

Lessons in managing pandemics like Covid-19 and its implications for Sustainability: A Public Sector Analysis

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Abstract

On a continuum to attain sustainability public sector entities must think about the impact of current decisions on long-term sustainability. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a worldwide economic collapse, and had magnified the pronounced inequality and poverty in South Africa. Secondary data analysis was used to do a systemic review of the literature to review Covid-19 and sustainability articles. Articles were analysed to identify common themes related to Covid-19 and Sustainability. Several themes were extracted from the literature that linked Covid-19 and sustainability. Public entities must develop sustainability strategies and approaches to navigate Covid-19 and other pandemics. The themes that emerged were aligning sustainability to strategy, ensuring governance, and compliance, effective partnerships, leadership, and effective people orientation.

Keywords: sustainability, Covid -19

Abbreviations: ILO (International Labour Organisation)

1. Background

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2020), Covid-19 caused a massive economic and labour shock disturbing the production and trading of goods and services. During the lockdown, all sectors were closed for economic activity except those services that are deemed essential services. ILO (2020) argued that the pandemic caused an economic crisis which disproportionately impacted and worsened the levels of inequality. Businesses have been affected to varying degrees regardless of size and some sectors like tourism, aviation, and hospitality have tremendous significant decline in revenues, insolvencies, and job losses. The SMME Sector as a major contributor to GDP and a creator of employment has been deeply affected by Covid-19 resulting in the closure, job loss, and severe revenue reduction. The consequence of the forecasted economic turmoil, uncertainty and fear has caused a delay in investments, purchase decisions, and recruitment of staff.

The Covid-19 pandemic is unique in many ways, but lessons can be gleaned like many other crises like 911, the global financial crisis, and pandemics like MERS, Ebola, and the Swine Flu. Although the magnitude of these crisis were different lessons could be drawn to manage Covid-19 and other future pandemics. .

The leadership approach required to navigate Covid-19 is agility, responsiveness, and complex problem-solving. ILO (2020) proposes that in previous pandemics business continuity planning was effective in navigating the uncertainty in the environment. Leaders must manage risk, establish business priorities, do response planning, minimise business disruption, and ensure that employees are protected and safe.

Furthermore, leaders are required to ensure that decisions in Covid-19 contribute to sustainability. Another insight is that the current circumstances require innovative novel approaches to reinvent the business and strategically position the entity to ensure sustainability. Furthermore, the Covid-19 circumstances require constructive partnership and collaboration between different stakeholders to fully optimise sustainability efforts.

2. Literature review

Sustainability relates to the quality of all aspects of life that is attained through a focus on social, economic, and environmental measures (Pirouz, Haghshenas, Haghshenas, & Piro, 2020). Besides sustainability theory, chaos theory can be used to analyse the Covid-19 pandemic. Mangiarotti et al., (2020) postulated that organisations must attempt to design sustainability into the mission statement, reporting systems, and practices. In practice, the sustainability approach of organisations is fragmented and there is a predominant focus on the economic dimension. A review of the literature revealed that an integrated and holistic approach to sustainability is contingent on governance, business models, performance management, measurement, and reporting systems (Miller et al., 2020).

Haanaes and Olyne (2022) postulated that there are two gaps in sustainability practices, “the knowing–doing gap” in that executives recognise the importance of sustainability but few incorporate sustainability into their strategy. The second gap is “the compliance – competitive advantage gap” and even less focus on competitive advantage.

Although sustainability is a new area of research, the bulk of research is slanted toward private-sector organisations (Alshehhi, Nobanee & Khare, 2018). Based on context and the character of work, sustainability in the public and private sectors differ essentially, and as a result, the framework, measures, results, and effects will differ (Ma et al., 2020).

2.1 Sustainability Theories

The review of theories on sustainability theories demonstrates that most theories focus on the dimensions of sustainability (value creation, value-destroying, trade-off theory, resource-based view theory, and slack resource theory) whilst there is a leaning towards stakeholder theory that indirectly contribute to sustainability (Alshehhi, Nobanee and Khare, 2018).

The sustainability framework formulated by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 2012b) proposed that for organisations to focus on sustainability there must be an agreed sustainability paradigm, principles, vision, develop sustainability objectives, goals and indicators. Furthermore, sustainability law, and codes must be adhered prepare the culture and systems; develop sustainability management and assessment; periodic evaluation and reporting (Mokhtar, 2021).

2.2 Sustainability Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts

Ahmad et al., (2019) proposed qualitative and quantitative indicators in the form of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. Outputs are management activities that transform the inputs. Outcomes measure changes in behaviour, attitudes, commitment, or socio-cultural values of groups. The impact of sustainability has consequences for the population. Whilst managing Covid-19, sustainability can still be managed provided that there is sustainability focus, with programmes and plans that culminate in outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

2.3 Chaos Theory

Su (2021) argued that the characteristics of chaos theory is that the occurrence is dynamic, complicated, and nonlinear causing significant changes. Another characteristic is that the theory makes provision for the dramatic change that can occur unexpectedly. Furthermore, chaos theory is associated with relationships in complex and interconnected systems, unpredictability, and unintended consequences (Biswas, Hasan, and Bala, 2018). Chaos is an organism that self-organises, and life "seeks order in a disorderly way" by traversing complexity until a workable answer appears. The internet is similarly logical despite no one offering direction or leadership (Chen, 2021).

This differs from the management theories which have been examined thus far, all of which to varying degrees, assume that the organisation operates within an environment that is characterised by irregularity and predictability. According to Gardini, Grebogi, and Lenci (2020), the environment is marked by the abrupt change that occurs at a high rate, necessitating adaptability to meet new demands.

Chaos is an orderly chaos characterised by intricacy, unpredictable behaviour patterns, and some degree of resemblance, like the regular/irregular characteristics of snowflakes (Pryor and Bright, 2022).

In order to manage chaos, and unplanned change, and build system resilience, a number of strategies are suggested: (a) knowledge sharing and promotion; (b) encouraging creativity and innovation; (c) team and project orientation; (d) encouraging diversity management; and (e) establishing steadfast values that serve as the foundation of the system (Gardini, Grebogi and Lenci, 2020) .

From a management perspective, managers are expected to make the transition from managing stable and safe work environments to environments characterised by complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty; (ii) cultivate employee resilience to adapt to change; (iii) purposefully disrupt the status quo; and (iv) create an environment that is supportive, safe, and creative (Mbengue, Ondracek, Saeed, and Bertsch, 2018). In addition, management must be able to manage the present (order) and future (disorder) and develop a culture characterised by exploration, risk-taking and create a learning organisation (Biswas, Hasan, and Bala, 2018) which provides for risk-taking, exploration, and the toleration of failure. The Covid-19 pandemic is an event that is also associated with unprecedented change, disequilibrium, and unpredictability. The pandemic is also associated with unplanned change. Covid-19 was closely resembled the characteristics of chaos theory.

3. Research Methodology

According to Taherdoost (2021) there are different approaches to reviews of secondary data. The chosen method that was used was scoping review of the literature on Covid-19 and Sustainability. Both quantitative and qualitative research studies will be included in the review. In addition, the primary and secondary literature on Covid-19 and sustainability was also systematically reviewed.

Following the guidelines by Hoque, Oyes, Chowdhury and Miah (2021) the analysis provided new knowledge on sustainability and Covid-19, additional or different from the primary research results by conducting further analysis of existing data sets through analysing, interpreting, and drawing conclusions. The topic, Covid-19 and sustainability, the research objectives, and research questions were used to select, analyse and interpret the data set (Islam, 2020).

3.1 A Practical Approach to Successful Research with Large Datasets

The below-mentioned approach was used to analyse secondary data to select journal articles, code the articles, identify topics, cluster them into themes, and interpret the findings.

Table 1:1

Define the research topic and question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with a thorough literature review • Ensure that the research question has sustainability relevance and is based on sound a priori reasoning. • Be flexible to adapt the question to the strengths and limitations of the potential datasets
Select a dataset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a resource from varied sources to identify the data set. • To increase the novelty of work, consider selecting a dataset that has not been widely used in the field or link datasets together to gain a fresh perspective • Factor in complexity of the dataset • Factor in dataset cost and time to acquire the actual dataset
Familiarisation with the dataset	<p>Learn the answers to the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does the database exist? • Who reports the data? • What are the incentives for accurate reporting? • Check if the data was audited and if the dataset can be linked to other large datasets. • Check to see if measures have been validated against other sources • Analysing of the data and review the outputs of the research.
Structure the analysis and present findings in themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the implications of the findings • Interpret the findings • Consult with a statistician for complex datasets and analyses • Consider the presentation of the data by using figures or diagrams.

Table 1: Secondary Data Analysis Guidelines (Source: Bookstaver, 2021)
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3.2 Secondary Data Analysis Process

3.2.1 Step 1: Develop the Research Questions

Research questions will be developed to guide the literature search on Sustainability and Covid-19 (Bookstaver, 2021). After the initial reading and review of the literature, some questions were identified using conceptual skills and applying theoretical knowledge, namely:

- What is the link between Covid-19 and sustainability?
- What are the management approaches were used during Covid-19 to ensure sustainability?
- How did management ensure a focus on sustainability?

3.2.2 Step 2: Conducting a Literature Review

The research on Sustainability and Covid-19 was synthesised and evaluated using the systematic recommendations offered by Phillips and Barker (2021). A methodical process is described in Table 2 below for reviewing the literature.

Key words identified to search academic databases, journal databases, and google scholar	Covid-19 and sustainability
Decide on the search portals	EBSCO (Elton B. Stephens Co.), Google Scholar, the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), ProQuest, Psych INFO and ERIC (Educational Resources Information Centre).
Select the number of relevant sources of primary, secondary & tertiary sources of literature	20 articles
Articles were skimmed and reviewed to determine the relevance	30 articles
Design a literature map on the study	Sustainability Theories Chaos Theory
Draft summaries and identify themes from the selected literature	A brainstorming exercise was done to link the areas to themes and sub-themes.
Review the identified themes and identify the research gap in the methods or the knowledge	The themes were reviewed to assess if there is a relationship to the problem statement.

Table 2: Systematic Guideline to Review the Literature (*Source: Phillips and Barker ,2021*)

According to Pollock et al. (2021) the scoping review technique was employed, which required a preliminary analysis of the volume and breadth of all relevant publications. The objective is to determine the nature and the extent of the previous studies and to also ensure completeness of the literature search. In this approach the features and the design of previous research is analysed and tabulated.

3.3 Analysis of the data

Cerar, Nell and Reiche (2021) suggested a method for analysing primary data to make sure the data set was in line with the goals of the study. To analyse the data set, the following steps will be taken: (a) The identification of the objectives of the study; (b) The description of the data gathering procedures and process; (c) The description of the data that was gathered; (d) The description of the methodologies used to collect the data; and (e) The consistency of the data was assured.

4. Discussion

The research on Covid-19 required organisations to reconsider strategy, structure, leadership approaches, the management of human capital, culture, communication approaches, the business models, systems, and processes to navigate the impact of Covid-19. Boiral et al., (2021) and Bryce et al., (2020) argued that most organisations were either ill-prepared or demonstrated a low level of resilience to the Covid-19 crisis. Several themes have emerged in the review of the literature that relates to vision, mission, policies, systems, processes, people, culture, and leadership. These themes will be discussed herein below.

4.1 Sustainability and Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the gross inequalities in health, and education and these inequalities became more visible and magnified. The Covid-19 pandemic mostly affected people physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, financially, and from a relationship perspective. The World Health Organisation (2021) claims that healthy lives and well-being is a complex phenomenon that is intertwined with personal, social, economic, political, and environmental factors.

Some of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were chosen in the table below to demonstrate the linkages between key issues related to the pandemic and sustainability. Most dialogues and interventions that were adopted during Covid-19 by leadership in the public and private sectors were devoid of sustainability thinking. Most of the SDGs are multi-dimensional, and intersectoral and have magnified the degree of inequalities. Going forward new ways of working, new business models, dynamic ecosystems and innovative thinking will be required to stimulate the economy and align to sustainable development goals.

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere	(55,5%) of the 58.8 million population are living in poverty (Statistics South Africa, 2021)	Proactive social protection system
Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture	Human Rights Watch Report (2021) reported that in South Africa the National School Nutrition Programme was closed exposing 9 million vulnerable children during the lockdown with any contingency plans. Spaull & Tomlinson (2021) claimed that 10 million adults and 3 million children experienced hunger in South Africa.	Encourage the SME development and the informal sector to grow and create jobs. More support and interventions needed to strengthen the SME and informal sector.
Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages	Research showed that 33% of South Africans were depressed, whereas 45% were fearful and 29% reported loneliness (Human Sciences Research Council, 2020) During the first four months of the hard lockdown there were 87000 gender-based violence (GBV) cases.	Increased investment in mental health and psychosocial support services, integrated within health and nutrition, education, and child protection systems (Unicef, 2021)
Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.	In the first phase of Covid-19 majority of learners had no access to the WIFI devices, data and skills to continue with learning. UNICEF (2021) reported that learners are 75% to a year behind in schooling and have lost 54% of learning time. From April 2020 approximately 400,000 to 500,000 learners have reportedly also dropped out of school altogether (UNICEF, 2021) School infrastructure was damaged during the lockdown 2020 (2000 schools were looted) and 140 was looted during the Kwa-Zulu Natal looting in 2021 (UNICEF, 2021). In June 2021, 4,642 Gauteng learners and 2,321 teachers tested positive for Covid-19.	Reimagine education campaign (Unicef, 2021)
Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	Covid-19 exacerbated the existing level of inequality of women – more women in low paid jobs experienced job loss, decrease in salary, increased domestic responsible and were exposed being frontline health	The speed of implementing interventions should be address gender equality should be increased.

	workers (Human Rights Watch 2021; UN Women's Report, 2021), Other factors is that there was in increase in gender-based violence, less than 20% of women went for family planning and reproductive health services and young girls were forced to marry and forego their rights (UN Women's Report, 2021)	Education and capacity development for women and girls must be prioritised.
Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	South Africa's unemployment rate rose to 34.4% in the second quarter of 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). According to expanded definition of unemployment to include discouraged job seekers the level of unemployment is 44.4% (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Youth unemployment measuring job seekers between the ages of 15 and 24 years is at a record high of 64.4% (Statistics South Africa, 2021).	Implement a wealth tax from the richest 354,000 individuals could raise at least R143 billion (Futshane, 2021). The informal economy should be supported and protected to contribute to job opportunities and growth (Futshane, 2021).
Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries	South Africa is the most unequal society in the world with the highest Gini coefficient of Covid-19 pandemic is proving to be a virus of inequality, which has worsened the already existing inequities. Only 10% of South Africans live in "opulence", while 35% are ranked as middle class, and more than 55% live in abject poverty (Futshane, 2021)	Covid-19 grant. Generation Unlimited initiative for young (UNICEF, 2021)
Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels	Corruption Watch (2020) reported that they received 4,780 reports of graft related to PPE and Covid-19 related good from South Africa. The Special Investigating Unit (SIU) is probing alleged corrupt PPE contracts worth R14.2 billion that are reported thus far.	A new law was promulgated as of April 2021 forcing political parties to disclose financial donations of R100 000 and more to foster transparency and good governance. Donations from foreign government, agencies and individuals are prohibited.

Table 1.1: Constructed by the researcher

4.2 Vision

During the Covid-19 crisis, leaders experienced paralysis, feeling disconnected from the vision and strategic objectives and the need to alter paradigms. Traditional approaches to managing are no longer relevant, there are more questions than answers, and organisations are forced to embrace change, align to the prevailing context, and extract opportunities from analysing the current context. Covid-19 is associated with volatility, complexity, and uncertainty and requires adaptability. Organisations are required to be responsive, agile, and flexible (Çiçeklioğlu, 2020).

There was an immediate need to move from the formal to the informal; from stability to instability, certainty to uncertainty; structure to unstructured; knowing to unknown; familiarity to unfamiliarity, inefficiency to efficiency, transaction-based focus to people-oriented focus amongst multiple other paradoxes. Most organisations ability and adaptability quotient varied on a continuum of readiness to manage the hyper-turbulent environment.

Organisations had to revisit and reframe and engineer the strategic objectives for the changes related to the pandemic. Simplistically, the work has moved from the office to the home and continue with this trajectory and format of hybrid working going forward. Many organisations readiness to manage the complexity of this nature was tested and continues to be tested. The expression used by leaders is that much unlearning and re-learning are required.

Covid-19 had a far-reaching impact on every aspect of business operations and organisations that was not aligned to sustainability strategically prior to Covid-19 continued to be reactive and had to consider drastic restructuring and surgical reduction of the workforce. Many organisations were thrown into disarray in most of the interventions by the public sector sustainability focus was not mentioned.

4.3 Governance, Risk, and Compliance

In the context of disruptive change, there were lapses in the governance in the boards, advisory committees, audit functions, and other structures and effective service delivery which were not optimally functional during the pandemic. Covid-19 has also highlighted capacity constraints in many departments to deliver essential public goods and services to citizens.

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) observed that most citizens of African states including South Africa disregarded quarantine and lockdown measures signaling that the measures were imposed without consultation and the following of democratic processes (APRM, 2020). This chaos and disruption also created opportunistic behaviour to flout supply chain management processes amounting to R14.3 billion in corruption and fraud to date and still counting.

4.4 Policy Level Change

The Covid-19 pandemic required that organisations reflect on their systems, policies, and procedures. Mendy, Stewart, and Van Akin (2020) revealed that organisations are able to make decisions quickly, embrace complex problem solving and work collaboratively. In addition, organisations had to refine HR-related policies to facilitate working from home. Supply chain management processes had to be refined to facilitate the procurement of goods and services (Mendy, Stewart, and Van Akin, 2020).

In addition, from a human capital management perspective, organisations had to be concerned about stigmatisation, discrimination, exclusion, childcare support, harassment, and revised benefits.

4.5 Culture

Pathiranage, Jayatilake, and Abeysekera (2020) stated that culture is a sign, symbols, assumptions, beliefs, values, and leadership behaviour that contributes to organisational culture. Covid-19 is associated with new rituals of zoom calls, home offices, and the use of technology. Leaders are now challenged to think about how to create an organisational culture based on the new paradigms.

The Covid-19 pandemic requires a transformation of the organisational culture to build trust through leaders being vulnerable, transparent, loyal, and honest (Spicer, 2020). Leaders had to embrace the positive, create a sense of community, and build resilience into the system. Support people to extract meaning from the chaos and assist people to a sense of what has happened. The culture transformation involved allowing people to learn, make decisions at their level, and refine processes to continue to deliver products and services to customers (Howard-Grenville, 2020). Spicer (2020) and Elsbach and Stigliani (2018) argued that the magnitude of the Covid-19 pandemic a new culture had to be created through experimentation, reflection, implementation, and action.

4.6 People-Oriented and Human Resource Management

Human resource management (HRM) was expected to ensure that employees are safe in the workplace and that they observe the Covid-19 protocols of maintaining social distance, wearing masks, sanitising, and defining strategies for working from home (Koirala and Acharya 2020; Elsafty and Ragheb 2020). In the Covid-19 had to transition to be more responsive and agile to providing HR services to the organisation. During Covid-19 HR professionals had to advise management on downsizing, re-engineering, workforce planning, retrenchment, and processing of Covid-19 relief funds. Furthermore, HR had to also provide professional support and advise on working from home policies and practices, managing performance, employee wellness, scheduling of the workforce, on-line recruitment and selection and on-line learning. HR was required to be responsive and agile to the needs of the business and crisis (Zhong, et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the leaders and employees co-create stories to evoke a common culture and values for healing and strength. In addition, a shared purpose emerges, and new possibilities can be forged.

4.7 Leadership

The leader must have foresight, cultivate knowledge of the environmental context, have situational awareness, be objective, and have a positive responsibility to be able to empathise with employees' discipline (Bartsch et al., 2020). Leaders must develop a clear goal-oriented vision, and present innovative long-term strategic thinking to gain a competitive advantage amidst the crisis also linked to sustainability.

Stefan and Nazarov (2020) argued that Covid-19 is associated with uncertainty, low morale and engagement related to job loss, employee fear of change, and adapting to the new approach to working. Frequent and explicit communication between the leader and employees, as an integral part of crisis management, has a positive impact on the performance of the organisation, creating relative safety at work and in the personal situations of their employees.

According to the extant literature, leaders had to provide different types of support to employees in the Covid-19 life cycle. In the first phase of the cycle, leaders had to adopt safety guidelines in accordance with the WHO Covid-19 Guidelines. The next stage is to support people with the emotional trauma of the chaos and unplanned change defined as a post-crisis and the new normal. Another layer of support is that people expect leaders to provide credible and relevant information without downplaying the severity of the situation. In addition, leaders must build trust, namely: (i) focus on the facts and differentiate between known and unknown, (ii) and avoid speculation and minimisation of the facts (Stefan and Nazarov, 2020). Leaders must have the ability to deliver bad news even though it may receive negative reactions. Unfounded optimism can create expectations and cause more anxiety.

Management scholars advocate that **transparency** improves perceptions of trust leaders that have good intentions are likely to be more trusted. Participation and involvement of staff in decision-making processes create buy-in but also improve the decisions that are taken. Leaders must show **vulnerability** and authentically demonstrate feelings about the impact of changes and losses to build trust. As the pandemic evolves, leaders must advocate for resilience, be hopeful, and be trustworthy to unleash creativity. Leaders are also expected to be optimistic and encourage a sense of community to build momentum for impending changes.

Leaders must celebrate and share positive stories and create uplifting moments as building blocks in reigniting resilient spirits. An important step in the process is to acknowledge the loss to build trusting relationships.

In responding to the pandemic, organisations must respond to the crisis with stories about how people are adapting to new ways of working. It is to show appreciation for the challenges people are experiencing. Another powerful strategy is to help people, help others and this results in the elimination of stress and improve well-being (paying it forward concept).

4.8 Communications

Stefan and Nazarov (2020) propose that leaders must use a variety of communication channels and approaches to convey information clearly and frequently to all stakeholders in a comprehensive, using flexible style to encourage adaptability and learning in the crisis.

The guidelines for the community during the pandemic will transform over the cycle of the pandemic. At the earlier stages of the crisis, people struggle to absorb information and hence clear, simple, frequent communication is recommended. The underlying message must be health and safety, and this must be repeated and reinforced.

At the outset of the pandemic, there is perceived threat, fear, and high levels of anxiety and people have limited desire to tolerate new, disruptive inputs that overwhelm a person's ability to process information. As a result, the audience can experience cognitive freezing because of the high levels of uncertainty and perceived threats. As the cycle progresses, leaders must define the goals and link them to the mission. Equally important is to understand the stakeholder perspective in general, and engage in constructive dialogue.

4.9 Creativity and Innovation

Traditional ways of thinking must be transformed to adopt new approaches to thinking that foster creativity, innovation, and change (Elsbach, and Stigliani, 2018). Leaders are required to step up and challenge the status quo (current way of doing things) and encourage employees to adopt better approaches for the organisation based on the current context.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The recommendations made herein below guides leaders to continue to consider the implications for sustainability when decisions are made during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Based on the lessons from Covid-19 in managing other pandemics leaders must assure that all decisions are made in the context of the strategy and align with the sustainability strategy. Organisations must develop a clear vision and mantra to ensure the safety and well-being of staff is ensured to deliver services to customers. In achieving these objectives and the context, leaders must still ensure a sustainability focus, namely, the reduction of waste, resource efficiency, innovation, and ecological sourcing. There must be a clear focus on generations yet to come. In order to change, organisations should evolve from 'knowing to do' and from 'compliance to competitive advantage'. Getting this wrong might be detrimental and counterproductive in the long term.

5.1 Compliance first, then competitive advantage

From a sustainability perspective, managers must still consider and adhere to all policies, laws, codes, and regulations on pollution, waste management, and energy efficiency. Investors and funders must continue to support organisations that have good sustainability performance.

5.2 Corporate Social Responsibility and a Good Corporate Citizen

Entities in the public sector should be good corporate citizens in ensuring that all measures are taken to minimise job loss, and proactively engage with suppliers, and other stakeholders to manage the effects of Covid-19 and other pandemics. The nature of community engagement should be refined and tailored to address socio-economic issues exacerbated by the pandemic. There must be a sense amongst the private sector that the public sector is not the only sector responsible to address the Covid- 19 pandemic. All spheres of government and the private sector should take collective responsibility and accountability as well as share a common vision and approach to managing pandemics.

5.3 The business case for developing sustainability strategies

Public sector entities should be more determined to develop sustainability strategies or adapt existing strategies in response to Covid-19. The pandemic has widened some of the pre-existing inequalities and hence provides the basis for organisations to reconsider sustainability strategies.

5.4 Transparency

The principle of transparency must be used openly by organisations to communicate with all stakeholders to determine, assess and improve sustainability practices. The practice of transparency requires open communications, high levels of information disclosure, clarity, and accuracy – as well as an openness to recognise faults and improve practices. Communication should remain at the centre of the pandemic, with critical enforcement to ensure that well-crafted messages are shared and avoid/ minimise fake news.

5.5 Engage the Board

Entity Boards should play a stronger and more collaborative role in managing pandemics like Covid-19 and sustainability in general. Boards should ensure that companies have efficient and effective Covid-19 strategies and programmes. The board should have oversight of these strategies and ensure that a scorecard is developed to monitor and evaluate the entity's performance in this regard.

5.6 Engage the Ecosystem

Collaboration and partnerships between different stakeholders are critical to find solutions and ensure sustainability. Unleashing the power of networks and structures within communities to manage the pandemic and ensure sustainability objectives are achieved.

5.7 Monitoring and Evaluation

Public entities must ensure that monitoring and evaluation are consistently practiced so that lessons can be gleaned to improve the management of the pandemic and that sustainability is managed effectively. This should be done through the establishment of horizontal and vertical reporting structures as well as the alignment of strategic planning documents for all spheres of government and the private sector.

5.8 Engage the Organisation Broadly

Sustainability must be mainstreamed into every decision made by the organisation so that it can be operationalised and cascaded to the lowest level within the organisation.

In essence sustainability efforts must be optimised as a major challenge that goes beyond individual companies. But reassuringly, a number of large companies are developing forward-thinking sustainability policies. It is becoming clear that sustainability is a megatrend that is not going away!

6. Conclusions

Public sector organisations must ensure that the lessons learned in managing the pandemic are documented for further reflection and analytics. Covid-19 was also associated with forging partnerships with various stakeholders, and these relationships must be maintained and retained. Sustainability is possible when there is collaboration and partnership. Lastly, a huge amount of data was collected through managing the pandemic and this data should be recorded, safeguarded, and maintained. Going forward organisation must ensure that decision-making is taken in the context of sustainability and not be paralysed by crisis and be reactive.

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