the online platforms

This question was posed to the participants: **"Do you believe that students are equipped with the necessary skills required in using the online platforms?"**

There were mixed responses on the preparedness of students having the necessary skills required in using the online platform.

I think there is such a diversity in terms of preparedness when our students come to the university that I wouldn't want to say as a blanket statement, students are prepared. I think that we owe it to our students to make opportunities available to them should they feel that [they] need additional preparedness for learning. Participant 2 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

Some participants believed that students are equipped with the necessary skills required in using online platforms.

Our students are tech savvy, so they come in knowing how to use their smartphones so they learn the technologies [of other software mediums]. Participant 3 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

It is believed that the First Year Student Experience (FYSE) programme equipped them in this regard. There was concern expressed that not all first years were equipped with the necessary computer skills or were au fait with technology in general. In addition to the first years, some respondents believed that not all students are prepared or have the necessary skills required to use the computer. Respondents commented that students need to be continually monitored to ascertain whether they have the necessary skills.

... we need to monitor when the students arrive, their level of readiness and this should be done on an annual basis. ... I think some of the universities do that. Participant 2 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

Let's say if I know that 70% of my first-year students are not very comfortable or haven't had much exposure to online learning in their matric, you know their schooling years, then I would make sure that the transition is a little bit gentler. Participant 2 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

Challenges experienced by lecturers included technology not being functional in some computer labs and lecture venues. During the pandemic, training was offered to students on the different online platforms being used. Additionally, students had the opportunity to work in the computer labs if they did not have a computer.

6.3.1.7 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education students' academic life

This question was posed to participants in relation to Covid-19: **"The Covid-19 pandemic has a major impact on higher education students' academic life in relation to the change over from contact lectures to online lectures and the change in assessment methods."** Participants were requested to comment on whether the decisions made in relation to the various assessment strategies employed were in the best interest of the students. One respondent was of the view that arising from Covid-19 and considering the health issues of students and staff, the university had no choice but to move to online lectures – although data and connectivity issues were a problem.

I think it was to protect the academic programme that we continued with assessments online. Of course, you know, when we looked at the analysis of

results, we could see a huge shift between how students were performing prior to the pandemic and then during the pandemic. And so, there was a lot of disparity there and reasons for concern. Participant 2 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

Another respondent believed that the change of assessment strategy from exams to continuous assessment was beneficial to the students.

But we also have to be very, mindful of the fact that we are fair and bringing in the social justice lens in this discussion, you don't want to design your assessments or any teaching and learning that would disadvantage some because of the inequities that exist in our country. So, there's quite a few factors that need to be considered when I am looking at my assessment strategy, is it going to be equitable to all my students? Participant 2 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

The participants were of the view that by not using a proctoring system during online tests, the pass rate and throughput rates were relatively high. The results were questionable but the necessity of going online was beyond the control of the university. Some of the respondents were of the view that the university is in the process of looking at systems to protect the integrity of assessments.

6.3.1.8 Strategic decisions made by management in monitoring the integrity of assessments

Participants were asked: **"what strategic decisions are made by management in monitoring the integrity of assessments or teaching methods?"** One participant commented that in terms of integrity of assessments and the teaching approaches used by lecturers, they examine the evidence based on the interventions that are applied by academics in making sure that the assessments are fair, valid and aligned to the teaching methods. Internal and external reviews are also fundamental in maintaining good practices and consistencies.

Internal reviews and external reviews are very important in terms of strategic decisions because the reviews would help us. If it's an internal review, it's like a self-introspection as to what can we do better, and then external review looks at it in terms of a more national level comparing the different universities and

indicating this is where you could improve or even share good practice from other universities with us. Participant 2 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

Participants stated that teaching and learning documents are accessible. In terms of integrity these policies are reviewed and updated regularly. However, given the emergence of new problems, such as artificial intelligence, the approach must be revisited.

I think it's become necessary to review the policy even though it's, you know, its valid until 2026 and then it gets reviewed. So, for example, if the arrival of something like artificial intelligence and let's say the plagiarism policy needs to be reviewed, then it would, because of necessity. Participant 2 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

Participants stated that there are regulations in place in examination venues on the procedures of conducting assessments. Making strategic decisions reside with Senate and other bodies – these are existing structures the university has to monitor and improve and update systems to allow for the authenticity of assessments and teaching methods. Moderation is part of the assessment policy and ensures the quality of the assessments. Examination and test papers are moderated which ensures quality. Moderation ensures that the assessments are fair and authentic. Exit level modules are moderated by external moderators. Exam boards also review pass rates.

In addition to that we've got exam boards where there is a review of pass rates. And that, I think is important. Because we can at that stage, have discussions about student's success. And it also gives us insight on how can we improve. Participant 3 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

6.3.2 Interviews: Executive deans, deputy deans and heads of department

This section provides analysis of the findings of the qualitative data that emerged from the analysis of the responses of the interviews with the executive deans, deputy deans and heads of department.

6.3.2.1 Principled and just ethical decisions

This question was posed to the participants **"Principled and just ethical decisions require proficient understanding of the correct procedure for examining and**

assessing the processes that would influence our choices in decisions. Please explain how you ensure that you abide by the above?" Respondents believed that it was important to consider one's value systems when deciding on the right action, and to always apply fairness and maintain transparency.

Transparency is important, reflect on one's own value system in choosing to do what is right Reflect on consequences of making various choices."
Participant 1 (Academic Head)

I think a lot of the ethical decisions or principles that I take comes from my upbringing comes from the way I look at the world. Participant 3 (Academic Head)

It is also good practice to engage with other staff members who have dealt with similar situations. They believed consulting with knowledgeable people, relating to the issue at hand, provides guidance on making the correct decisions.

Find out from relevant people who may have an understanding if I am not certain as to what is required. Participant 1(Academic Head)

The respondents were of the view that it was important to be guided by policies and procedures, rules and regulations when making principles and just ethical decisions.

In ensuring principled and just ethical decisions, I consistently follow our established policies and procedures for evaluating processes that impact decision-making, promoting a thorough understanding and adherence to correct procedures. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

Respondents further believed that experience also plays a role in making ethical decisions. One has to consider the different cultures, environment, background and challenges. It is also important to take cognisance that not all rules will be applicable to all situations or individuals.

And making sure that the student will not be disadvantaged. But in saying that, that decision should not disadvantage historic students. Participant 4 (Academic Head)

There is no one size fits all in HE.

First of all, you need to understand the rules of engagement. What is the examining process all about within an institution and how it works. Because sometimes you think that maybe what you're doing is the correct way however the process is [different]. Participant 4(Academic Head)

... one thing ... very important for ethics is to always be fair. It always the same whether it's a student, whether it's a colleague. You always interrogate it like that. If you stand by your rules, your ethics, then I don't think you can go wrong. I always say you have to live with your decision, even if it was a wrong decision. But based on the information on hand, we make a decision. Participant 4 (Academic Head)

6.3.2.2 Decisions made in terms of teaching and learning arises from honesty and integrity

In answer to a question **"Society and university stakeholders expect that the decisions you make in terms of teaching and learning arises from honesty and integrity. How do you make sure these values are part of all your decisions?"**, participants believed that one needs to reflect on one's values, making sure that your decisions are built with honesty and integrity.

Follow the truth. It may be rigid but it is the answer Follow the straight and narrow path. Participant 1 (Academic Head)

The majority of the respondents believed that the qualities of honesty, transparency, integrity and ethical conduct must be part of one's character.

Upholding honesty and integrity in decisions is paramount. I integrate these values by fostering a culture of transparency and ethical behaviour within the department. Furthermore, consequence management is implemented if these values are compromised. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

I think honesty and integrity really stems from what are the ethical rules that governs and guides us as academics. So, honesty and integrity are one of the core elements of teaching and learning, obviously, and I think that's fundamental. So, if you're looking at how do I make sure that these values are

part of my decision in terms of honesty, it's part of my DNA. Participant 7 (Academic Head)

They further stated that concepts of collaboration and teamwork are very important.

So again, I think it's also good to collaborate. But collaborate not just internally, you collaborate externally, check what the industry wants, because I cannot go and teach something that industry does not want. So, if industry wants this and I'm not doing that then I'm not being honest to the student and there's also no integrity. Participant 4 (Academic Head).

Respondents also believed considering all stakeholders in the institutions is fundamental when making decisions.

I think one of the critical things with regard to decision-making, it's honesty and then you have to consider those people who will be affected by your decision And then those decision that you are taking is at the best interest of the stakeholders in particular and the university at large. Participant 9 (Academic Head)

6.3.2.3 Decisions are always consistent in every situation or circumstances

In a follow-up question "**How do you ensure that your decisions are always consistent in every situation or circumstances. What technique do you consistently employ?**", the majority of respondents believed that transparency and consistency is very important.

Consistency in decision-making is achieved by employing a systematic approach that considers various situations, ensuring decisions align with our values and principles. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

I think consistency would mean when you set a precedent so that you are consistent and you treat everyone fairly and sometimes it's difficult because we've had incidences where I know that the student is wrong. Participant 3 (Academic Head)

The respondents were of the view that always being fair and consistent in any decision one has to make, taking into consideration various circumstances and contexts, also following the rules and going over all the facts is important in making correct decisions.

Record the decisions made and follow precedent in the interests of fairness and consistency unless circumstances change which justify a different decision than one made in the past. Accept that exceptions may lead to a new rule. Participant 1 (Academic Head)

I mean rules are there for a reason and I try as much as possible to stick to the rules, you know, but sometimes you base your decisions on the individual because they may have a very special circumstance that's not covered by the rules. So you have to work outside the rules. Participant 3 (Academic Head)

Respondents believed that if one follows rules and regulations and policies then there will always be consistency in all decisions made. There is no one size fits all, for all decisions taken, sometimes different circumstances expect you to make different decisions.

Cannot make the same decision with everyone. Look at [each] case on merit. Decisions made on a needs base not what others have ... my consistency is about making sure that I make decisions that are based on equitability and what I can provide as a manager. Participant 5 (Academic Head)

Yes, in my decisions, I maintain consistency, although sometimes you are compelled to move away and just to adapt to the situation. Participant 10 (Academic Head)

They further indicated that if the decision-making process is transparent, it will compel you to always act ethically and to guarantee that integrity is upheld when it comes to decisions made within the organisation.

I believe that transparency is very important. If you make decisions in a transparent way, then transparency will force you to make decisions that are within that particular framework ... that are not in contradiction with what we do and what people or what members of the society expects us to do What I'm saying is that when decisions are made, be transparent as a leader in the

institution, make decisions in a transparent way, ensuring that nothing is hidden. Participant 11(Academic Head)

6.3.2.4 Dealing with issues of moral dilemma

This question was posed to participants: **"Please describe an incident on how you dealt with an issue when confronted with a moral dilemma?"** The majority of the respondents reported that transparency and fairness and input from all staff played a vital role when confronted with a moral dilemma.

When faced with a moral dilemma, I prioritise open communication, seeking input from all stakeholders and applying ethical frameworks to arrive at a resolution that aligns with our values. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

Staff are also guided by their moral and ethical values when presented with issues of moral dilemmas.

I think your morals is very much tied to your ethical behaviour. So, in dealing with any incident that you know where you are in a moral dilemma, you would look at what are the ethical principles that would guide me in order to deal with this incident or the situation? Morals and ethics work hand in hand, so you have very strong ethics in order to make correct moral decisions. Participant 7 (Academic Head)

[It] places seniors in difficult situations when students lie. It's hard to find a solution to solve their problems when academics do not know the truth. It is important to deal with issues with students' straight on.

The following are some of the more pertinent examples of dilemmas that heads of departments go through on a daily basis and the processes of ethical decisions maintained or followed through.

At the time when annual subject offerings still existed at DUT, there were certain lecturers who only wanted to lecture annual subjects as it meant setting and marking one main exam and supplementary exam for three subjects, while lecturers doing semester modules had to set papers and mark for six main and six supplementary exams. The timeframes for semesters were also more pressurised and constrained. So, I dealt with the inequality in loads as follows:

- *Transparency – I made the above discrepancy known at a departmental meeting and*
- *Introduced fairness – looked at ways to make the loads more equitable and give relief for the lecturers with more semesterised modules.*
- *Input from staff themselves also helped as well as the fact that annual subjects were being phased out. Participant 1(Academic Head)*

It's what happened last year. The first semester of 2022, I remember the university took a decision that all third year students should come to the university for their tests. There were students who were not in favour of writing the test in person, so they disrupted the process. The lecturer informed me about that incident and I asked the lecturer to reschedule the test. The following week, students came and they disturbed. They started with the process of disturbing the process of writing. So, I had to take a decision, because firstly, it was not a department decision for the students to write the test, it was an institutional decision. Which means that those who are preventing others from writing were actually in conflict with what the university required. And it's because they wanted to cheat online, so that was the dilemma that I had. If I inform legal services about what their leaders were doing, they would have faced disciplinary or expulsion.

The decision that I took, even though it was against the students, I know that the consequences led to them being expelled from the institution because they were preventing people who were ready to write the test at the time. So that is the dilemma that I had.

They were expelled. They were violent, they were violent towards the lecturers, they were insulting other students who were ready to write the test. Participant 11 (Academic Head)

6.3.2.5 Best decision-making tools and problem-solving techniques applied when making difficult decision

In response to a question **"What are the best decision-making tools and problem-solving techniques you best applied when making difficult decisions"**,

respondents stated that one has to look at both sides of the issues whether it is a staff member or student.

Hear the other side: Where it involved staff members, get their input. Where it involved students, hear their side; base decisions on fairness and equity; be transparent. Participant 1 (Academic Head)

Decisions must be made arising from fairness and impartiality and be guided by policies, rules and processes.

While bearing in mind 'doing things right' (processes and procedures, ensure that we do the right thing, taking into account the fairness and consequences of the decision/measures). Participant 1 (Academic Head)

The decision-making tools and techniques I find most effective involve thorough analysis, considering both short-term and long-term implications, and consulting with relevant experts or colleagues and I'm always guided by our policies. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

Respondents stated that one should seek advice from either staff or students depending on the issue before making any decisions.

Get input on possible solutions from staff/students involved; and follow precedent set in the past as far as possible. Participant 1 (Academic Head)

It was also important one's emotions should not get in the way of making the correct decisions. "I don't become emotional. And don't take it personal when you're dealing with the problem. Do not make it a personal thing, because, especially we in the service business because providing education is the service business and we're dealing with customers. Participant 8 (Academic Head)

Respondents believed that principles of consultation, consistency, listening and being transparent are also important tools to be utilised in all decision-making processes.

I consult extensively before I make a decision ... put all the alternatives on the table and see which one best serves the department or which one best serves the interest of the institution. Participant 11 (Academic Head)

Analysing and assessing a situation is crucial. Do not rush into judgments that you have not thoroughly considered or assessed.

... but I also say you don't rush into something because if you rush into something, it means that you didn't analyse it properly and you didn't think about it So there's always, maybe a bit of overthinking, but once I get to the point I know I'm happy, I can live with it even if someone says it was wrong.

Participant 4 (Academic Head)

Basalla (2022: 27) cogently expresses "wise leaders are learners. If they stop learning, they stop leading wisely. Leaders who learn ask the right questions, get the most accurate answers, and make the wisest decisions". This process requires the leader to truly listen and hear the answer with an open mind.

6.3.2.6 Teaching and learning decisions are made with collaboration with exco members/staff members collectively

This question was posed to the respondents: **"When making teaching and learning decisions, do you collaborate with your exco members/staff members and collectively make these decisions? Please explain."** The majority of respondents believed that they do collaborate with their staff when input is required as decision-making should be a collective effort and that being open and transparent is very important.

Collaboration is essential. Decisions regarding teaching and learning involve input from exco members and staff, ensuring a collective approach that considers diverse perspectives and the most suitable solution is selected that ensures our core business is never compromised. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

I'm a firm believer in that, although I'm the head of department - I never ever keep things from staff. I think you get much better buy in from staff if you are open and honest. So, in my department, nothing is done without the staff knowing, and we make decisions collectively. Participant 3 (Academic Head)

We talk! So, if you don't collaborate its chaos. If you make a decision on your own it's like you're ignoring the rest of the world. And it will impact on the results

and will impact on the lives of everybody. So it's better to have that discussion.

Participant 4 (Academic Head)

I have to make sure that I consult as much as possible so that at the end of the day when the decision is made it shouldn't be the decision of the HOD it should be a decision of the department. Participant 9 (Academic Head)

A respondent stated that having curriculum discussions with all staff about teaching strategies is vital.

We do in terms of re-curriculum ... that was not something that I could do on my own. We had to work together because everybody had to be part of this process. We had to discuss what we were going to teach ... how we going to teach. We didn't know whether we would have time to do it but we made a collective decision. Participant 6 (Academic Head)

A respondent asserts that certain departmental decisions regarding students, needs to go via the Exco of Faculty Board after it is discussed with the HOD. More serious issues are taken to the Faculty Board and then to the Senate. It is important that as the university is governed by systems and structures, one must ensure that no decisions that are made regarding the students are only made by one individual.

When making teaching and learning decisions, we are governed by policies and processes, procedures and systems ... anybody can make decisions, but what are the consequences for the institution? You know what are the rules that I'm breaking or bending slightly. So, it's not a decision I can make, so therefore, you have to involve the structures for decision-making. Participant 7 (Academic Head)

6.3.2.7 Teaching and learning decisions taken, are clear of invested interests/personal bias

A question posed to the respondents **"How do you ensure that when you make teaching and learning decisions, they are clear of invested interests/personal bias?"** Respondents believed transparency is very important and personal interest must be declared.

Personal interests must be declared upfront and affected persons should recuse themselves/not participate in the decision-making process." Participant 1 (Academic Head)

They were of the view, if you follow policies, rules and regulation this will eradicate bias.

To mitigate personal bias, I maintain transparency in decision-making processes and actively seek feedback from diverse sources to ensure a well-rounded perspective. If one is guided by policies, then bias will be eliminated. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

Respondents believed that it is important to focus on why we are here. We make decisions based on the students' wellbeing and consult with knowledgeable people if unsure of making a particular decision.

Yes, we tried by all means to run away from bias, but as human beings, the whole issue of biasness will come into play. But it is important that we have to focus more on what we are here for. Firstly, as lecturers we are here for our students, we are here to represent DUT to the best of our ability. To make sure that the students when they leave here are built with those graduate attributes and they have been achieved, so let's put all these biases aside. Participant 9 (Academic Head)

6.3.2.8 Incorporating empathy and compassion when making important teaching and learning decisions

This question was posed to the respondents: **"Do you incorporate empathy and compassion when making important teaching and learning decisions? If yes, please explain your method for incorporating this?"** The majority of the respondents answered yes. They stated that even though it's important to incorporate empathy and compassion, one needs to look at the situations and consider the extenuating factors and then provide necessary processes.

Yes! Consider ameliorating/mitigating factors when making a decision on / deciding on measures. However, this should not cloud responsibility for one's actions. If a person has done something wrong, they need to take responsibility

for this, however, the measures/consequences may be less harsh if the situation demands it. Participant 1(Academic Head)

Empathy and compassion are integral in decision-making. I incorporate these qualities by evaluating the situation and understanding the impact of decisions on students and staff, fostering a supportive learning environment. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

Respondents believed that listening to students is very important as each story comes with their own challenges.

There's no method for us ... for me and my staff it's the same ... this is not a job for us. It's almost like a calling. Participant 3 (Academic Head)

It is important that whatever the outcome of the decisions whether favourable or unfavourable, students need to understand the way a particular decision was taken.

[However big or small a situation is], and if the decision is not in the favour of the student, which is when you go to another level in terms of empathy ... because the students don't understand why certain decisions are being made. So, you've got to be empathetic. I think empathy is applicable in any situation when dealing with any stakeholder at the university. Empathy is one thing, but empathy in practice becomes compassion. Participant 7 (Academic Head)

A participant stated that it is critical to show students empathy and compassion. For instance, during load shedding, when they are unable take an online test, which is essential for the academic programme and if students arrive late, we should listen to their challenges instead of closing the doors. They might have a good excuse.

I share this very same sentiments with my staff member. I said, "Guys, if you are here to fail the student, you want to prove a point that your subject is one of the difficult subjects in this department. [Then] you are in the wrong place. Go somewhere else!", because that's what other lecturers are doing. They want to prove a point. I don't know what point. Participant 9 (Academic Head)

Remember, our role is not only to teach students, not only to tell students about what is prescribed in the textbook, but our role over and above that, we have to be parents. We have to exhibit a parental role or play a parental role to our

students. Guide them in the ways of life. Because they impact negatively on our teaching and learning, you may find that when are you are the best lecturer. Of course, you may be the best lecturer, but what if your students have problems? Over and above your teaching, you have to infuse methods of empathy, have to be considerate. You have to understand that you are not dealing with robots you are dealing with human beings. People who have emotions and feelings.

Participant 11 (Academic Head)

6.3.2.9 Providing quality education instead of being business driven and "concentrating only on financial gain"

Participants were asked **"How do we ensure that our focus is to provide quality education instead of being business driven and concentrating only on financial gain?"** Respondents were of the view that it was fundamental to look at disadvantaged students regarding financial challenges and literacy.

It is absolutely important to take into account the disadvantage faced by students, where they come from and the consequences of such disadvantage, such as financial challenges, low literacy/IT literacy...There should be alternative means to deal with funding/non-payment issues, especially for deserving students. Participant 1(Academic Head)

The respondents stated the university must offer high-quality education since we are driven by what the industry requires. Sending students to the job markets without the requisite skills damages the institution's credibility.

Prioritising quality education over financial gain requires a balanced approach, considering the educational impact while maintaining financial sustainability through prudent resource management. Our assessments must be evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure our standards are maintained. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

The respondents further believed that continuous review of the curriculum programme is necessary so that we can see the progress made and take corrective measures where necessary. If departments are costly to run they look at using their special funds and introducing short courses. Some departments do not increase their student numbers, as they believe in quality over quantity.

For our department, our professional boards give us a number that we can take for enrolment and the number normally is not something that the institution agrees with. So, we've used basically the professional board directives to be able to make sure that we've got the number that is manageable. So, we can provide them with the best possible education. Participant 5 (Academic Head)

Some participants believe that students should not pass a module if they have displayed poor performance. The focus should be on quality over quantity.

I think there again I already mentioned ... if you go quantity ... somewhere it's going to bite you. So it's not about the numbers, it's not about the quantity. If I only have a 20% pass rate. I will defend it because I know what I've done and how I got them there and then that 20%. Participant 4 (Academic Head)

The respondents further believed that the university needs be attentive in what skills, industry is looking out for when they employ our students. We need to make sure that the students are equipped with the appropriate graduate-level attributes as the university is at risk if we send underprepared professionals into industry. This is further supported by Kumar and Rewari (2022) who highlight the mismatch between academia and industry skills required and note that one of the ways to bridge the gap can be through leveraging online platforms as long as this is integrated into the curriculum.

If we looking at education, I don't think we can actually do our own thing because we are very much governed by the quality processes, procedures and policies, not just within (DUT) but within higher education as a whole. In following those policies and procedures, obviously you would ensure that quality is maintained and continually evaluating and continually plugging [gaps] and [making] interventions where you have come short in terms of quality. Participant 7 (Academic Head)

As much as we might like to or we are trying our level best to deliver quality education, it boils down to one thing, it's the money. The subsidy at the end of the day, because each and every year, the subsidy that is given by the Department of Higher Education and Training of South Africa (DHET) is diminishing. Participant 9 (Academic Head)

6.3.2.10 Structures that are in place for the holistic development of students rather than concentrating on making sure they achieve high marks and passing

A question was posed to participants on **"What structures do we have in place to build on the holistic development of students rather than only concentrating on making sure they achieve high marks and passing?"** Respondents believed it was important to equip students with life-long learning, while also emphasising their entrepreneurial and technological skills and skills-based learning.

Prepare them for life rather than for certification. Entrepreneurship skills are important, opens up job creation rather than job dependence. Participant 1 (Academic Head)

Structures for holistic student development involve comprehensive educational programmes, mentorship initiatives, and extracurricular activities that contribute to well-rounded student growth? Participant 2 (Academic Head)

A respondent was of the view that it was important to help students improve their writing and verbal communication abilities.

Improve their written and spoken communication skills, especially where English is not their first language. Participant 1 (Academic Head)

Students must repeat the year if they are not ready to advance to the next level. Respondents were of the view that when students participate in community engagement it brings about positive and intrinsic gratification.

Students participated in community engagement. They learned the value of giving back ... to those that are less fortunate. Participant 6 (Academic Head)

Respondents were of the view that one should maintain an open-door approach to allow students to discuss their challenges and difficulties.

Yes, of course. I organised [a leadership team building camp for] all 18 class reps. We do not actually give them the skills on how to deal with student matters in class. We want them to shine. [We] want them to succeed? But what extent do we actually know our students? As persons, not as students, will come to

us. For learning, we impart knowledge to these people, but to what extent do we know them? How much do we know about our students? Participant 11 (Academic Head)

6.3.2.11 A culture or environment whereby staff members are able to discuss ethical concerns without fear or reprisal

In answer to a question "**Do you promote a culture or environment whereby staff members are able to discuss ethical concerns without fear of reprisal? Please elaborate on your response**", the majority of the respondents believed that having an open-door policy with one-to-one consultation is crucial as it fosters a culture of open discussion.

In terms of my leadership, its democratic because that kind of leadership actually works well for me because I'm always open to listening to [the] opinions of staff ... in that way I feel there's a better flow and nothing is being hidden. Participant 8 (Academic Head)

Yes! Open door policy. Allow for meeting agendas to be flexible. Where the situation requires it (such as sensitive issues), allow for one-on-one consultation. Participant 1 (Academic Head)

Some respondents acknowledged that they encourage staff to share their mistakes so they can be guided on the issues. Individuals learn from each other about student issues etc. Staff are also encouraged to discuss ethical issues and concerns in a safe space.

A culture of open discussion on ethical concerns is always encouraged in my department through an open-door policy, emphasizing, that staff members can express concerns without fear of reprisal, promoting transparency and accountability. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

Of course, yes undoubtedly... As staff we need we lead by example. I cannot tell myself not to smoke weed and I smoke weed in front of them ... staff members need to talk about the things that affect them, ethical issues in an open way, and you'll be surprised that when you begin to open the door, many people actually come forward and begin to talk about their experiences. And in

that process, staff members were able to learn from each other. Participant 11(Academic Head)

6.3.2.12 Contingencies plans/policies in place to move students to online learning during the pandemic

Respondents were asked: **"When making the decision to go the route of online learning during the pandemic, were there existing contingencies plans/policies in place to move students to online learning? If yes, how did it cater for accessibility (laptops, data, connectivity issues)? If no, are there plans to develop policies in the case of future emergencies/disasters (e.g. contingency funds to cater to student needs, etc.)."** The answer was that Covid-19 was unprecedented and caught the university by surprise.

Actually, no, because it was an emergency situation and we were acting globally. We were not prepared, it happened throughout the world and that is why we called it 'emergency teaching and learning' and we honestly never planned for something like that. Participant 8 (Academic Head)

They stated that the decision to move to online teaching was made at management level. There were discussions to address the accessibility of data, wi-fi connectivity etc. Laptops were an issue that was not addressed. It was not possible to get laptops for all students. Students living in rural areas had connectivity issues and could not log on for the online classes.

During the decision to transition to online learning, existing contingency plans were developed during the pandemic, addressing accessibility issues through provisions such as data support, and connectivity solutions to an extent. Laptops were a resource constraint that was not addressed. Those living in the rural areas had experienced poor connectivity and had to make arrangements to move to areas of better network coverage for all assessments. All lessons were recorded to allow students with network issues to revisit the lessons. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

I think Covid-19 caught us of guard in a very big way. In fact, we felt sorry for some of our students who were in the rural areas. We could not do anything about that because remember, we were under national lockdown. And I don't

even think we are prepared if something like Covid-19 were to hit us again [i.e.], we'll find that other students who are in rural areas will continue to use their cell phones. Others may not even have sufficient data to write assessments or assignments. I think that the majority of the students, when writing assignments, were using their cell phones. Participant 11 (Academic Head)

This situation was exacerbated with the added challenge of load shedding.

Load shedding was also an added challenge. Although the institution made data available to students, we had to come up with a contingency, a plan to deal with those students who couldn't write simply because of connectivity issue. Participant 8 (Academic Head)

The respondents were not aware of any contingency funds to cater to student needs, nor are they equipped for any future emergencies.

I don't believe the institution after Covid-19 has come up with a contingency plan if it happens again. Participant 5 (Academic Head)

If there's another future emergency, well, I don't know, but I hope that the university has strategic plans in place to deal with the future teaching and learning, online teaching and learning. Participant 7 (Academic Head)

Teaching in practical lessons, for example, 'patterns and computer skills' was a challenge as this was more impactful with contact lectures.

This was a huge problem. When we are to go online, it became a huge challenge for us. I'm talking primarily about first year students that came to us with no background knowledge. The theory was fine because its theory you can teach online. [But] how do you teach them to make a pattern online when they don't even know what it is? You cannot teach certain things online. Participant 6 (Academic Head)

Others I know that from rural areas like where my home address is, there's no way I can have an online class at home because network is so bad and I was thinking about students who were from around my area that I know have no access too. Thanks, but I believe the online policy, I don't know whether it has

been developed or I do not remember the university putting the policy out for discussion. Participant 11 (Academic Head)

6.3.2.13 Students equipped with the necessary computer technology, skills and data to be part of the online learning platform

In answer to a question posed to the respondents **"Do you believe that students are equipped with the necessary computer technology, skills and data to be part of the online learning platform? How is this ensured and monitored?"**, respondents shared mixed feelings. Participants believed that while students could use computers and log on to internet platforms while on campus, it was difficult for them to do so off campus.

No, my answer is no. Students are not equipped. The students still have to get their own things If I were to make a suggestion to say laptops and smartphones that could be able to cater for online could just as well be made part of the fees so that every student gets it as [standard]. Participant 5 (Academic Head)

On campus, yes. However, the opportunities/access to devices off campus are not the same and this seriously hampers students, particularly those who are already disadvantaged." Participant 1 (Academic Head)

Many students encountered difficulties using computer programmes, such as Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and others. "I think a lot of students even now actually don't know much about computers ... [regarding] mastering PowerPoint, Word, Excel. Participant 3 (Academic Head)

Mentor programmes offered in some departments assisted first year students to navigate their technological and computer challenges. "We have a strong, not a formalised mentorship programme. But our student body, like the fourth year students, are the senior students and they look after the first year students. Participant 3 (Academic Head)

Some students who did not own a computer or a smart phone were negatively affected in terms of their learning.

In 2020, it was a huge wake up call for us. They don't have network in the areas where they're staying. So, having the data is one thing but having network [is another]. So those are the challenges I am facing and we still get students that are in that situation, their phones break or their phones die or something goes wrong, then there is no communication ... then they change their number all the time. It's just from where the students are coming from. They all don't have smartphones and laptops. Participant 6 (Academic Head)

Respondents stated that it was important to regularly monitor students' abilities and competencies in the various technology skills and accessibility.

Ensuring students' readiness for online learning involves regular assessments of their technological capabilities and providing necessary support, including access to technology and skills development. Surveys are regularly conducted to ensure any shortcomings are addressed. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

Important narrative shared by an HOD/respondent regarding our ethical practices and conduct by refraining from discrimination and assumed information regarding our students.

No. I think it is one of the greatest challenges our institution faces as we cater for students who are from disadvantaged communities or backgrounds and some of them have not seen a laptop, they might have a smartphone, but having a smartphone does not make you are technology wise but also remember some of them were first year students straight from high school. They have not even seen or not used a laptop, you know. So that's why, you find that even though the majority of them passed, but it does not necessarily mean that they are all technology wise. They know how to use a computer. They know how to log on, how to monitor time during an assessment. I believe even now if we were to go back to online learning some of our students will struggle because, they do not have the ability or the skills to operate a computer.

You should know how to operate a computer or how to save something, how to retrieve something that you have that you have been working on, how to search the Internet, how to use these tools. to give you what you want.

At the end of the day, we do not know our students, we don't know the students that we teach. We need to be ethical all the time, in that we do not discriminate because of assumed information that we have about our students. I know that we have a lot of students, but at least try to understand, have basic knowledge of who the students are and what they expect from you and how they came to the city in the first place. I think that is very important. Participant 11 (Academic Head)

6.3.2.14 Further thoughts/comments that would add value to the study

In the final question, the respondents were requested to provide their thoughts and comments that would add value to the study. Staff were of the view that ethics cannot be factually defined, unlike other norms like the law. Ethics must consider the specific facts of an event or issue, the circumstances of the individuals involved, how they are disadvantaged, the justice or unfairness of the situation, and the repercussions of the results. Since moral principles are different from one individual to another, decision-making must be made with integrity, free from bias, maintaining impartiality and equity.

By its very nature, ethics are not objectively determined like in the case of other normative rules, such as law. Ethics must take into account the particular circumstances of a situation/matter, the personal circumstances of the people involved, their disadvantage, the fairness/unfairness related to it, as well as the consequences of the outcomes. Ethical values, by its very nature, differ from person to person, so there is a need for consistency, absence of bias and the preservation of fairness and equity in making decisions. Participant 1 (Academic Head)

Participants further believed that cultivating a climate of moral decision-making necessitates ongoing introspection, teamwork, and a dedication to offering outstanding education while attending to the changing needs of our employees and students.

Fostering a culture of ethical decision-making requires continuous reflection, collaboration, and a commitment to providing quality education while addressing the evolving need of our students and staff. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

The institution needs a platform where all academics can discuss ethical issues, best practices – improve how we make decisions – by learning from each other.

I think as members of staff, we should run away from assuming that other people know things that we know, so before decisions are taken, try to involve other people in the process of making the decision. Be inclusive. Participant 11 (Academic Head)

6.4 Summary of chapter

The findings from the semi-structured interviews (qualitative approach) were presented in more detail in this chapter. Both groups of personnel i.e. senior management, middle management and academic support staff, shared their understanding of strategies and policies in place, and the challenges faced with teaching and learning during the pandemic and the measures (if any) in planning for future scenarios that may require responses similar to those needed for Covid-19. The qualitative findings support the aim of the study which was to examine the views, perceptions and feelings of academic practitioners regarding the ethical decision-making practices that impact teaching and learning.

The next chapter (chapter 7) discusses the extent to which the quantitative results supported or differed with the qualitative findings. The literature review from Chapter 2 and the theoretical framework from Chapter 3 are also used to support and enrich the discussion in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS (QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA)

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 presented the findings from the semi-structured interviews. This chapter discusses the quantitative and the qualitative results in collaboration with pertinent literature and theoretical frameworks to allow for a robust discussion and argument.

The aim of this exploratory study was to gain a deeper understanding of the thought processing mechanism used in making fundamental teaching and learning decisions. Such an understanding aided in the development of a framework for ethically conscious decision making for HE.

The critical questions to meet the research objectives were as follows:

RQ1: What are moral decision-making processes for teaching and learning in higher education?

RQ2: What are the ethical practices of higher education practitioners relating to teaching and learning?

RQ3: What are the ethical dilemmas experienced by educational practitioners pertinent to teaching and learning?

RQ4: What are the best ethical approaches suited to guide decision-making in teaching and learning in higher education?

RQ5: What decision-making framework can be used to make ethically conscious decisions?

7.2 Discussion of findings

The discussion of findings provides a detailed interpretation of the analysis of the quantitative data (questionnaire) and the qualitative data (the semi-structured interviews) in context with the literature review and the theoretical framework.

The discussion of the findings stems from the research questions posited for this study arising from the title of this study: "A framework for decision-making for ethical consideration in teaching and learning in higher education".

The interpretation of findings in this chapter is also reinforced by the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results presented in Chapter 5.11. The SEM analysis statistically validated the relationships between the key variables underpinning ethical decision-making in teaching and learning. These results offer empirical support for the theoretical assumptions and observed patterns discussed here, particularly in confirming the influence of ethical leadership, values, and institutional culture on academic decision-making.

7.2.1 Moral decision-making processes for teaching and learning in higher education

The findings arising from RQ1 with regards to moral decision-making processes for teaching and learning in HE identified three major sub-themes, namely institutional priorities, inclusive culture, ethical conduct and quality education.

7.2.1.1 Institutional priorities

The findings for the **'consequences of decisions, including their impact on the university, are taken into consideration by academic management prior to effecting a decision'** indicate a mean of 2.86 and a significant p-value (< 0.001), highlighting considerable disagreement and mixed views and perceptions on their meticulousness of making the correct decisions that will provide negative impact to the university. This does not augur well for the institutions as it is important that we are aware that making the wrong decisions will impact on teaching and learning and the academic functioning of the institution which is the core function of the university. According to Chapman and Lindner (2016) HE is more prone to corruption arising from important decisions taken by various personnel in the university that have major implications to staff and students.

There was strong agreement for the statement **'decision making regarding teaching and learning emanates from a moral thought'** (a high mean of 4.01, and a median of 4.0) and a significant p-value (< 0.0001). The findings indicate that the majority of respondents perceive that decisions made arise from a good place (meaning

emanating from a moral perspective). Employees believe that when management members make an ethical decision the careful and thorough thought processes allow accurate and authentic decisions. Employees trust that senior members are making decisions based on ethical principles. According to Sam and Gupton (2021: 81-82) individuals endeavor to make decisions in an environment that is not easy to take the appropriate action or make the best decision. Making moral choices in a turbulent environment can be difficult, and even in periods of relative calm, our ethical practices might lapse.

Similarly, the findings highlight agreement that **'the quality of education is closely linked to ethical decision making in teaching and learning'**, with a mean of 3.83, p value = < 0.001 highlighting a robust view of the connection between ethical practices and teaching and learning outcomes. This echoes Prisacariu and Shah (2016:153) who state that "quality of education is closely linked to, and depends on, the ethical behaviour at a systemic level involving teachers, administrators in education, researchers and other stakeholders".

With respect to the statement **'the COVID-19 pandemic has a major impact on Higher Education students' academic life in relation to the change over from contact lectures to online lectures as well as the change in assessment methods'** respondents were of the view that COVID-19 and potential health risks of students and staff the university had no choice but to move to online lectures – although data and connectivity issues were a problem. Respondents believed that the change of assessment strategy from exams to continuous assessment was beneficial to the students. By not using the proctoring system, during the online tests the pass rate and throughput rates were relatively high. The results were questionable but going online was beyond the control of the university. Respondents indicated that the university was in the process of looking at systems to protect the integrity of assessments.

I think it was to protect the academic project that, we continued with assessments online. Of course, you know, when we looked at the analysis of results, we could see a huge shift between how students were performing prior to the pandemic and then during the pandemic. And so there was a lot of

disparity there and reasons for concern. Participant 2 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

For the the statement on '**the institution prioritises financial growth over providing quality education**' which is the institution's core focus, the findings revealed that respondents appeared neutral, which is evident with a mean score of 3.41 and a median of 3.00 and a non-significant p-value of 1.000, indicating no strong consensus. Whilst some respondents believed that the university focuses on financial growth, the inconsistency in responses (as indicated in the standard deviation of 1.19) reveals conflicting viewpoints within the academic community. Interviewees commented that it is important the institutions consider students from disadvantaged backgrounds who experience financial difficulties as well as academic challenges as noted by a participant. Respondents interviewed also believed that the institutions should concentrate on quality and not quantity.

As much as we might like to or we are trying our level best to deliver quality education, but it boils down to one thing, it's the money. The subsidy at the end of the day, because each and every year, the subsidy that is given by the DHET is diminishing. Participant 9 (Academic Head)

Prisacariu and Shah (2016: 153) maintain that HE's core focus has also changed to being a business and thereby concentrating more on "growth and income generation". They further state that HE is becoming accountable in making sure they provide quality and relevant academic programmes that respond to "the changing needs of industry and professions". Coelho and Menezes (2012) concurs by stating that the challenge for a HE institution, however, extends beyond its ability to generate knowledge; it also involves its capability to connect it with citizens in a way that makes it crucial for organising the social and cultural aspects of an information driven society (Coelho and Menezes, 2021).

7.2.1.2 Inclusive culture

A very small number of respondents agreed that **different cultural groups are considered when making ethical decisions** (mean of 3.02 and $p = 0.003$). Sadly this does not look good for the institution. To maintain high standards and equitable results in our teaching and learning endeavours, it is imperative that we include a

diverse cultural group, which is inclusive of different values, experiences and wisdom. Disregarding cultural perspectives will undoubtedly marginalise specific groups. According to Cherkowski, Walker and Kutsyuruba (2015: 4), school leaders ought to become conscious of how they make ethical choices so that especially in a multicultural society there will be mutual interest, and they can aspire to achieve a greater normative base for decision-making rather than enforcing their own principles on students and teachers. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005, in Wood and Hilton, 2012) assert, in order to improve the viewpoint of others, leaders who use an ethic of care are urged to promote the awareness of various socio-cultural existence.

7.2.1.3 Ethical conduct

Ethical conduct is clearly visible in all our actions and decisions revealed a mean = 3.07 and $p = 0.002$. The significant p-values highlight differences in the views of the respondents. While the mean implies slight agreement, the variability underscores inconsistency in experiences or views. Higher education institutions are the places where we educate students on the right way of life. If individuals that are part of the institution do not portray ethical conduct in their behaviour then the institution is undergoing moral degeneration, which is evident by a decline in ethical standards.

One respondent commented,

It is essential for management to promote ethical behaviour, practice ethical behaviour and also monitor ethical behaviour. Just providing staff with training and not ensuring that this is followed through, is detrimental to the success of the institution. Respondent 7

Lazenby (2022: 63) supports these findings by stating individuals embodied with ethics and morals should conduct themselves with integrity, equality, inspire trust and have a strong moral compass.

The findings for the statement '**the institution focuses on students achieving high marks and passing rather than on the holistic development of the student**', which indicated a mean of 2.34 and $p\text{-value} < 0.001$, showed that the university puts emphasis on academic metrics instead of the students' well-being or holistic development. A well rounded student in all aspects of development is crucial as the students will be going out into society and industry. Higher education's core focus has

also changed to being a business and thereby concentrating more on 'growth and income generation'. Higher education is becoming accountable in making sure they provide quality and relevant academic programmes that respond to "the changing needs of industry and professions" (Prisacariu and Shah, 2016: 153). Singh and Blessinger (2024) agree that graduate competency is misaligned with employer expectations and this has been contributed to the growing issue of unemployed graduates. Candidates with a variety of capabilities are sought after by employers in order to boost and facilitate the organisation's production.

A respondent noted:

Sadly, it seems more and more that the institution is becoming a business which focuses on increased financial growth year on year. Respondent 62

The respondents interviewed indicated that the institutions need to provide skill-based learning to the students to allow for job creation instead of job dependence. It was also important that students participate in community engagement so that they learn the value of giving back to the community and the less fortunate. According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005, as cited by Wood and Hilton, 2012), an ethic of care emphasises the significance of students and their growth, with a special emphasis on helping them reach their academic and professional objectives. Additionally, an ethic of caring is focused on the personal growth of workers.

For the statement, '**society and university stakeholders expect that the decisions you make in terms of teaching and learning arises from honesty and integrity. How do you make sure these values are part of all your decisions?**', the findings highlight that the participants were of the view that reflection on one's values ensures that one's decisions are built with honesty and integrity. One's character should be built with the qualities of honesty, transparency, integrity.

Follow the truth. It may be rigid but it is the answer. Follow the straight and narrow path. It is how you feel after making the decision that is more important than what you have achieved in the outer world. Participant 1

Ethical behavior and conduct must be part of one's character. Collaboration and team work are very important.

But collaborate not just internally, you collaborate externally, check what the industry wants because I cannot go and teach something that industry does not want. I can't teach them 1980 stuff, we are now in 2023. *Participant 4 (Academic Head)*. This response is supported by Singh and Blessinger (2024), stating that HE institutions and industry should collaborate to better understand the needs of employers while also making sure that graduates possess the knowledge, abilities, and other components of competence needed to fill the roles that the business requires. Additionally, constant contacts between employers and universities are necessary to develop, modify, and revise curricula in order to fulfill industry-required future competencies.

Decisions made need to be in the best interest of impacted stakeholders as well as the university at large. Respondents also believed that considering all stakeholders in the institutions is fundamental when making decisions. According to Valentine and Godkin (2019: 279), when making ethical decisions people frequently evaluate problems using predetermined standards like 'equity', 'fairness', and/or 'justice'. Situational elements that reinforce ethical determination have a significant impact on the process of making ethical decisions, even though people and their surroundings also play a role.

'When making the decision to go the route of online learning during the pandemic, were there existing contingency plans/policies in place to move students to online learning? How did it cater to accessibility (laptops, data, connectivity issues)? Are there plans to develop policies in the case of future emergencies/disasters'? The respondents indicated that COVID-19 was unprecedented and caught the university by surprise.

We were not prepared, it happened throughout the world and that is why we called it an emergency in teaching and learning and we honestly never plan for something like that. Participant 8 (Academic Head)

Students had major issues with connectivity. This resulted in them missing out on lectures. Load shedding compounded the problem of connectivity. Educators had then to deal with students that could not write the online assessment because of connectivity issues. The majority of the students were using their cell phones to complete their assignments. This finding raises issues in this study concerning the policy about permissible media for assignments and the integrity of assessments.

Students living in rural areas were unable to have online classes due to network issues.

I know that from rural areas like where my home address is, there's no way I can have an online class at home because network is so bad and I was thinking about students who were from around my area that I know has network challenges. Participant 11 (Academic Head)

This situation was exacerbated with the added challenge of load shedding. The respondents were not aware of any contingency funds to cater for student needs and did not believe that management is ready or equipped for any future emergencies.

Practical sessions were a challenge as they are more suited for contact lectures, e.g. patterns and computer skills. The respondents were not sure whether the university was prepared for any future emergencies.

And I really, don't even think we are prepared if something like COVID were to hit us again. Participant 11 (Academic Head)

But they do hope the university has a strategy to deal with future emergencies. Respondents also believe that the new way of working in the Covid-19 pandemic has become an integral part of who we are and how we function. It has changed the way we work. However, the integrity of online assessments has become questionable.

And of course, you know, with online assessments, one needs to question the validity and the integrity of the online assessments. Participant 1 (Academic Support Staff – Quality)

The university has been looking at different software i.e., a proctoring system which has been piloted for use in online assessments. "Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank further reiterates that most students will have great difficulty accessing online learning, especially those staying in places that have poor internet access and are subject to numerous other disadvantages" (World Bank, 2020, as cited by Ali, 2020: 21).

7.2.2 Ethical practices in higher education

RQ2 addressed the ethical practices of HE practitioners relating to teaching and learning. Two themes were identified from the findings, namely, online learning, and technological support and institutional culture.

7.2.2.1 Online learning and technological support

The findings for the statement **'academic management ensures students are equipped with the necessary skills to use online platforms'** indicate a mean score of 3.03 and a non-significant p-value (0.106) which highlights different perceptions of the respondents as some respondents were of the view that adequate measures are being made while other respondents may believe that the students need the necessary skills training. These results highlight that it is imperative that management ensures that students have the necessary skills and knowledge to equip them to be part of any online platform. If not, then the academic programme will be impacted. According to Liu et al. (2021), disasters like Covid-19 impacts on the institutions core values. Leadership in organisations must make discretionary decisions during crises because they are unpredictable, chaotic situations. Management can act as their institutions' moral voice in times of crisis, providing strength, support, flexibility and advice. They further state that educational institutions that did not respond to the epidemic may have done so because of the lack of guidance for such a unique crisis, resulting in "ethical tensions" (Liu et al., 2021: 1).

Similarly, there is a lack of consensus in respondents' views as to whether the **'institution has taken into consideration the challenges students experience with learning remotely and online teaching'**. Findings highlight mixed feelings amongst the responses with regards to institutions actions in the challenges experienced by the students with remote and online learning. These findings raise concerns as there needs to be an overall commitment of management and academics in sympathising with the challenges experienced by students from online learning. According to Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo (2020: 6),

Technological challenges are primarily related to a lack of internet connectivity and electronic devices. This problem may increase inequalities through uneven access to the technology needed by students and teachers. Indeed, not all

learners have access to the necessary technologies to take advantage of online education such as a fast internet connection and a powerful computer.

Ali (2020: 21) notes "the unprecedented situation in wake of COVID-19 has brought about challenges to staff, students and administrators to adopt online learning despite certain shortfalls in its organization and implementation".

The results reveal a significant concern regarding '**academic management ensuring students are equipped with the necessary computer technology to be part of the online learning platform**', highlighting a notable mean score of 2.80 and a highly significant p-value (< 0.001). An explicit disagreement was noted indicating an apparent shortcoming in making sure that students are equipped with the essential technology for online learning. This statement does not auger well in terms of the managements function with respect to the core function of the university, which is teaching and learning. It is important that they ensure that the students are equipped with appropriate technology to be part of the online platform to continue with the academic programme. This is further supported by qualitative responses which highlight that not all students have the necessary skills required in using the online platform. The respondents further believe that students have different sets of skills or levels of preparedness in terms of technology. They believed students were equipped with the necessary computer technology on campus but experienced challenges working remotely, especially students that were resource constrained. One respondent noted,

I think it is one of the greatest challenges our institution faces, we cater for students who are from disadvantaged communities or background and some of them have not seen a laptop, they might have a smartphone, but having a smartphone does not make you technology wise but also remember some of them were first year students straight from high school. Participant 11 (Academic Head)

The findings on whether '**academic practitioners ensure that the online learning platforms are working for all students**' have a mean score of 3.70 and a significant p-value (< 0.001). This clearly implies that although there is minimal support for technology, there is clearly an effort from academic practitioners to ensure that the

learning platforms are operational and accessible for students. This highlights the commitment of academic staff amidst all the teaching and learning challenges.

7.2.2.2 Institutional culture

The findings highlight that respondents are in slight agreement that **a culture of ethical teaching and learning exists at the institution** indicating a consistency in their insights. This is positive as the employees believe that there is an ethos of morality and ethics, nurturing an awareness of truth, integrity and accountability in the context of teaching and learning. Kaufmann (2018: 218) states we therefore need to offer a learning culture that instils rational and analytical thinking and encourages the growth of ethical principles. Prisacariu and Shah (2016: 161) concur by adding that it is the duty of the leaders in HE to make sure that autonomous institutions are administered ethically and a culture of authenticity is present.

The notion that **'ethical values in relation to teaching and learning are not only advocated but are also practiced consistently'** highlights significant concerns. A mean score of 2.86 and a p-value of < 0.001 indicate inconsistencies between support and actual implementation of ethical practices, indicating room for improvement in aligning values with actions. Concerningly, respondents perceive that ethical and moral principles in the context of teaching and learning are not necessarily supported or applied constantly. Cherkowski, Walker and Kutsyuruba's (2015: 4) contend that "educational leaders have a moral responsibility to be proactive about creating an ethical environment for the conduct of education".

The findings for the statement **'ethical concerns can be discussed without fear of reprisal'** highlight a mean score of 2.63 and a highly significant p-value (< 0.001), indicating unhappiness and fear of reprisal when voicing ethical issues. This might affect trust and freedom of speech and transparency within the university. This finding is supported by the literature in chapter three (theoretical framework) which implies, anyone can state that a "fully adequate" number of fundamental freedoms, including the right to possess property, the right to feel safe from harm, the freedom of their beliefs and expression, and the right to association, given that these entitlements are in line with other people's claim to the similar privileges and dispensations (Quinn, 2017: 84). "Ethical environments allow employees to voice concerns and offer suggestions without fear of reprisal, fostering an adaptable workplace essential for

thriving in today's dynamic business landscape" (Kihara, 2024: 48). Kihara (2024: 5) further states that "over time a culture marred by a lack of trust and fear of retribution stifles creativity and flexibility, posing significant challenges for organizations aiming to adapt to market shifts and sustain competitiveness in the long run".

Contrary to the quantitative findings, the qualitative findings indicate that there is a practice of an open-door policy and informal meetings with department heads whereby issues are discussed that are not part of a formal meeting.

A culture of open discussion on ethical concerns is always encouraged in my department through an open-door policy, emphasizing that staff members can express concerns without fear of reprisal, promoting transparency and accountability. Participant 2 (Academic Head)

Interviewees commented that when there is an open-door culture, staff feel comfortable to talk about their experiences, which allows them to learn from one another. Clearly there is a contradiction of views between senior staff and lecturers.

The findings highlight significant concerns with regards to whether **'decisions taken by academic management are consistent across teaching staff'**. With a mean score of 3.73 and a highly significant p-value (< 0.001), respondents are observing inconsistencies in decision-making, noting issues of fairness and transparency when decisions are made. This practice of treating staff differently creates animosity amongst staff members and brings down the morale of staff members. Shaw (2014: 3) supports this discussion by stating that ethics addresses both personal morality and the moral guidelines that control and confine behaviour. It also looks into issues of moral responsibility and the principles that ought to direct our behaviour, as well as issues of right and wrong, justice and injustice, accountability and responsibility, and fairness and unfairness. A respondent noted:

There is a culture of favouritism in the organisation. People are promoted, awarded based on who they know and are friends with, at DUT. Inconsistency in application and awarding of promotions, funding for conferences, workshops etc. Respondent 29

The findings reveal a strong agreement, that in the **'the absence of a strong ethical culture at the university has a major impact on teaching and learning'** highlighting

a mean score of 3.84, a median of 4.00, and a highly significant p-value (< 0.001). These results indicate the respondents' perceptions on the importance of the presence of a strong ethical culture that will have positive benefits on teaching and learning. The lack of ethical values, best practices, ethical conduct and behaviour impacts the primary focus of the university which is teaching and learning. Individuals with a strong ethical culture personify truth, integrity and transparency. These positive attributes will hopefully attract more staff, students and management of similar calibre to the university. According to Smith, Barnes and Harris (2015: 118), "Ethical organizations are frequently thought of as resulting from their cultures. Organizations possessing ethical cultures create and maintain a shared pattern of values, customs, practices, and expectations which dominate normative behavior in the organization".

Similarly there was strong agreement that '**ethical breakdown can arise from an organisational culture that fails to encourage ethical practice and behaviour**' as evidenced by a mean of 3.65 and a significant p-value (0.003), highlighting respondents' concerns that the institution was failing to foster ethical practices and conduct, which explains the ethical breakdown. The lack of ethical culture in HE institutions can lead to a deterioration in academic integrity, harm the universities standing and, importantly, impact the students and wider community in a negative way. According to Smith, Barnes and Harris (2014: 119), creating a feeling of connection where people are proud of and devoted to their companies is a crucial part of creating an atmosphere that is ethical. They are unlikely to take from them, disparage their fellow employees, or damage their image since they only care about what is best for their organisations. They further assert that "an unethical culture will feel oppressive, as people resist acknowledging conflict and contradictions, and as individual members strive to hide misdeeds" (Smith, Barnes and Harris, 2015: 120).

7.2.3 Ethical dilemmas experienced by higher education practitioners

The theme identified for RQ3 was institutional ethical culture.

7.2.3.1 Institutional ethical culture

There was a strong agreement amongst the respondents that '**decisions and practices relating to teaching and learning have a major influence in the learning environment**', as evidenced with a high mean score of 4.36 and a significant p-value

(< 0.001). Ethical decision making and practices are fundamental in cultivating a positive and healthy learning environment. Its pleasing to note that the majority of staff members are of the same mindset as they believe that decisions do impact the core focus of the university which is teaching and learning.

'If decisions are made with the absence of ethical thought a tertiary institution will go through a phase of moral decay' echoes strongly with respondents as evidence with a mean score of 4.29 and a significant p-value (< 0.001) which further supports the importance of ethical practices and leadership. Educational institutions should make decisions based on ethics, values, truth and transparency to avoid going through a moral degeneration.

With the highest mean score for this section (4.47) and a significant p-value (< 0.001), there was overwhelming agreement between the respondents that **'academic management cannot make moral decisions without possessing moral values themselves'**. These results show the commonality of staff views relating to this very fundamental practice of HE practitioners. Also emphasised was the importance of good leadership to epitomise moral standards to encourage ethical practices across the institution. The ethical and moral integrity of academic management emerges as a key concern. A moral virtue is an ingrained quality of character. For instance, think about someone who embodies the virtue of honesty. Naturally, honest individuals will speak the truth; they will find it unpleasant to even consider acting dishonestly; and they will be uncomfortable when they are asked to participate in dishonest activities by others. Morally decent individuals continually do what they believe to be correct; it becomes a way of life (Quinn, 2017).

According to de Cremer and Vandekerchove (2017: 448), ethical leadership can be described simply as the way the leader is able to be a role model in being a principled employee, while it is debated that moral leaders must display or communicate ethical standards through the various levels in the organisation.

The findings with regards to the statement **'when faculty concerns are discussed in a safe environment, the staff are more happy to provide solutions'** highlights strong agreement with a mean score of 4.00 and a significant p-value (< 0.001). Staff believe that when teaching and learning issues are discussed in safe spaces, free of reprisal, positive and healthy solutions to teaching concerns are generated. These

results underscore the benefits of having a supportive and healthy organisational culture to enhance positive relationships, engagements and collaborations.

In response to the statement, '**how do you ensure that when you make teaching and learning decisions they are clear of invested interests/personal bias?**' highlights transparency as being very important and that personal interest must be declared. It was important to follow policies, rules and regulation as this will eradicate bias. Furthermore, decisions should be based on the students' well-being and knowledgeable people should be consulted if unsure when making a particular decision. Personal bias must be mitigated and it was also very important to not move away from rules and regulations.

To mitigate personal bias, I maintain transparency in decision-making processes and actively seek feedback from diverse sources to ensure a well-rounded perspective. If one is guided by policies, then bias will be eliminated
Participant 2 (Academic Head)

Personal interests must be declared upfront and affected persons should recuse themselves/not participate in the decision-making process. Participant 1 (Academic Head)

When making decisions, responsible citizens consider the needs and preferences of others. They acknowledge that happiness, success, and the ability to achieve goals are among the 'core values' that almost everyone shares. Self-interested people just take into consideration their own needs and desires. Making the decision to adopt an "ethical point of view" entails accepting that other individuals and their underlying values are also deserving of respect (Quinn, 2017, 50).

The findings for the statement '**there is a lack of consistency in decisions taken for different staff members**' reveal significant concerns regarding consistency in decisions applied for different employees. This is indicated by a mean score of 3.58 and a significant p-value of 0.0006. A median of 4.00 confirms this observation highlighting that numerous respondents believe there is injustice, unfairness, and inequalities in the way decisions are made with different employees. This unethical practice of senior management will result in the unhappiness and demotivation of staff members. Rawls's view of justice was based on two main tenets: (a) that all parties

involved in or impacted by an action should be treated equally, and (b) that all parties ought to have fairly equal access to advantages and decision-making power; or else there has been inequity and injustice (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2005; Shapiro and Gross, 2008, cited in Wood and Hilton, 2012: 6-7). Furthermore, protecting the principles of equality and fairness while providing for all staff in the teaching environment serves as a leading ethical guideline for HE personnel (Liu et al., 2021: 3).

7.2.4 Ethical approaches suited to guide decision-making in teaching and learning

The themes identified for RQ4 are performance evaluations and principled consistent decisions.

7.2.4.1 Performance evaluation

Findings reveal significant concerns regarding bias in the performance management process. With regards to the statement '**a low rated performance evaluation is given to staff members that line managers are negatively inclined**' there is strong agreement that staff members are adversely/poorly rated by their line managers if there is an unsatisfactory relationship between line manager and staff member as indicated with a mean score of 3.20 and a highly significant p-value (< 0.001). These results highlight bias, unfairness and lack of objectivity when line managers are rating employees. It also brings a lot of animosity amongst staff members. Rubin and Edwards (2020: 1940) concur that a staff member may submit an unjust or unfair statement or an incorrect performance rating arising from biased treatment by the line manager. Previous studies highlight evaluation bias misrepresents scores arising from employee's race/ethnicity, gender, age and other factors. They further state amidst the possible existing measures, unfairness grievances claiming biased conduct in the evaluation of the performance process demonstrates behavioural indicators of equality signals. Complaints of unfairness in the review process indicate numerous issues, involving incorrect or unfair evaluations, irregular submission of performance benchmarks and personal discord between senior managers and employees (Rubin and Edwards, 2020: 1939).

The findings highlight for the statement '**a high rated performance evaluation is given to staff member that line managers are positively disposed towards**' produced a mean score of 3.17 and a significant p-value of (< 0.001) indicating that respondents believe the performance evaluation process is influenced by personal biases rather than objective metrics, raising concerns and apprehensions about fairness and transparency. This also questions the integrity of line managers. "The problem often occurs because it is easier to give high ratings than to do the work needed to justify low ratings, even if low ratings are deserved. In addition, supervisors may see inflated ratings as a way of avoiding unpleasant interactions with subordinates or as a means of getting all they can for their workers when the outcomes of performance appraisal are tied to pay increases or other benefits" (Lin and Kellough, 2019: 196).

7.2.4.2 Principled and consistent decisions

The findings for the statement '**Covid-19 has impacted on student learning, thorough research has been undertaken before arriving at the best decisions that can support student during this crises**', highlight that there was dissatisfaction with the adequacy of research conducted to support students during the crises. This is indicated with a mean score of 2.79 and a significant p-value (< 0.0001), revealing an observation that institutions interventions lacked the thoroughness that was needed to address the students challenges effectively.

There is no doubt that institutions that lack such preparation and planning measures, need to put in place now in order to avoid the excessive demands and tensions that come from adopting things quickly. There is a clear need for post-secondary online learning expertise in this crisis and it should serve as a reminder that institutions need to cultivate this competency (Ali, 2020: 18).

The finding for the statement in '**ensuring that your decisions are always consistent in every situation or circumstances and what technique is consistently employed**' reveals that the majority of the respondents believed that transparency and consistency is critical in decision making irrespective of the context or circumstance of the condition. Being consistent in one's decision making in any situation demonstrates trust and integrity amongst employees which leads to a more positive work environment.

Record the decisions made and follow precedent in the interests of fairness and consistency, unless circumstances change which justify a different decision than the one made in the past. Accept that exceptions may lead to a new rule.

Participant 1 (Academic Head)

Going over all the facts is important in making correct decisions. If one follows rules, regulations and policies then there will always be consistency in all decisions made. There is no one size fits all for every decision taken, sometimes different circumstances require different decisions. However, if the decision-making process is transparent, it will compel you to act ethically and to guarantee that integrity is upheld when it comes to decisions made within the organisation.

I believe that transparency is very important. You know, if you make decisions in a transparent way, then transparency will force you to make decisions that are within that particular framework that I mentioned earlier on, that are not in contradiction with what we do and what people or what members of the society expects us to do. Participant 11 (Academic Head)

Josephson (2002: 13) asserts the decisions made are consistent, for every situation or condition. One's principles are the same whether "at work, at home, in public or alone".

The findings for the statement, '**what are the best decision-making tools and problem-solving techniques you best utilised when making difficult decisions**', revealed that it's important for both staff and students to look at both sides of the issues. Decisions must be made arising from fairness and impartiality and be guided by policies, rules and processes. It was also important that one's emotions should not get in the way of making the correct decisions. Consultation, consistency, listening and being transparent are also important tools to be utilised in all decision-making processes. Analysing and assessing a situation is crucial.

I consult extensively before I make a decision, like especially decisions that will affect the working life of a person or decision that you will impact negatively on someone's work life, put all the alternatives on the table and see which one best serves the department or which one best serves the interest of the institution.

Participant 11 (Academic Head)

Not being afraid to be confrontational, but more importantly not being afraid to be unpopular if it is for the greater good.

But I also say you don't rush into something because if you rush into something, it means that you didn't analyse it properly and you didn't think about it.

Participant 4 (Academic Head)

According Mbogoi (2019) when it comes to staff career promotion, moral leaders follow the explicit rules and regulations outlined in the university's laws. They examine these policies on the basis of ongoing statutory revisions and contextual realities, consulting with pertinent authorities, in an effort to apply them equitably and consistently. Because of this, trustworthy managers care about the well-being of all staff members and foster an atmosphere that allows them to flourish, be effective in the workplace, and advance in their careers. Dialogue is a good way to handle this. While Josephson (2002: 13) asserts an ethical individual act on grounds of her conscience not focused on opportunism. They are trustworthy and unfailing. The decisions made are consistent, for every situation or condition. One's principles are the same whether "at work, at home, in public or alone".

In response to the statement '**Do you incorporate empathy and compassion when making important teaching and learning decisions? If yes, please explain your method for incorporating this?**' The findings highlight that the majority of the respondents stated that they incorporate empathy and compassion when making important teaching and learning decisions. They believed that even though it's important to incorporate empathy and compassion, one needs to look at the situations and consider the extenuating factors and then provide necessary processes. Listening to students is very important. Each story comes with their own challenges. It is important that whatever the outcome of the decisions whether favourable or unfavourable students need to understand how a particular decision was taken. Applying empathy and compassion with students e.g. during load shedding when they are not able to take an online test is important for the students' emotional and mental well-being.

By utilising the various paradigms, HE can become conscious about the viewpoints that they tend to adopt in addressing moral quandaries. If one has received a very spiritual upbringing, for instance, the guiding principle they choose might be the ethics

of care, which emphasises compassion and empathy, or 'the ethics of justice', which places a great focus on 'rights and laws' (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016: 7).

Remember, our role is not only to teach students not only to tell students about what is prescribed in the textbook, but our role over and above that we have to be parents. So you know, that's why I'm saying that over and above your teaching, you have to infuse methods of empathy, have to be considerate. You have to understand that you are not dealing with robots you are dealing with human beings. People who have emotions and feelings. Participant 11 (Academic Head)

7.3 Chapter summary

This chapter discusses the findings of the quantitative and qualitative results with the engagement of literature review and the theoretical framework. A noticeable alignment of different contextual findings suggest that the study is consistent and highlights a cohesive understanding of the study focus. This signifies that the numerical data (quantitative) and descriptive data (qualitative) together support or justify the current information (literature), which serves in the reinforcement of the overall validity and reliability of the research study.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

Chapter 7, provided a detailed discussion on the findings and analysis from the quantitative data (questionnaires) and qualitative data (interviews) integrated with findings from the literature review. This chapter re-presents the objectives of the study and how they have been fulfilled, provides a conclusion, and makes pertinent recommendations. The limitations of the study and suggestions for future research will also be outlined.

The study focuses on the ethical practices of HE practitioners at DUT with specific emphasis on decision-making in teaching and learning and to gain insights on the cognitive process applied in making important teaching and learning decisions. The study is important because it will also help other universities reconnect with their responsibilities and professional emphasis. It will encourage practitioners to consider their role as educators and be mindful about the processes involved on making ethical and moral decisions.

A mixed method approach using explanatory sequential design was undertaken. Data was collected in two phases. The researcher gathered and analysed the quantitative data, the results of which were used to construct the qualitative design. The aim of this approach was to use the qualitative findings to assist in clarifying and more fully understanding pertinent quantitative outcomes.

The quantitative phase of the study incorporated Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), to statistically validate the relationships among the core ethical constructs identified in the questionnaire data. The SEM results provided empirical confirmation of how ethical values, institutional culture, and leadership influence ethical decision-making in teaching and learning. This modeling helped to strengthen the credibility of the proposed ethical decision-making framework by offering deeper insight into how these latent constructs interact in practice.

8.2 Conclusion

The aim of this exploratory study was to gain a deeper understanding of the thought processing mechanisms used in making fundamental teaching and learning decisions in order to develop a framework for ethically conscious decision making for HE. In relation to the theoretical constructs, this study scrutinised related and pertinent literature in the areas of ethical and moral decision-making processes in teaching and learning, the ethical practices of HE practitioners, ethical dilemmas experienced by HE practitioners and ethical approaches suited to guide decision-making in teaching and learning. All of the factors related to each research question were taken into account by the empirical analysis that was directed by the research questions, which enhanced the thoroughness of the qualitative phase of this study.

Further, the findings were substantiated by similar preceding research studies which were either in agreement or disagreement with the existing study. To further gain an insight into the philosophical standpoint of ethics and ethical decision-making, various ethical theories were examined. The appropriate paradigms engaged with were the deontological theory, normative theory, justice theory, ethics of care, and virtue theory. These theoretical perspectives met the objectives of the study.

The study reveals mixed views and perceptions on the process of making correct decisions that have negative impact to the university. The university was not prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic that caught the university by surprise. The pandemic had a major impact on teaching and learning in terms of a change over from contact to online learning including:

- Lack of adequate planning regarding students being equipped with the necessary skills or technological resources to be able to use online learning platforms.
- High pass rates and throughput rates were noted during the period arising from the online assessments which questioned the integrity of the medium for assessments: and
- Lack of inclusivity of different cultural groups was present in the university environment.

DUT places emphasis on academic metrics rather than the holistic development of students. Discrepancies between the support and actual implementation of ethical

practices revealed further development is needed in the alignment of values with action. Ethics and moral principles in the context of teaching and learning are not necessarily supported or applied consistently. There is unhappiness amongst staff and fear of reprimand when discussing or voicing ethical concerns. Inconsistencies in decision-making are noted in relation to the fairness or transparency of how decisions are made. Injustice, unfairness and inequalities are some of the aspects noted in terms of the decisions taken for different staff members. Regarding performance management evaluations, respondents reported unfairness, bias and lack of objectivity in the ratings of employees. The evaluations were also influenced by personal biases rather than objective metrics. Consultation, consistency, listening and transparency are important tools to utilise in the decision-making processes.

8.3 Recommendations

The core recommendations presented here emanated from the detailed analysis of the research findings based on the objectives of the study.

8.3.1 Objective 1: To ascertain the moral decision-making processes for teaching and learning in higher education

- Prior to academic management making teaching and learning decisions, thorough analysis of the subject matter should be conducted to ensure that the decisions align with the university's focus on teaching and learning. This will help to minimise any negative impact on the functioning of the university especially academia.
- There is strong agreement that decision-making regarding teaching and learning emanates from a moral thought. It is important that the university maintains this positive approach which is fundamental for maintaining and upholding the quality of education. If this way of thinking is practiced by senior individuals in HE then this culture might filter to all employees in the institution.
- The change over from contact lectures to online/remote learning resulted in various challenges experienced by students namely data, internet and connectivity issues. Technology issues were also a major issue because of a lack of ownership of computers and a lack of relevant computer skills to work

alone. It is therefore suggested that proper feasibility studies be conducted before allowing students to work remotely. It is further suggested that management has a moral duty to ensure that students acquire the necessary computer skills so they can work independently.

- Institutions should emphasise quality education instead of emphasising financial growth, therefore the focus should not be on increasing the enrolment figures. It is further recommended that management examines the financial challenges experienced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. According to Boughey and McKenna (2022), the stated need for greater accountability and openness is another way that neoliberalism has affected educational institutions. The idea here is that if the public provides funding – either through taxes or payments for goods or services – the organisations that supply the funded services must be held responsible for how the funds are used and the high standard of the services they offer.
- Management should consult with a diverse cultural group when making teaching and learning decisions which will bring about higher standards and equitable results. Engagement of diverse cultural groups will bring about diverse perspectives and viewpoints and enhance critical thinking and creativity. It will also help foster tolerance, empathy and respect. It is further recommended that the university does not marginalise any specific group by not including them in any decision-making processes. It is fundamental that ethical conduct be clearly evident in the conduct, behavior and decision making of all employees in HE. Management must endeavor to continuously display ethical conduct and decisions in all their university engagement which will have a positive spin within the university community.
- The university should focus on the holistic development of the student as they will be going out into industry and playing a role in their community and society, therefore should not only be focusing on students achieving high marks. It is further recommended that the university engages students in community programmes so that they appreciate less fortunate individuals and learn the value of giving back. Ela Gandhi, the previous Chancellor of DUT, maintained

that HE needs a renewed focus, commitment and responsibility when she stated that the university "must move away from an image of being a factory that churns out degrees but rather build an institution from which men and women of substance and character will be produced to transform our country and our nation into the compassionate, caring and winning nation that we wish to see" (Naidoo, 2011: 11).

- Individuals in HE who make important teaching and learning decisions need to reflect on their values as well as make sure that decisions are built on the traits of honesty, integrity, transparency and justice. This can be done by making sure that decisions are consistent and are aligned to the university's principles and guidelines. "As society continues to face numerous ethical challenges, from environmental crises to social justice issues, the need for individuals who can approach these problems with integrity and thoughtful consideration is more pressing than ever" (Iloka, 2025: 169).
- COVID-19 was unprecedented and caught the university by surprise; it is important that the university be prepared, equipped and have a strategy in place for any similar future emergencies. Network issues must be in place so that students do not miss out on lectures. Students must be equipped with the necessary technology so that they are able to do the necessary online assessments. Management must consider students living in rural areas and the challenges they experience in relation to network, connectivity issues etc. Walker (2018: 555) enhances this argument by acknowledging global and regional nuances i.e. what may be 'ideal-aspirational' globally needs to be 'practical-feasible' locally. Walker (2018: 555) further suggests that a framework that expands upon existing capabilities may help to reduce inequalities at universities. The university must procure proctoring software which will eradicate the online cheating challenge and help with the integrity of assessments.

8.3.2 Objective 2: To examine the ethical practices of higher education practitioners with specific emphasis on decision making in teaching and learning

- Academic lecturers should continually monitor students' progress in order to mitigate any challenges or difficulties experienced by students on the online learning platforms. It is also important that we know our students, their background, so that we understand their challenges. This is critical when making important teaching and learning decisions, ensuring we treat all groups of students fairly. It is also important that academic practitioners ensure that students have the necessary technology, infrastructure i.e. data, internet, and the necessary skills required in all these applications needed to work from home. It is fundamental the management members and academic staff are committed and sympathise with challenges experienced by students with online learning.
- Ethical and moral principles in relation to teaching and learning must be supported, encouraged and applied consistently. It is further recommended that management must be seen to be advocating ethical behaviour in all their daily interactions with all the stakeholders. This is important to build trust, a positive culture and authentic relationships.
- The university should be a place where individuals feel safe to discuss ethical concerns without fear of reprisal or negative consequence for them. It is therefore recommended that the university should endeavor to provide a culture or an environment whereby staff members feel safe to discuss ethical issues without fear of being reprimanded. If this is in place with management it will only bring about satisfied, happy and productive employees. The employees will also grow intellectually and their thinking and behavior will be governed or embodied with ethical aura. Sakiman and Yasin (2023) state that it is essential to promote a culture where individuals are valued for their unique contributions and perspectives. Being open and honest about choices, objectives, and difficulties while supporting team member input and dialogue creates a

comfortable, friendly environment that encourages diversity and values every employee and student by upholding moral principles.

- Management must treat all employees fairly and equitably across the university. They must ensure that all their employees across the board are equally provided with promotional opportunities, irrespective of race, personality clashes etc., as this fosters a culture of transparency, authenticity and trust. The practice of treating staff differently creates animosity amongst staff members, affects staff morale, their relationships with their peers/colleagues and more importantly has an impact on their teaching and learning activities.
- The university should be a place that embodies a strong ethical environment that contributes to the positive environment of all employees as well as cultivates and nurtures the teaching and learning setting. Hence, it is recommended that management makes a concerted effort in building the university in an environment built with authenticity, trust, transparency, accountability and shared values which are the pillars of Envision 2030 subscribed by the university. It is also important that HE stakeholders that are involved in this transformation 'walk the talk', meaning they must role model these important mores. An environment built with a culture of authenticity will enhance our academic programme and create a sound reputation which will attract highly skilled professionals and students alike. Sakiman and Yasin (2023) note that when educational institutions prioritise integrity, fairness and accountability in their workforce, they become capable of making ethical judgements, motivating others, and this contributes to the improvement of the institution.
- A university that does not support and encourage ethical practice and behaviour will give rise to an ethical breakdown in the university. It is recommended that the university encourages and creates a safe space whereby employees feel at ease and relaxed in discussing and debating ethical concerns and issues. It is further recommended that all management members should walk the walk in terms of the ethical role they portray in the university. Bhana and Bayat (2020:

128) assert that "the responsibility of HEIs to sustain ethical values and to nurture an ethical culture has never been more important".

8.3.3 Objective 3: Ethical dilemmas experienced by higher education practitioners

- Respondents indicated strong agreement that ethical decision making and practices are fundamental in cultivating a positive and healthy learning environment. Hence, it is crucial that management foster an ethical learning environment by, for example, educating staff on ethical values, ensuring a code of conduct, providing ethics workshop etc.
- It is crucial that educational leaders make decision engrained with ethics and integrity, ensuring fairness and transparency, cultivating a transparent, positive and ethical environment to avoid the institution going through a phase of moral decay or moral degeneration.
- One of the findings highlights the highest mean score for a statement in the questionnaire was that academic management cannot make moral decisions if they themselves do not have moral values. Thus, there was strong agreement among respondents regarding this important practice of HE practitioners. It is fundamental that leadership in HE must exemplify strong moral standards to inspire ethical practices throughout the institution. It is also important that management members are embodied with ethical and moral values so that all decisions they make will be built on transparency, integrity and honesty. Ethical and authentic leadership is required to encourage ethical practices across the institution.
- Management should create a safe space for the staff to collaborate and discuss academic issues. It's important that employees are encouraged rather than reprimanded for voicing faculty concerns. This also helps in fostering an institution epitomised by openness, transparency, accountability and authenticity, which is crucial in building a positive teaching and learning community.

- Some HE personnel can be guilty of having self or personal interests when they are in senior positions and given the authority to make teaching and learning decisions. This behaviour can be detrimental to the functioning of the academic programme, the students as well as the reputation of the university. It is therefore recommended that educators and senior management should continuously practice self-reflection and/or self-perception, maintain transparency, and obtain feedback from relevant individuals (student and/or staff). According to Swami Vivekananda, "True leadership begins with the transformation of the self". He believed that individuals should strive to understand their own strengths, weaknesses, values, and beliefs. By cultivating self-awareness and introspection, one can develop a solid character and a clear sense of purpose (Hashimy et al., 2023: 34). Leaders who uphold ethics must be conscious of their own and other people occupying the world. This consciousness spreads to every area of their existence. Individuals develop a lifestyle that continuously shapes their perception of themselves rather than reaching a state of self-awareness. Leaders that possess self-awareness are perceptive, introspective, and constantly cultivating that understanding (Basalla, 2022: 30).
- Decisions should be made on the basis of diverse perspectives. It is further recommended that decisions must be based on students' well-being and to consult with knowledgeable people, when unsure about making a particular decision. Personal bias must be mitigated and it is also imperative to not ignore rules, regulations and policies.
- Injustice, unfairness and inequalities were some of the variables noted on how decisions are applied with different employees. This does not augur well for the university environment as society expects HE personnel to practice transparency, fairness and honesty. Furthermore as a place of higher learning, HE personnel should be role models for the students. Executive management, senior managers and middle managers should make decision that are always consistent with all staff members. To promote equitable learning, educational institutions should encourage the appreciation of values and ideas including

diversity, social justice, equity, fairness, and integrity (Carrington and Kimber, 2020).

8.3.4 Objective 4: Ethical approaches suited to guide decision-making in teaching and learning

- Fair performance management evaluations are critical for employee morale, growth and productivity. Issues of personality clashes and disliking employees for whatever reasons should not be a criteria for low ratings. When there are inconsistencies between ratings of employees evaluations, this gives rise to animosity amongst peers. Findings from previous studies suggested that a myriad number of employees perceive the performance evaluation system as not being correct and fair (Swaroop and Gupta, 2014). Hence it is recommended that leadership in HE promote a performance appraisal system that has well-defined objectives and expectations. Line managers who assess their employees should understand their roles and what is expected from them. Employees that are being evaluated should also understand the procedure and criteria executed in the implementation of the performance evaluation. It is imperative that performance appraisals are authentic, consistent, transparent and fair. It is further recommended that performance evaluations should not be influenced by personal biases but align to objective metrics.

- COVID-19 caught the university by surprise and impacted on student learning. Respondents were of the view that inadequate research has been done on the processes and structures required for students to move to remote-only learning again in the future if necessary. A lack of preparation and guidance on how HE institutions may work to respond to the crisis is a key reason why HE leadership were unable to respond appropriately to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic (Liu et al., 2022). Arising from learning challenges experienced by students it is therefore recommended that management apply their minds on the fundamental aspects that one needs to put in place in such scenarios, so that students will not experience similar challenges when required to learn in a similar crisis. Areas requiring a particular focus include creating equal access to technology and levelling the playing field for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, educating students on how to prepare should a crisis occur, and

being able to make agile adjustments to accommodate for the living conditions of students.

- Transparency and consistency are the techniques that need to be used when making important decisions in any given situation. Applying consistency in every decision allows one to foster trust and authenticity amongst employees which creates a positive work environment. Every situation or circumstances provides direction and guidance in determining the best course of action. Looking at all the facts that are in front of you and being guided by policies, rules and regulations is a good decision-making approach one can use.
- Before one makes important decisions, one needs to listen to both sides of issues. Some of the effective and appropriate decision-making tools and problem-solving techniques one can utilise when making difficult decisions are sense-checking if the decision is free of bias, favouritism or prejudice. One's emotions must not come in the way of making important decisions as it could impair judgement and could be a possible cause of bias. Other important tools are consultation, consistency, listening and transparency and analysing and assessing the situation, is fundamental.
- All academic practitioners should incorporate empathy and compassion in all teaching and learning decisions which are crucial for the academic programme. This will allow for a positive, understanding and caring environment that fosters empathy and encourages a space for a safe dialogue. Empathy and compassion assist academic practitioners and management members to appreciate and relate with students on an individual level. Incorporating compassion and empathy in all decisions making processes makes the academic programme stronger, enhances the academic programme, and, most importantly indicates to the academic community that the institution is built with the values of care, empathy and compassion. "Swami Vivekananda emphasised the importance of building character based on truthfulness, integrity, compassion, and self-discipline. He believed that leaders should possess a strong moral compass and be driven by the welfare of others. By embodying these virtues, individuals can inspire and influence those around

them, creating a positive impact in their communities and society as a whole". (Hashimy et al, 2023: 34).

8.3.5 Objective 5: Decision-making framework for ethically conscious decisions

This objective was achieved by designing a framework for consideration when making ethical decisions. The literature for this research study offered deep insights into ethical decision-making guidelines; the framework provided in Figure 8.1 builds on this and together with the data collected from the respondents offers pragmatic ethical considerations for HE institutions when making important decisions that impact the community within the universities.

Figure 8.1 is divided into three key aspects namely: the core beliefs for guiding ethical principles and authentic leadership, practices that promote ethical decision making, and stakeholders that are an overarching element that always need to be considered as one works through making ethical decisions. At the top of the framework (blue section), the core beliefs are made up of fairness, transparency, integrity and consistency and to the furthest right, pragmatic definitions of each are given. Next (orange section), the practices entail engagement, policies, rules and one's personal value system. To the furthest right of this section, examples of these practices are presented to make this a practical framework. Finally, the stakeholders (green section) are a cross cutting element throughout the framework to demonstrate that the impact to them should be considered throughout the decision-making process.

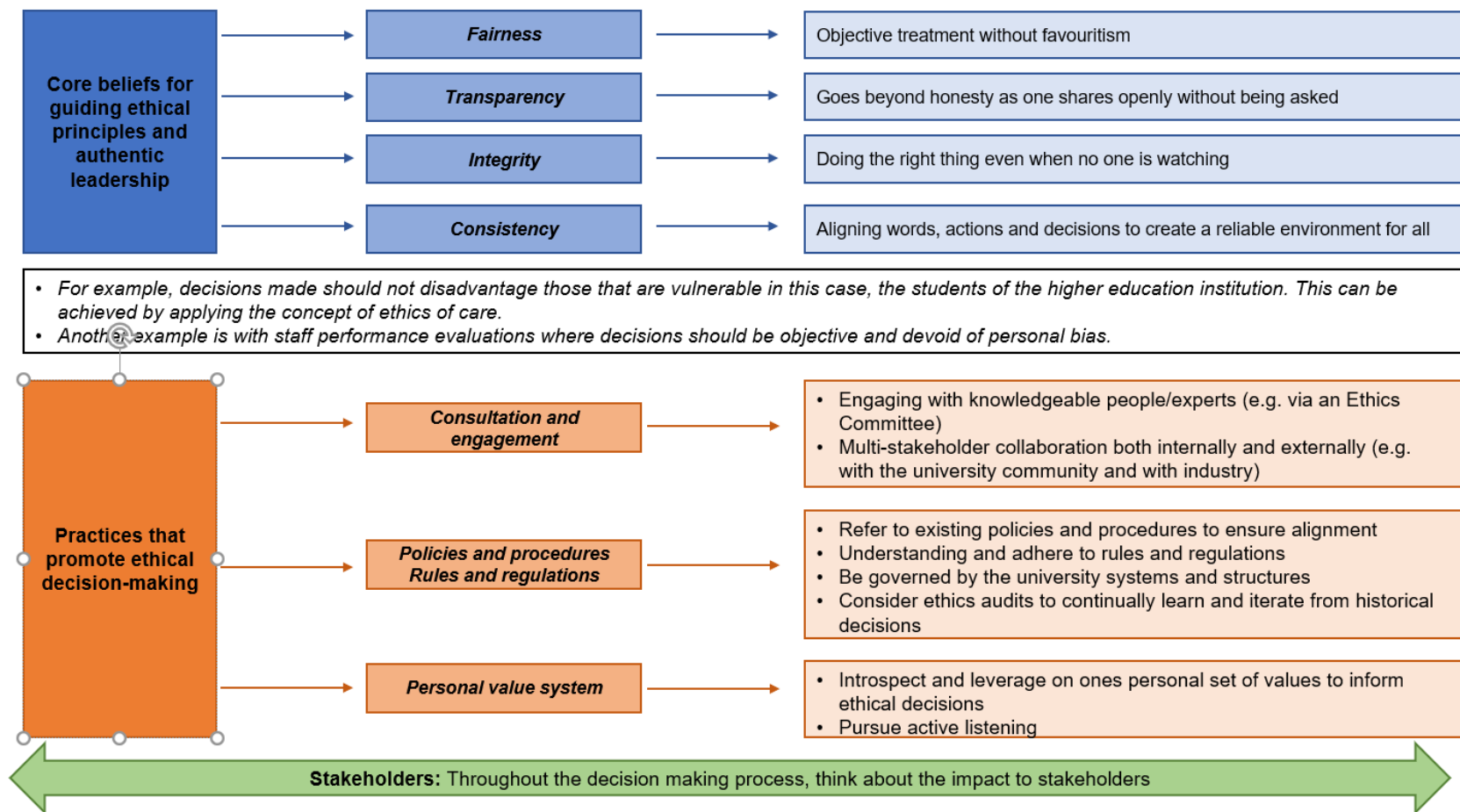


Figure 8.1: Framework: Ethical considerations for decision making in teaching and learning in higher education

8.4 Limitations of the study

The empirical results of this study are limited to DUT although the important insights emanating from this study could be applied to other HE institutions. It should be emphasised that as situational conditions might differ significantly, these findings cannot be generalised to other UoTs or any other HE institution. Additionally, the opinions and viewpoints provided may not be generalisable in light of the empirical findings.

As the study also included a qualitative approach there was a restriction on the number of questions that could be included in the interview schedule, so that the respondents were not burdened in answering too many open-ended questions.

8.5 Suggestions for future research

Future research could be extended to other HE institutions in South Africa as ethical practices and decision-making made by HE practitioners plays an important role in teaching and learning. The study could also include students to hear their views and perceptions on ethical and moral decision-making in teaching and learning. Further research could also look at educators' ethical and moral engagement in teaching and learning in the classroom as well as the role of HE in developing students with the necessary ethical moral standards.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY AT DUT



*Directorate for Research and Postgraduate Support
Durban University of Technology
P.O. Box 1334, Durban 4000
Tel.: 031-3732576/7
Fax: 031-3732946*

8th July 2021

Mrs Tigambery Naidoo

c/o Department of Information and Corporate Management

Faculty of Accounting and Informatics

Durban University of Technology

Dear Mrs Naidoo

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE DUT

Your email correspondence in respect of the above refers. I am pleased to inform you that the Institutional Research and Innovation Committee (IRIC) has granted **Gatekeeper Permission** for you to conduct your research “A framework for Decision Making for ethical consideration in teaching and learning in Higher Education” at the Durban University of Technology. **Kindly note that this letter must be issued to the IREC for approval before you commence data collection.**

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

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

Kindest

regards.

Yours sincerely

DR LINDA ZIKHONA LINGANISO

DIRECTOR: RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE SUPPORT DIRECTORATE

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM



LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: A framework for Decision Making for ethical consideration in teaching and learning in Higher Education

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Tigambery Naidoo, M Tech (DUT), M Ed (UKZN)

Supervisor: Dr M Rajkoomar, PHD (LIS)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: The aim of this exploratory study is to gain a deeper understanding of the thought processing mechanism used in making fundamental teaching and learning decisions to develop a framework for ethically conscious decision making for higher education.

The study is important as it will assist higher education practitioners to re-connect in their duties and focus as professionals. It will encourage them to consider their role as educators and be mindful about the processes involved on making ethical and moral decisions.

Good Day

I am a student at DUT doing research for my PhD in Business and Information in the Faculty of Accounting and Informatics. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study entitled: A framework for decision making for ethical consideration in teaching and learning in higher education. This research study is important as the ethical guidelines that will be documented arising from this study will assist other institutions of higher learning to exhibit similar ethical decision making tools for the enrichment of teaching and learning.

Outline of the Procedures:

A mixed method approach using explanatory sequential design will be employed for this study. Questionnaires and interviews will be the instruments used for the collection of data. Emailed administered questionnaires and letter of consent will be distributed to all academic staff of DUT and non-contact interviews will be conducted with executive deans, deputy deans, HoDs, CELT and CQPA personnel. Appointments for the interviews will be made with the respective individuals closer to the time of the scheduled on-line meeting which will be held virtually with the participants. The target population for this study is 752 (660 academic staff, 57 Head of Departments, 11 Executive Deans and Deputy Deans, 16 CELT and 8 CQPA staff).

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: There are no risks to respondents.

Reasons why the participant may be withdraw from the Study: Participation is voluntary and respondents may choose to withdraw from the study at any time and there will be no adverse consequences to the participants.

Benefits: Guidelines to ethical decision making processes will emanate from this study – beneficial to the participants and the university in relation to teaching and learning.

Remuneration: Participant will not receive any monetary or other types of remuneration.

Costs of the Study: Participants will not be expected to cover any costs towards the study.

Confidentiality: Participants responses will be kept confidential and will not be identified as their own views. The names of the respondents will not be mentioned in the report or in any future journal publications.

Results: Will be published in the DUT library repository. Individuals are able to access the document.

Research-related Injury: There will be no research-related injury expected in this study.

Storage of all electronic and hard copies including tape recordings Materials will be stored in the office of the researcher for a period of three years and then shredded.

Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries: Please contact Mrs T Naidoo, the Researcher on (082 407 0286), my supervisor Dr M Rajkoomar (084 624 1062) or the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031 373 2375. Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Postgraduate Support Dr L Liganiso on 031 373 2577 or researchdirector@dut.ac.za.

CONSENT

Full Title of the Study: A framework for Decision Making for ethical consideration in teaching and learning in Higher Education

Names of Researcher: T Naidoo

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- ☐ I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Tigambery Naidoo about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number:
- ☐ I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- ☐ I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- ☐ In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- ☐ I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- ☐ I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- ☐ I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

_____	_____	_____	_____
Full Name of Participant Thumbprint	Date	Time	Signature / Right

I, _____ Tigambery herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully Naidoo informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Tigambery Naidoo	_____	_____
Full Name of Researcher	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Full Name of Witness (If applicable)	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)	Date	Signature

APPENDIX C: ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER



APPENDIX D: ACADEMIC STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE

ACADEMIC STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire.

It is intended to elicit your views on the perceptions, attitudes and practices around moral and ethical decision-making by academic practitioners (executive dean, deputy deans, and head of departments) in higher education.

Your responses will form an invaluable source of data for my study on “A Framework for ethically-informed decision making in teaching and learning in Higher Education”. However, I shall not subsequently present your responses in a way that identifies you personally.

Please answer all questions and select only one response to each question by placing a cross (x) in the appropriate box on the right-hand column of the tables.

The academic practitioners are executive deans, deputy deans and head of departments (who play a crucial role in teaching and learning decisions).

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Please indicate your gender.

1.1	Male	1
1.2	Female	2
1.3	Do not identify with the above prefer not to disclose	3

2. Please indicate your age category.

2.1	Below 25 years	1
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2.2	26 – 35 years	2
2.3	36 – 45 years	3
2.4	46 – 55 years	4
2.5	56 years and above	5

3. Please indicate the faculty in which you are employed.

3.1	Faculty of Accounting and Informatics	1
3.2	Faculty of Management Sciences	2
3.3	Faculty of Applied Sciences	3
3.4	Faculty of Health Sciences	4
3.5	Faculty of Arts and Design	5
3.6	Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment	6

4. Please indicate your years of service at this institution.

4.1	2 years and below	1
4.2	2 – 5 years	2

4.3	6 – 10 years	3
4.4	11 – 15 years	4
4.5	16 – 20 years	5
4.6	21 – 25 years	6
4.7	26 – 30 years	7
4.8	31 years and above	8

5. Please indicate your designation.

5.1	Head of Department	1
5.2	Senior Lecturer	2
5.3	Lecturer	3
5.4	Junior Lecturer	4

6. Please indicate your highest qualification.

6.1	Diploma	1
6.3	B Tech Degree	2
6.2	Bachelor's Degree	3
6.3	Honour's Degree	4
6.4	Masters Degree	5
6.5	PhD	6

SECTION B: DECISION MAKING SURVEY

7. Please indicate with a cross (x) your response to the Likert rating Scale statement below:

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	Moral decision-making					
7.1	Decision making regarding teaching and learning emanate from a moral thought.					
7.2	Decisions made arise from self-invested interest.					
7.4	If decisions are made with the absence of ethical thought a tertiary institution will go through a phase of moral decay.					
7.5	Academic practitioners cannot make moral decisions if they themselves do not have moral values.					
7.6	The necessary skills and understanding to the ethical concerns of staff and students are in place.					
7.7	Decisions taken serve the interests of the students and staff.					
7.8	Decision-making relating to assessment strategies during Covid-19 have been discussed with the important role players before a final decision is made.					
	Ethical decision-making approaches					
7.9	Processes and procedures involved in making ethical and moral decisions are considered before implementing a final decision.					

7.10	Academic Practitioners are equipped with the knowledge and skills to make decisions that are aligned with teaching and learning and the institutions goals					
7.11	There is a lack of consistency in decisions taken for different staff members.					
7.12	The consequences of decisions, including their impact on the university are taken into consideration by middle/senior management prior to effecting a decision.					
7.13	Quality of education is closely linked to ethical decision making in teaching and learning.					
7.14	DUT have considered the choices they have made on online learning and educational technology for teaching and learning.					
7.15	Covid-19 has impacted on students learning, thorough research has been undertaken before arriving at the best decisions that can support students during this crises.					
	Ethical practices in decision-making					
7.16	A high rated performance evaluation is given to staff members that line managers are positively disposed towards.					
7.17	A low rated performance evaluation is given to staff members that line managers are negatively inclined towards.					
7.18	Decisions taken by academic practitioners are not consistent with all teaching staff.					

7.19	Decisions and practices relating to teaching and learning have a major influence in the learning environment.					
7.20	What is good for others rather than him/herself is given top priority.					
7.21	The budget is utilized for the faculty and the students.					
7.22	Ethical conduct is clearly visible in all our actions and decisions.					
7.23	Different cultural groups are considered when making ethical decisions.					
	Ethical culture					
7.24	When faculty concerns are held in a safe environment they are more happy to mitigate the solution.					
7.25	A culture of ethical teaching and learning exists at DUT.					
7.26	DUT have a strong culture that supports ethical standards.					
7.27	The absence of a strong ethical culture at the university has a major impact on teaching and learning.					
7.28	The institution provides workshops for staff on ethical practices.					
7.29	Ethical values in relation to teaching and learning are not only advocated and talked about but also lived by all members of DUT.					

7.30	Staff members are satisfied that ethical concerns can be discussed without fear of reprisal.					
7.31	The institutions core focus is business driven concentrating on financial growth instead of providing quality education.					
8.	General					
8.1	The online learning platforms are working for all students.					
8.2	Students of DUT are equipped with the necessary computer technology and data to be part of the online learning platform.					
8.3	Students are equipped with the necessary skills required in using the online platforms.					
8.4	DUT has taken into consideration the challenges students experience remotely in online teaching.					

9. Please add any other comments/remarks you feel may be important to this research study.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INPUT AND VALUABLE TIME.

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE CELT AND CQPA

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE CELT AND CQPA

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this non-contact interview. I will not take more than half an hour of your time. As mentioned previously I would like to hear your views on the practices around ethical decision making in higher education. Your responses will form an invaluable source of data for my study on “A framework for Decision Making for ethical consideration of teaching and learning in Higher Education”, however, I shall not subsequently present your responses in a way that identifies you personally.

Would you mind if I use a voice recorder?

1. As policies guides us in making ethical decisions, does DUT have a teaching and learning policy?
 - 1.1 Whose responsibility is it to develop a teaching and learning policy?
 - 1.2 What ethical consideration should be part of this policy?
2. How are the departments being monitored in making sure that their curriculum design captures the student learning proficiency in their respective modules and ascertaining that there is a balance of teaching methods/approaches which meets the necessary module aims and outcomes?
3. When making the decision to go the route of online learning during the pandemic, were there existing contingencies plans/policies in place to move students to online learning. If yes, how did it cater for accessibility (laptops, data, connectivity issues)? If no, are there plans to develop policies in the case of future emergencies/disasters (e.g. contingency funds to cater to student needs, etc.).
4. Do you believe that students are equipped with the necessary skills required in using the online platforms?
5. Are students of DUT equipped with the necessary computer technology and data to be part of the online learning platform?
6. The covid-19 pandemic has a major impact on Higher Education students' academic life in relation to the change over from contact lectures to online lectures as well as the change in assessment methods.

With reference to the above do you believe that decisions made in relation to the various assessment strategy employed were in the best interest of the students?

7. What strategic decisions are made by management in monitoring the integrity of assessments or teaching methods.

8. Have you any further thoughts/comments that you would like to include which would add value to the study.

Thank you for your valuable time and support.

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE EXECUTIVE DEANS, DEPUTY DEANS AND HODS

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE EXECUTIVE DEANS, DEPUTY DEANS AND HODS

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this non-contact interview. I will not take more than half an hour of your time. As mentioned previously I would like to hear your views on the practices around ethical decision making in higher education. Your responses will form an invaluable source of data for my study on “A framework for Decision Making for ethical consideration in teaching and learning in Higher Education”, however, I shall not subsequently present your responses in a way that identifies you personally.

Would you mind if I use a voice recorder?

1. Principled and just ethical decisions require proficient understanding of the correct procedure for examining and assessing the processes that would influence our choices in decisions.

Please explain how you ensure that you abide by the above?

2. Society and university stakeholders expect that the decisions you make in term of teaching and learning arises from honesty and integrity. How do you make sure these values are part of all your decisions?
 - 2.1 How do you ensure that your decisions are always consistent in every situation or circumstances. What technique do you consistently employ?
3. Please describe an incident on how you dealt with an issue when confronted with a moral dilemma?
4. What are the best decision making tools and problem solving techniques you best utilised when making difficult decisions?
5. When making teaching and learning decisions, do you collaborate with your exco members/staff members and collectively make these decisions? Please explain.
6. How do you ensure that when you make teaching and learning decisions they are clear of invested interests/personal bias?
7. Do you incorporate empathy and compassion when making important teaching and learning decisions? If yes, please explain your method for incorporating this?
8. How do we ensure that our focus is to provide quality education instead of being business driven and concentrating only on financial gain?

9. What structures do we have in place to build on the holistic development of students rather than only concentrating on making sure they achieve high marks and passing?
10. Do you promote a culture or environment whereby staff members are able to discuss ethical concerns without fear of reprisal? Please elaborate on your response.
11. When making the decision to go the route of online learning during the pandemic, were there existing contingencies plans/policies in place to move students to online learning. If yes, how did it cater for accessibility (laptops, data, connectivity issues)? If no, are there plans to develop policies in the case of future emergencies/disasters (e.g. contingency funds to cater to student needs, etc.).
12. Do you believe that students are equipped with the necessary computer technology, skills and data to be part of the online learning platform? How is this ensured and monitored?
13. Have you any further thoughts/comments that you would like to include which would add value to the study.

Thank you for your valuable time and support.

APPENDIX E: EDITING CERTIFICATE

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