



WEBINAR

Business Schools in a Post COVID-19 World

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Summary

In late April 2020, the South African Business Schools Association hosted a webinar for the leadership and staff of local business schools, to outline and unpack some of the known and unknown effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on our sphere of education. Facilitated by futurist Marius Oosthuizen, the session was aimed at assisting business school deans, directors and their top teams to understand current trends and to plan for potential scenarios, across a spectrum of severity and length. The session was well attended, and engaging, incorporating input from 35+ attendees, and covering themes such as economic recovery, how to approach reopening, and how we innovate the business model beyond lockdown.

KEYWORDS Business School, Future, Covid-19, Scenarios, South Africa, Economy, Technology, Education models



Introduction

By the end of April 2020, South Africa's national lockdown in response to the coronavirus pandemic had been extended and people were starting to come to grips with the idea that "recovery" would be a staged and long-term journey. Five weeks into it, it was becoming clear to many, across sectors of the economy and society, that hopes of "returning to normal" may have to be reconfigured and reimagined – in the short to medium term, at a minimum. Practices like work-from-home and social distancing had been firmly established globally, and business owners and managers were tasked with scenario-planning and preparing for a "new normal" and our place within it.



On April 29, 2020, the South African Business School Association (SABSA) hosted a participative webinar to engage, guide, and be guided by the leadership of local business schools. The event was facilitated by Marius Oosthuizen, a member of faculty at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), University of Pretoria.

Oosthuizen is a well-respected futurist, educator and consultant in strategic foresight. The intent of the session was to map the known variables, and outline a systematic approach to anticipating conditions, according to a scale of severity and time. Each school will ultimately set their own course, but one aim was to assist schools in developing a framework for planning, or imagining a new approach to our education niche and value proposition.

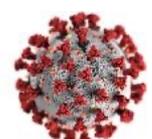
Shock and disruption

After welcomes and introductions, Oosthuizen opened the session by referencing Alvin Toffler's 1970 book, *Future Shock*. Future shock is a term which is – in short – used to describe the state of the world when the rate of change (in technological and social elements) is faster than our ability to adjust. It is, Toffler wrote, "the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time."

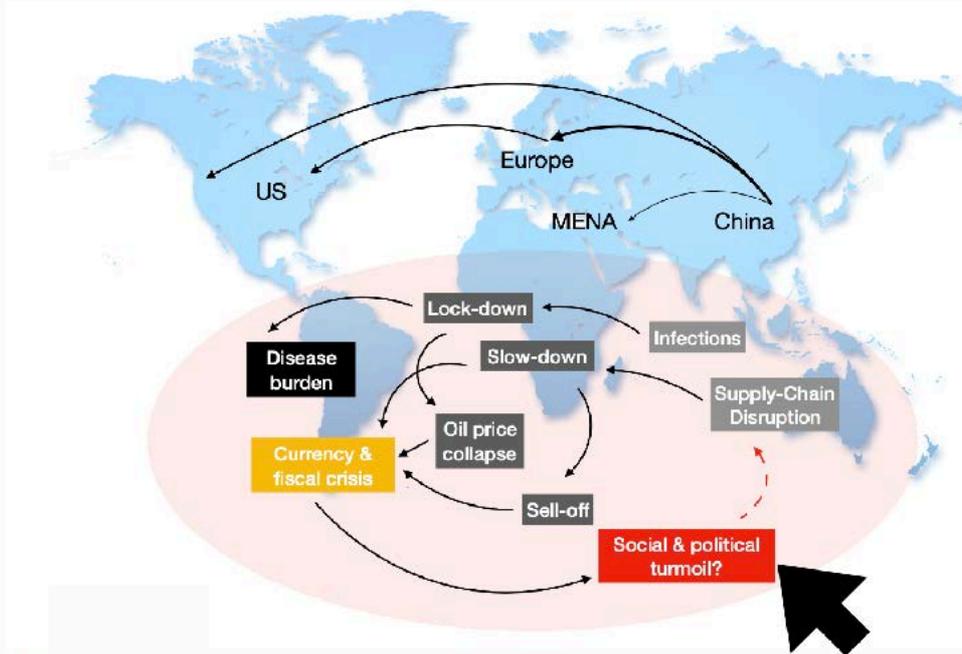
Oosthuizen argued that society (and our political, social and business leaders) are currently in state of future shock, reeling from the tectonic shifts that this global pandemic has ushered in at every level of society.

In a matter of months, we have seen a near reverse of the globalisation trend, with countries closing their borders, flights and airlines grounded, as well as fundamental shifts in the models of both businesses and schools. A profound economic contraction is also evident, with businesses around the world shutting their doors, and significant job losses, some of which are expected to be permanent. And these material effects say nothing of the millions of people sick and struggling, and hundreds of thousands of deaths. At the time of writing, various estimates suggest that around 25-33% of the world's population was under lockdown or shelter-at-home orders, of varying degrees, and coronavirus had overtaken things like malaria, and HIV and Aids, in terms of daily deaths.

With this in mind, Oosthuizen developed and presented a number of tools and graphics for understanding the "system dynamics of a pandemic" – generally and specifically in South Africa – as well as unpacking mindsets and attitudes towards initiatives like #flattenthecurve.



Systems dynamics of the pandemic



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Prevention & Mitigation (Health and Security)

Social distancing

Lockdown

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CORONAVIRUS IN SA
 THE SANDF WILL SUPPORT THE SAPS TO ENFORCE THE LOCKDOWN

eNCA

Testing, track & trace

PPE

Containment, through hygiene (Sanitiser) & PPE

Entry point sanitiser

Public space & transport

Schools & individual hygiene

Protocols

Where are we now?

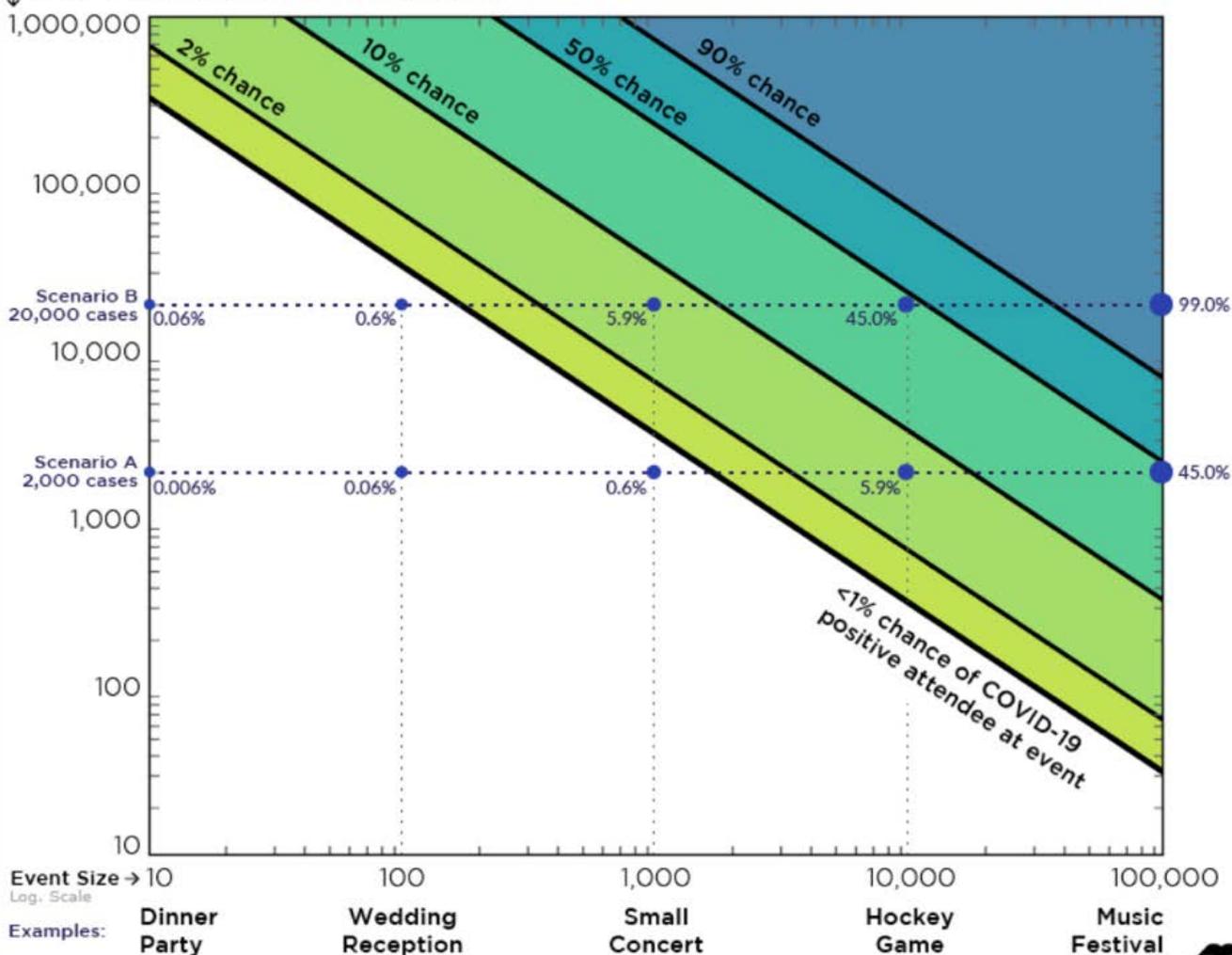
Oosthuizen emphasises that although the illness came to Africa “late” for various reasons, the economic effects of the lockdown and slowdown could be felt here early because of our particular set of challenges as a region consisting of developing nations. South Africa was already in a state of flat economic growth rates and “fiscal pinch”, making us vulnerable to volatility.

With the arrival of Covid-19 clearly imminent, our government and health services shifted quickly into a state of preparation and prevention. This is the core of the “flatten the curve” strategy which seeks to prevent overwhelming the capacity of health care systems. Our focus, he said, has rightly been on how we will manage the disease burden, and he commends the local efforts therein. But now we need to shift from prevention to containment, a stage that much of Asia for example are in, as they attempt to re-establish a sense of normalcy and equilibrium, even within the context of a long-lived health threat.

The lifting of lockdown and reopening of the economy requires what President Ramaphosa calls a “risk-adjusted strategy” informed by data and global best practices.

COVID-19 Event Risk Assessment Planner

Active circulating infections in the U.S. Log. Scale

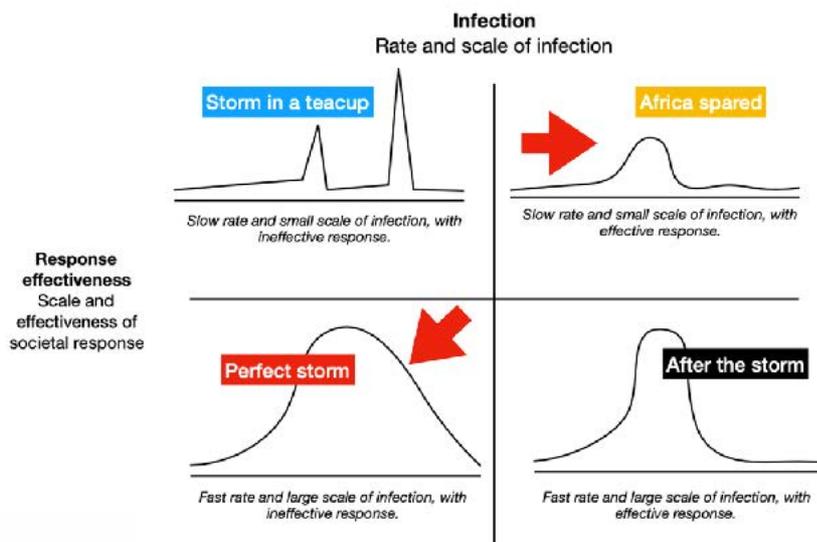


Source: Adapted from J.S. Weitz - jsweitz@gatech.edu



Anticipating the damage

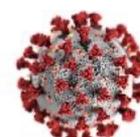
What does the future hold? There is no crystal ball, of course, but Oosthuizen presented a four-quadrant, potential scenario graphic, that – on a macro level – anticipates for the rate and scale of infection, combined with the scale and effectiveness of the societal response.



With this in place, Oosthuizen broke these down further according to (a) the number of anticipated infections in SA, (b) the healthcare system’s capacity, (c) economic impact, (d) social impact, and finally (e) potential political effects or fallout.

The details of which are encapsulated in the following table.

Scenario	Storm in a teacup	Africa spared	Perfect storm	After the storm
Anticipated infections (SA)	Under 1000	Under 5000	Millions	Two hundred thousand at a time
Capacity of health system to cope	Public hospitals control outbreak	Private hospitals provide assistance	Quarantine centres erected in school halls.	Regional quarantine centres remain
Economic impact	Recessionary impact. Supply chain reorientation.	Recessionary impact. Job and revenue losses passed through system.	Fiscal crisis, currency devaluation, decade-long recovery. Major risk to mining, tourism, airline industry	Fiscal crisis, currency devaluation, decades-long recovery.
Social impact	Isolated, pocketed deaths, widespread social distancing as precaution.	Isolated, pocketed deaths, widespread social distancing as precaution.	Social shut-down, inter-community tensions. Conflict over resources. National tragedy among immunodeficient populations.	Temporary social shut-down, isolated tensions, pocketed community tragedies.
Political fall-out	Negligible	Temporary drop in confidence in government responsiveness.	Loss in adherence to rule of law, breakdown of societal norms. State of emergency, local securitisation.	Temporary drop in confidence in government responsiveness. Significant fracture in political support of dominant parties.

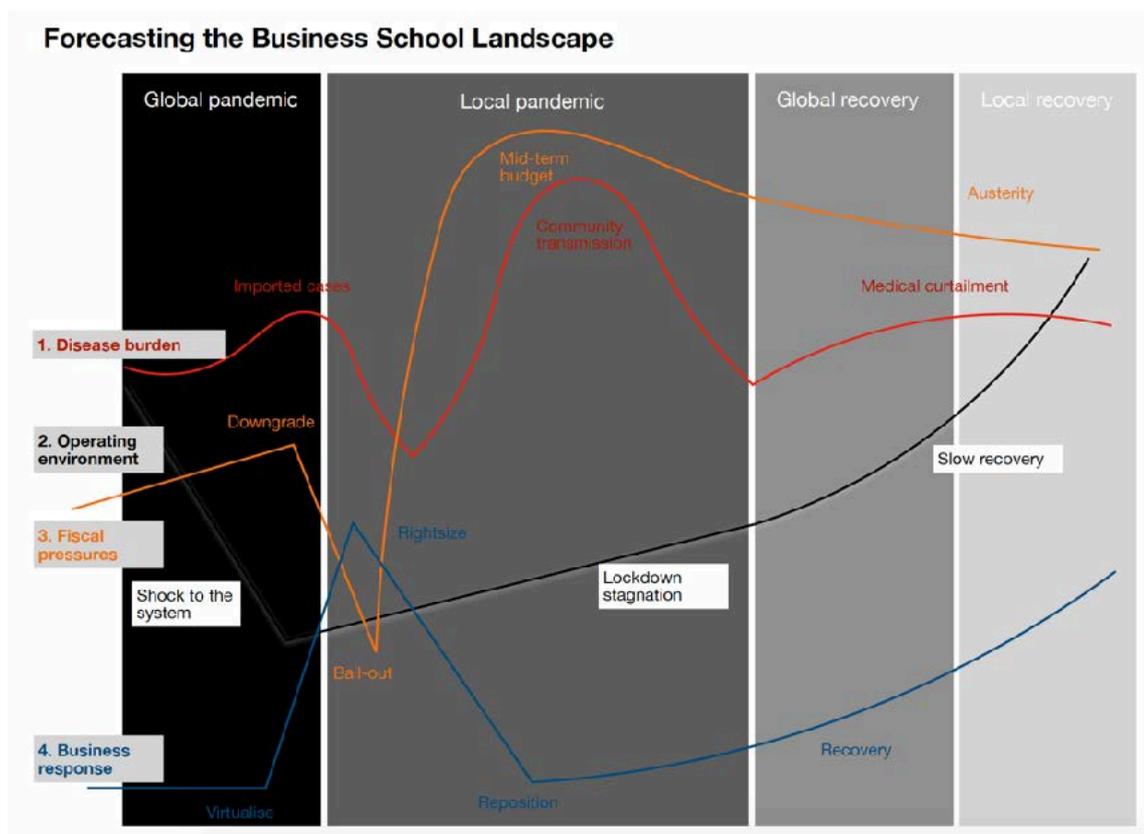


Oosthuizen confirms that the “storm in a teacup” scenario has (essentially) been surpassed. This is no longer on the table. If we can manage to remain in the “Africa spared” scenario, we will see economic contractions and its social consequences, but these will be somewhat limited. But this, at this point, is best case scenario.

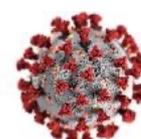
The risk or fear is of falling into the “perfect storm” scenario where huge loss of life and extended financial crisis (as well as the resultant political effects) is very real, and will have a long tail. All of which is already informed, or affected, by the fiscally constrained position South Africa occupied prior to this current threat.

Zooming in

Having outlined the broad economic factors and scenarios, Oosthuizen began to focus in on the impact on specific industries, types of business (See, among others, slides 15 and 16), and then shifted the conversation to the business school sphere (see graphic below).

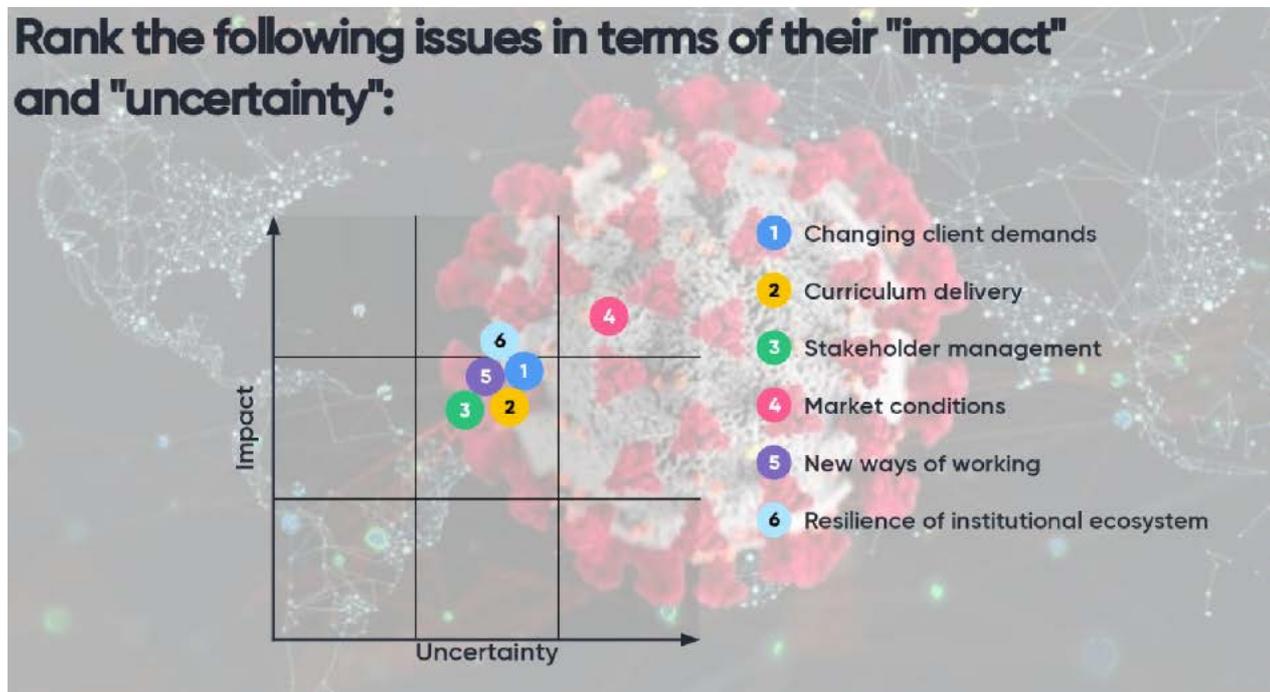


Here, specific metrics are plotted in terms of milestones (during pandemic, and during recovery), in two categories (global and local), because of the anticipated lag economically and the projection of increased (or amplified) effect in a developing nation.



What business school leadership had to say

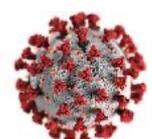
At this juncture, the webinar shifted into a more participatory mode, using the menti.com tool for input from attendees. The first step was measuring sentiment. Participants were asked to rank a set number of issues according to impact and uncertainty, with "market conditions" emerging as a standout concern.



The next question was to complete the following: "Covid-19 will cause business schools to transform their ..." with variations on modes and means of delivering courses emerging as the most frequent response. Also noteworthy was a preponderance of concern about the relevance and existence of said organisations. The former being a largely pragmatic concern, and the latter of a more philosophical nature.

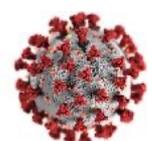
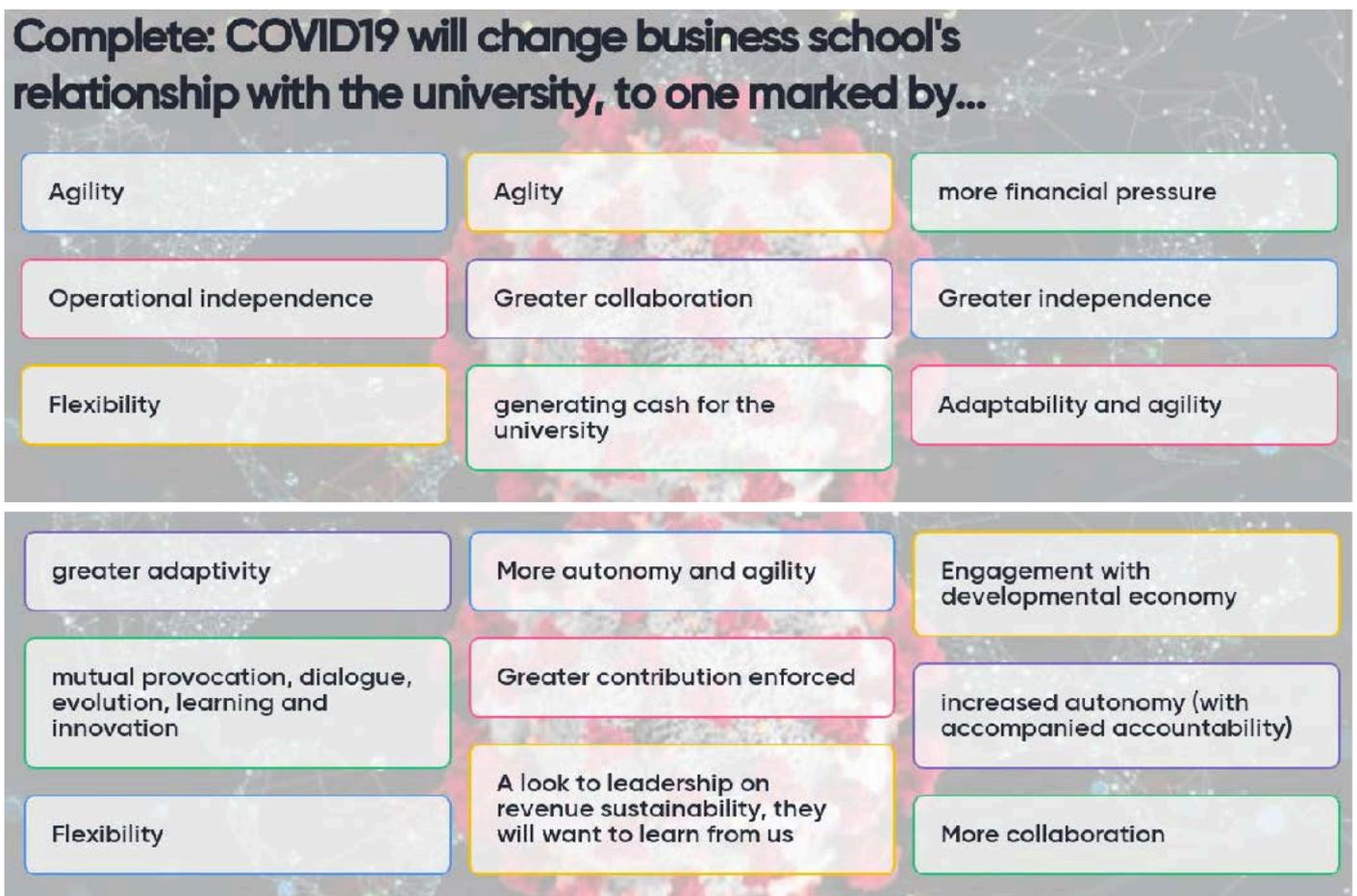
Complete this sentence: COVID19 will cause business schools to transform their...

Ways of delivery	attitudes towards national education	Purpose and strategic goals
value proposition	Way of engaging	Delivery mode
mode of delivery	Delivery methods	Faculty to discover new Ways of delivery





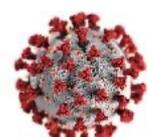
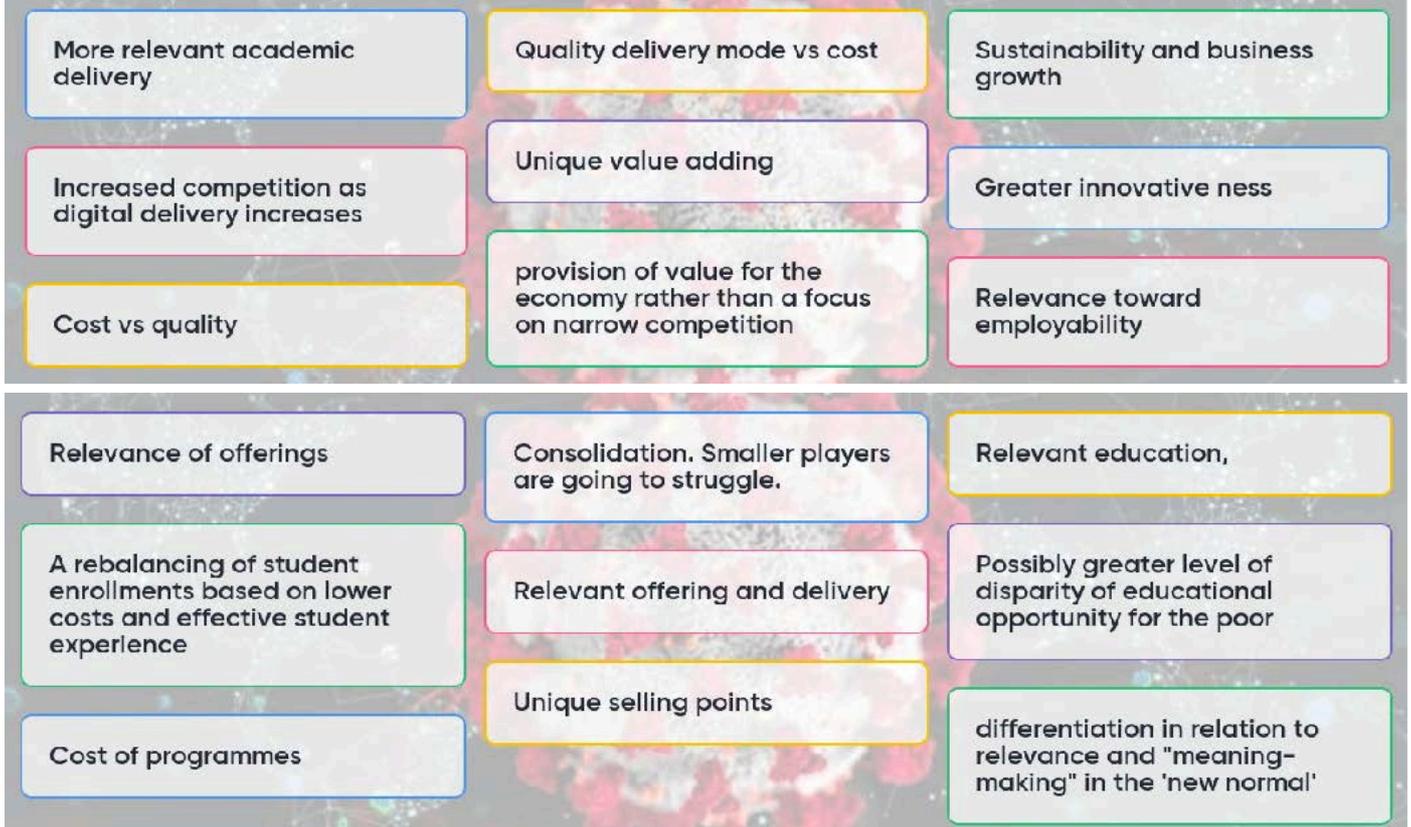
The third question asked participants to anticipate how the Covid-19 crisis may change the relationship of business schools and their parent/host universities. Here many submitted terms like “flexibility” and “agility” as being the notable keywords to describe said relationship. There seemed to be a general split between participants who expected this would make them more collaborative with their university and those who felt it would ultimately result in great independence.





Fourth, Oosthuizen asked participants how they expected the competitive landscape to shift, and a general consensus emerged that there would be more competition, a need for more innovation and USPs, and a focus on value (cost v relevance and quality). This reflects attitudes about the leanness of both future budgets (who will pay, and what will they be prepared to pay for) and time resources (what is a priority for your time, and how much time do you have for your priorities).

Complete: The competitive landscape for schools (domestic and global) will shift towards...





And finally, participants ranked a number of issues according to their perception of “highest to lowest impact” on business schools. Here we saw an echo of concerns about delivery modes. This is telling in an environment such as south Africa with expensive and sometimes unreliable communication and internet infrastructure.

