

# USING A MEANING-CENTRED LEADERSHIP MODEL TO IGNITE A FIELD OF INSPIRED CONNECTIONS IN YOUTH LEADERS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigated whether teaching student leaders about the Meaning-Centred Leadership Model results in a significant improvement in their leadership potentials. The participants were two groups of student leaders (N=18) from a satellite campus of a university of technology in South Africa. The paper utilised both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data was collected using Purpose in Life Test (PIL) and Youth Leadership Test (YLT). In addition, qualitative data was collected on the participants' subjective experience of development in leadership potential. A non-equivalent control group design was employed. A 'repeated measures' t-test was used. The qualitative data was analysed by means of themes. The findings from this paper indicate that a meaning-centred leadership model can be used to inspire young people in their leadership development. The levels of meaning of student leaders in the experimental group were significantly better after the intervention than before. In addition, there was a significant increase in the leadership aptitude of student leaders in the experimental group after the meaning-centred leadership model. Notable differences were also observed between the two groups, in the sense that the Purpose in Life and Youth Leadership Test scores of participants in the experimental group was significantly better after the intervention than before. The findings indicate that it is possible to inspire youth leaders in their leadership development for meaning by means of a meaning-centred leadership model, and that this helps in their transformational self-knowledge.

**Keywords:** Meaning-Centred Leadership Model, leadership development, youth, creative values, experiential values, attitudinal values, task-oriented, relational-oriented, servant leadership



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## INTRODUCTION

The youth of South Africa are faced with a dichotomous situation because of the history of apartheid, which they did not experience personally, a democratic era in which unemployment and aggression seem to be normal, and recognising that they might inherit a desolate future. Every little attempt they make to present their views, they are perceived as being troublesome, and hence they are labelled a 'generation at risk'. Therefore, they end up becoming gangsters, futile, uneducated, diseased and unemployed (Jobson 2011). Even the youth who attempt advocate for their needs often lack diplomacy and resort to anger outbursts; and without realising that times have changed, youth struggle to disconnect themselves from the 'defiance campaigns', which were employed by their predecessors.

Therefore, policy makers are more concerned about youth because they can be either become a major source of problems or a major resource for national development (Statssa 2010). However, the problem is that most of the youth leadership programmes are more concerned with developing mechanical skills instead of inspiring values. Therefore, it is the duty of society to inspire young people to acquire skills and values that will enable them to develop their full leadership potential.

Meaningful leadership development is a great way to promote positive life skills learning. The *National Youth Policy 2009–2014*, of South Africa, proposed important reasons for the development of young people, however, there seems to be few solid mechanisms to ensure proper implementation of policy recommendations (RSA 2009). Besides the fact that most of the budget earmarked for youth development initiatives cannot be accounted for, the biggest challenge is that the efficiency of interventions is also difficult to measure (Budlender, Weideman and Zimba 2006). These challenges are caused by poor and/or lack of leadership development initiatives specifically intended for youth.

Leadership development helps young people to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, to set holistic goals, and establish the self-esteem and enthusiasm necessary to reach the goals (NASET 2005). The purpose of this article was to demonstrate how a Meaning-Centred Leadership Model can be used effectively in youth leadership development. Its primary objective is to demonstrate to the readers how a meaning-centred intervention can be used to inspire values and consequently develop leadership skills among student leaders.

This article will present one of the important theories that will help authorities shift perceptions about young South Africans – their potential to lead through a Meaning-Centred Leadership Model (MCLM). It starts with a summary of the literature on youth leadership, focusing primarily on the role played by higher education in leadership development, as well as the importance of integrating values and skills into the Meaning-Centred Leadership Model (MCLM). Finally,

it will present an empirical study conducted with student leaders to validate the development of this model.

## WHAT IS YOUTH LEADERSHIP?

Youth leadership can be defined as (1) showing people the way, and setting an example (Wehmeyer, Agran and Hughes 1998); and (2) being able to examine one's own gifts and flaws, setting personal and career goals, and having the courage to execute them; as well as identifying and taking full advantage of available resources, not only to be social, but also to establish meaningful social relations and cultivate positive attitudes (AERC, Children's Hospital 2014). According to Scharmer (2009, 4), 'Leadership is the capacity of a system or a community to co-sense and co-create its future as it emerges.' Thus, inner and outward dynamics play a significant role in defining youth leadership.

### The role of higher education in developing leadership

Von Döepp (2009) mentioned that 'Academics, policy makers and opinion leaders have increasingly singled out the importance of leadership as a variable in shaping the various development and government outcomes witnessed on the African continent.' Currently, institutions of higher learning are considered to be a source for potential change given their important role in inculcating leadership capability among youth (Astin 1993; Astin & Astin 2000; Morse 1989; 2004). Moreover, it is the responsibility of higher education authorities to ensure that students develop effective leadership potentials. According to King (1997, 87), 'Helping students develop the integrity and strength of character that prepare them for leadership may be one of the most challenging and important goals of higher education.'

### Meaning-Centred Leadership Model (MCLM)

Meaning-making, in all its various aspects, is not only an important motivating force in human life but also in leadership (Frankl 1985). We search for personal meanings in our life experiences, which enables us to transfer those values to become Meaning-Centred Leaders.

It is through meaning-making that human consciousness is expanded; for this reason, Meaning-Centred Leadership Model (MCLM) attempts to integrate the strengths of three leadership theories (i.e. task-oriented, relational-oriented, and servant leadership styles), with the three basic principles of Viktor Frankl's philosophy (i.e. creative, experiential, and attitudinal values), to enable leaders to survive and adapt in different settings, for example, in the workplace, society, institutions and/or organisations (Frankl 1985). By integrating the three values into the leadership styles, MCLM recognises that leadership can and should be situational, depending

on the needs of the team, goal attainment, team spirit, or resilience. For this reason each leader will apply the model with a conscious analysis of the presenting concern, the intended result and the most appropriate tool for the job (Frankl 1978; 1985).

As leaders become engaged in a diverse set of leadership responsibilities, they ignite a field of inspired connections to self, to others, and to the local and world communities (Scharmer 2009).

Hence, MCLM is also used in leadership development to facilitate the conscious integration of the principles of sense of meaning with the strengths of other leadership theories. Thus the purpose of using MCLM in leadership development is to ignite a field of inspired connections by integrating the values of Viktor Frankl's philosophy with the strengths of three leadership styles (Frankl 1985).

Meaning-Centred Leadership Model can be defined as a holistic method that integrates creative, experiential and attitudinal values (Frankl 1978) in leadership development and practice, with task-oriented, relational-oriented and servant leadership potentials, across all areas. Thus, MCLM strives to develop a complete systems intervention, which builds a system-wide transformational self-knowledge.

As a result, in order to continually self-evolve into an effective and efficient leader, MCLM advocates that there are three principal ways through which we can inspire leadership potentials among youth: what they give to the world (task-orientated leadership potential); what they take from the world (relations-orientated leadership potential); and maintaining positive attitudes (servant leadership potential) (Calvard and Pierce 2013; Frankl 1985; Ja'afaru 2014; Taberner *et al.* 2009).

The aim of MCLM is to inspire appropriate and meaningful leadership practices across a wide range of personal, organisational, institutional and governmental activities.

Thus, MCLM involves integrating the epistemology of leadership (thinking about leadership thinking) (Flumerfelt 2006), with the ontology of leadership (the nature and function of *being* for a leader and the actions of effective leadership) (Jensen 2014), with the axiology of leadership (the value of considering values in leadership) (Hodgkinson 1995).

The next section is a discussion of how the strengths of three leadership theories (i.e. task-oriented, relational-oriented, and servant leadership styles), were combined with the three values of Frankl's philosophy (i.e. creative, experiential, and attitudinal values), with the intention of developing the Meaning-Centred Leadership Model (MCLM).

## Meaningful task-oriented leadership (creative values)

Viktor Frankl's philosophy teaches us that the first way in which meaning can be found is through our creations. Youth need to feel that there is a goal to fight towards, or that there is something to live for, that life has a purpose. Everyone, in one way

or another, draws meaning from doing something. In this sense the desire to make a difference becomes the primary source of authentic meaning (Pattakos 2004). Thus youth can achieve meaning through pursuing studies, voluntary or part-time work, artistic pursuits, as well as causes in which they can be active, like hobbies and sport (Greenstein & Breitbart 2000). It is only once youth leaders comprehend the importance of creative values that will make it much easier for them to execute their duties effectively and efficiently as task-oriented leaders. More importantly, attaining creative values enables youth leaders to understand their purpose, and inspire them to be task-oriented leaders.

A task-oriented leader is one who focuses on the results or goal attainment, together with all support mechanisms necessary to reach the goal. A task-oriented leader is more concerned with discovering practical, step-by-step solutions for meeting specific goals. In other words, a task-oriented youth leader might ask: ‘What should we do to achieve our desired results?’ (Anzalone 2014; Emery, Calvard and Pierce 2013; Tabernero *et al.* 2009).

The main priority of the task-oriented leader is the achievement of the task at hand. For example, task-oriented student leaders might mobilise resources to ensure that all poor, but academically deserving, students receive financial assistance. This type of leader monitors progress by tracking the achievements of the team, and judges the success of the project based on the extent to which the goals and objectives were completed (Anzalone 2014; Emery, Calvard and Pierce 2013; Marquis 2014; Tabernero *et al.* 2009).

A task-oriented leader is rational and investigative. For example, task-oriented student leaders might observe whether the annual student fee increases are in line with inflation or not. A task-oriented leader understands that they will not accomplish all their goals at the same time and hence they might prioritise them. For example, a task-oriented student leader might become aware that because they have a limited time to serve the needs of the students, they will first attend to those which are very important.

### Meaningful relational-oriented leadership (experiential values)

The second way to discover meaning is through what a person receives or takes from the world in terms of encounters and experiences with other human beings. The way youth interact with one another helps them to discover their meaning. How their educators and fellow students treat them, enables them to find meaning. Loving others, that is, knowing, appreciating and respecting others the way they are, helps them to find meaning (Giovinco 2001). Realising experiential values empowers youth leaders to understand their purpose, and they will be able to inspire meaningful associations as relational-oriented leaders.

A relational-oriented leader understands the importance of tasks, but also places a tremendous amount of time and focus on meeting the needs of everyone involved in the assignment. This may involve looking after the wellbeing of team members, spending individual time with team members to learn their strengths and weaknesses, recognising and rewarding excellence, or just leading in a friendly or encouraging way (Anzalone 2014; Marquis 2014; Emery, Calvard & Pierce 2013; Taberner *et al.* 2009).

The relational-oriented leader understands that achieving the desired outcome requires an encouraging environment where people feel appreciated. Personal clashes, disappointments, bitterness and even apathy can have a negative impact on achieving goals, so to minimise such problems; the relational-oriented leader puts people first (Anzalone 2014; Emery, Calvard & Pierce 2013; Marquis 2014; Taberner *et al.* 2009). For example, there might be constant conflicts between members of a group. A relational leader would see this and commission for a team-building exercise.

### Meaningful servant leadership (attitudinal values)

The third way to discover meaning is through the stand one takes to his or her predicament in case he or she must face a fate that cannot be changed. This is the reason why life never stops to have meaning, because even a person who is deprived of both creative and experiential meanings is still challenged by a meaning to fulfil, that is, by the meaning inherent in the right, in an upright way of suffering. Facing challenges without meaning is likely to bring despair, however, suffering with positive attitudes (meaning) is likely to bring fulfilment (Frankl 1985). What matters in this case is the attitude that one adopts. By changing their attitudes, youth can also change from seeing themselves as helpless victims (of drives, genes, environment, society, and the past), to seeing themselves as people who are in control, irrespective of the circumstances. The emphasis is on the potential of each situation.

Once youth leaders comprehend the importance of attitudinal values, it will make it much easier for them to execute their duties effectively and efficiently as servant leaders. More importantly, attitudinal values assist youth leaders to understand their purpose, and inspire them to be servant leaders.

A servant leadership involves demonstrating integrity, leading by example, collaborating with others to make decisions and maintaining a positive attitude even in the midst of challenges (Ja'afaru 2014; Marquis 2014; Van Dierendonck *et al.* 2014). Servant leaders are more interested in the service they provide and less about the recognition they attain. They motivate members of their organisation all the time by engaging them in meaningful activities.

Servant leaders consider factors beyond their mandate and aim to address the broader institutional factors (Ja'afaru 2014; Marquis 2014; Van Dierendonck

*et al.* 2014). For example, student leaders might be concerned with the high rate of academic exclusions of students who fail repeatedly. Usually, task-orientated student leaders put pressure on university authorities to readmit these students. A servant leader goes beyond readmission and follows up on these students to establish whether they receive support to cope with academic activities. If a student does not adhere to the stipulated conditions of his or her readmission, the leader might take further steps to fix the situation.

However, servant leaders typically go beyond generally accepted ethical principles and consider the broad implications of their character (Ja'afaru 2014; Marquis 2014; Van Dierendonck *et al.* 2014). For example, there are instances where, even after readmission, when academically excluded students fail to cope with academic demands. A servant leader would consider the long-term impact of keeping these students in the system, considering the fact that institutions of higher learning in South Africa have restricted quotas. A servant leader might consider the fact that keeping students who fail repeatedly in the system might disadvantage new students, and cost the university a lot of money.

## HYPOTHESES OF THE PAPER

The overarching objective is to investigate the efficacy of a meaning-centred leadership model on the sense of meaning in student leaders as related to the development of their leadership potential. The primary research question was: Can a meaning-centred leadership model increase the levels of meaning and inspire leadership potential among student leaders?

The researcher postulates that a higher sense of meaning is essential to enable student leaders to cope effectively with their leadership responsibilities; therefore, a high sense of meaning is likely to inspire leadership potential among young people.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The researcher followed a non-equivalent comparison group design (NCGD), in which one pretest-posttest comparison group and one pretest-posttest experimental group was used. The following equation was employed.

$$\begin{array}{cccc} N & O & X & O \\ N & O & & O \end{array}$$

The researcher compared an experimental and control group. The researcher also used the difference in difference approach to calculate the effect of a treatment on the outcome by comparing the average change over time for the control group.

The article is exploratory in the sense that there are few or no earlier studies to refer to. Thus, the intention was to determine the usefulness of a meaning-oriented intervention in youth leadership development at an institution of higher learning.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Two groups of student leaders from a university of technology in South Africa.
- Experimental group (n=9, age range = 23 to 27 years, females = 56 per cent, majority ethnicity = 67 per cent Sotho speaking, raised by both parents = 22 per cent.
- Comparison group (n=9, age range = 21 to 31 years, females = 78 per cent, majority ethnicity = 78 per cent Sotho speaking, raised by both parents= 67 per cent).The researcher used existing groups of participants or nonrandom.

## QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Participants completed Purpose in Life Test (PIL) of Crumbaugh and Maholic (1969) and Youth Leadership Test (YLT) (NLLC 2006) pre- and post-intervention. Data on the participants' demographics was also collected.

### Qualitative data collection

The researcher administered a questionnaire with open-ended questions to gain insight into the participants' impression of the meaning-centred intervention. The following aspects were covered: were they satisfied with the content of topic:

- What skills and values were inspired upon?
- How will the skills and values inspire them to provide a better service or contribute more to their team work?
- How do they rate the presenter?

The researcher conducted a member-checking process by sharing the findings with those from whom the data was collected. Sharing the themes that emerged from the findings provided an opportunity to, not only validate the findings, but also elicit further clarification of the results.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Permission to conduct this paper was obtained from the management of Central University of Technology, Free State (Welkom Campus). All students who participated in this paper completed a consent form. Participants were assured that all information would be treated as confidential and anonymous.



The questionnaires were administered by the researcher, and completed individually by the participants.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Data was analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The effect of the independent variable (meaning-centred intervention) on the dependent variable (PIL score/sense of meaning and Youth Leadership Skill) was examined. To investigate the research hypotheses the researcher used a paired samples t-test. More specifically a 'repeated measures' t-test was used, whereby each group, comparison and experimental, has been tested twice. The researcher used the change scores analysis to assess the differences between both groups. The change score analysis simply seeks to determine whether, on average, one group experienced a larger pretest-posttest difference.

The qualitative data were thematically analysed using the procedures recommended by Guest (2012).

## RESULTS

There was a significant increase in the mean of participants in the experimental group as compared with those in the control group. As a result the Purpose in life and Youth Leadership Test scores of participants in the experimental group were significantly better after the intervention than before. From this we can conclude that the intervention did have a positive effect.

The levels of meaning of student leaders in the experimental group were significantly better after the intervention than before. As can be observed from the Table 1, the group displayed moderate purpose in life before the meaning-centred intervention, with a mean score of 103.44. However, the intervention brought about an increase of 16.23 ( $p < .01$ ) in the PIL scores.

**Table 1:** (Experimental Group) Pre-posttest Means (with Standard Deviation) and Range for Meaning (N=9)

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Difference Score	Two tailed P value	One Tailed P value
N	9	9	-	-	-
Mean (SD)	103.44(16.36)	119.67(12.56)	-16.23(3.8)	0.0025	0.0012
Range Min (Max)	68(119)	92(135)	-24(-16)	-	-

When the student leaders were distributed into various levels of meaning, 22 per cent of them expressed a definite lack of meaning, and after the intervention, the number decreased to zero. The number of student leaders who experienced high levels of

meaning increased from 44 per cent to 89 per cent after the intervention. There were no changes in the comparison group.

In addition, there was a significant increase in the leadership aptitude of student leaders in the experimental group after the meaning-centred leadership model. Table 2 indicates that the group displayed high leadership aptitude before the meaning-centred intervention, with a mean score of 48. The intervention brought about an increase of 4.11 ( $p < .01$ ) in the YLT scores, to 52.11.

**Table 2:** (Experimental Group) Pre-posttest Means (with Standard Deviation) and Range for Leadership Aptitude (N=9)

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Difference Score	Two tailed P value	One Tailed P value
N	9	9	-	-	-
Mean (SD)	48(7.33)	52.11(5.73)	4.11(1.6)	0.0193	0.0097
Range Min (Max)	31(55)	40(58)	-9(-3)	-	-

The number of student leaders who fell in the well-rounded individual category increased by 11 per cent, from 78 per cent before the intervention to 89 per cent after the intervention. Even though this does not prove that it was the intervention that contributed to the increase of the leadership aptitude, because t-test cannot prove causality, it is highly probable that the intervention contributed to the improvement.

Table 3 indicates that a difference in difference score of 15.79 was obtained between the Means of the Purpose in Life test scores of student leaders in the control group and experimental group at post-test stage. Thus, the intervention did have a desired effect on the experimental group.

**Table 3:** Difference in difference between the Means of the Experimental Group and Comparison Group for Meaning (N=18)

	Pretest	Posttest	Mean Difference
Experimental Group	103.44	119.67	16.23
Control Group	106.56	107	0.44
Change	3.12	-12.67	<b>15.79</b>

Table 4 reveals that a difference in difference score of 4.11 was obtained between the Means of the Youth Leadership Test scores of student leaders in the control group and experimental group at post-test stage. Thus, the intervention did have a desired effect on the experimental group.

**Table 4:** Difference in difference between the Means of the Experimental Group and Comparison Group for Leadership Aptitude (N=18)

	Pretest	Posttest	Mean Difference
Experimental Group	48	52.11	4.11
Control Group	49.89	49.89	0
Change	1.89	-2.22	4.11

The transformational self-knowledge with regard to meaningful task-oriented leadership (Creative Values) was inspired since student leaders indicated that they are committed, open minded, established clear visions and goals, they are analytic, flexible, affirmed, creative, can set limits, they are organised, can communicate better and they are determined to learn. Supportive statements include:

- My analytic ability is enhanced (Participant 9).
- I was provoked to set new aims (Participant 2).
- Setting clear and achievable goals, know where to stop (Participant 7).

Furthermore, student leaders affirmed that their transformational self-knowledge with regard to meaningful relational-oriented leadership (experiential values) was inspired in the sense that they are disciplined, established strong characters, more understanding, can build team cohesion, will relate better with others, able to share, are more diplomatic, and will listen to others. Supportive statements include:

- I will share my success with my teammates (Participant 7).
- I will be able to deal with people who don't share same values as me (Participant 6).
- I will be able to motivate others; I will enjoy my work and life even more (Participant 3).

Lastly, student leaders affirmed that their transformational self-knowledge with regard to meaningful servant leadership (attitudinal values) was inspired because they are optimistic, can persevere, sacrifice, are confident, courageous, their perspectives changed and they established positive attitudes. Supportive statements include:

- I should not give up because of negative things that occurred in my life (Participant 5).
- I got a chance to look at life in a different way; got the spirit to be optimistic towards the future (Participant 8).
- I learned that out of every painful situation comes something good (Participant 2).
- When you have purpose in life you don't give up easily (Participant 3).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this article was to demonstrate how a Meaning-Centred Leadership Model can be used effectively in youth leadership development. Its primary objective was to demonstrate to the readers how a meaning-centred intervention can be used to inspire values and consequently develop leadership skills among student leaders. The outcome of the research revealed that there was a significant improvement in the levels of meaning, as well as leadership capabilities, of student leaders in the experimental group.

Their meaningful task-oriented leadership (Creative Values) was inspired. In the same way, several authors indicated that a task-oriented leader is one who focuses on the results or goal attainment, together with all support mechanisms necessary to reach the goal (Anzalone 2014; Emery, Calvard and Pierce 2013; Taberner *et al.* 2009). A task-oriented leader is more concerned with discovering practical, step-by-step solutions for meeting specific goals. In other words, a task-oriented youth leader might ask, 'What should we do to achieve our desired results?' (Anzalone 2014; Emery, Calvard and Pierce 2013; Taberner *et al.* 2009).

The student leader's transformational self-knowledge with regard to meaningful relational-oriented leadership (experiential values) was also inspired. Several authors have indicated that the relational-oriented leader understands that achieving the desired outcome requires an encouraging environment where people feel appreciated (Anzalone 2014; Emery, Calvard & Pierce 2013; Marquis 2014; Taberner *et al.* 2009). Personal clashes, disappointments, bitterness and even apathy can have a negative impact on achieving goals, so to minimise such problems; the relational-oriented leader puts people first (Anzalone 2014; Emery, Calvard and Pierce 2013; Marquis 2014; Taberner *et al.* 2009).

Lastly, their transformational self-knowledge with regard to meaningful servant leadership (attitudinal values) was also inspired. These findings are supported by several authors who reported that servant leadership involves demonstrating integrity, leading by example, collaborating with others to make decisions and maintaining a positive attitude even in the midst of challenges (Ja'afaru 2014; Marquis 2014; Van Dierendonck *et al.* 2014).

The meaning-centred leadership model inspired most of the student leaders to appreciate themselves and the role they play in their respective positions, in the sense that they are enlightened, determined, courageous, strong willed, giving, well-balanced, resilient, and firmly grounded. Themes emanating from the qualitative analysis affirmed that the model is relevant for inspiring transformational self-knowledge among youth leaders.

As a final point, it can be concluded that exposing student leaders to a meaning-centred intervention inspired their leadership potentials, in the sense that their levels of meaning and leadership aptitudes increased. A number of authors have indicated that it is the responsibility of higher education authorities to ensure that students

develop effective leadership potentials (Astin 1993; Astin and Astin 2000; Morse 1989; 2004). At present, institutions of higher learning are considered to be a source for potential change given their important role in inculcating leadership capability among youth (Astin 1993; Astin and Astin 2000; Morse 1989; 2004).

This article demonstrated how the three basic values of Viktor Frankl's philosophy were integrated with three separate leadership styles to formulate the Meaning-Centred Leadership Model (MCLM). As a result, the outcomes of this paper are aligned with Scharmer's view of developing complete systems interventions, which construct a system-wide transformational self-knowledge (Identity, Will), as opposed to one that is primarily concerned with building an individual's technical 'leadership skills' (Scharmer 2009). Also, by integrating the three values with the three leadership styles, I was attempting to justify Scharmer's statement that 'Leadership development is not about filling a gap but about igniting a field of inspired connections' (Scharmer 2009).

Limitations of the paper include the use of a purposeful sample, which attracted student leaders mostly from the moderate to high levels of meaning category. The primary drawback of quasi-experimental designs is that they cannot eliminate the possibility of confounding bias, which could hinder one's ability to draw causal inferences. Although the difference in difference design was used with the intent to eliminate some of the effect bias, the method may be subject to certain biases (mean reversion bias, etc.). Also, the researcher conducted the training and also administered the questionnaire; for this reason, the article could be perceived to be biased, therefore the researcher used a mixed methods approach in order to control these limitations. Also, the sample size was too small; thus one cannot say with certainty that the student leaders represented here also reflect the reality of youth leaders in all institutions of higher learning, and thus one should be careful when it comes to generalising the results to other settings. The limitation of a thematic analysis is that it may miss nuanced data. It should also be noted that some of the organisations or institutions with limited financial resources might find it costly to implement the intervention because it takes place over a 2-day period. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that a meaning-centred leadership model does increase the levels of meaning of student leaders and inspire their leadership potential.

Moreover, the model seems to be a promising intervention for inspiring effective leadership aptitudes among student leaders, which will ensue that they will develop into responsible and mature adults. It is also evident from this research that the participants could comprehend the Meaning-Centred Leadership Model. Consequently, the student leaders indicated they could employ the model in their personal lives. More importantly, student leaders indicated that they will apply the skills and values they acquired in respective facets of their lives. At the end, it can be concluded that in teaching student leaders about the Meaning Centred Leadership Model, we were able to ignite a field of connections by integrating the values of

Frankl's philosophy (i.e. creative, experiential and attitudinal values) with the strengths of three leadership styles (i.e. task-oriented, relational-oriented and servant leadership aptitudes).

## CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that a meaning-centred leadership model can be used to inspire young people in their leadership development. The researcher provided new evidence concerning the relationship between sense of meaning, as measured by Purpose in Life (PIL) test, and leadership aptitude, as measured by Youth Leadership Test (YLT), in the sense that, as the participants' levels of meaning increased, in the post-intervention measurements, their leadership aptitudes were positively impacted.

From the results gained, it is suggested that similar dynamics are likely to be at play in other student and/or youth organisations. Therefore, it is recommended that this model should become part of the on-going leadership development sessions of young leaders in different sectors.

Furthermore, the meaning-centred leadership model could be employed as another way of empowering leaders, and subsequently lessen unnecessary conflict. Because student leaders play a major role in leading student organisations and/or structures, especially in institutions of higher learning, interventions aimed at inspiring leadership skills and values will assist them to be more effective. If successful, these programmes should have an impact on improving relations between student leaders and authorities.

Moreover, a higher sense of meaning enables leaders to develop holistically. For this reason, leaders with a high sense of meaning will apply the leadership skills and values with a conscious analysis of the presenting concern, the intended result and the most appropriate tool for the job. Also, it is important that the intervention should not only be rendered when youth leaders depict signs of weariness, but should form part of their continuous development.

Finally, because leaders come across different situations they cannot remain within one leadership style. To become effective leaders young people need to be flexible. It is through employing the principles enshrined in the Meaning-Centred Leadership Model (MCLM) that they will be able to lead in diverse environments and under different circumstances. As Viktor Frankl puts it, 'When we are no longer able to change a situation – we are challenged to change ourselves' (Frankl 1985).

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