

# EXPLORING THE VIEWS OF ACADEMICS ON AN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**J. Frantz\***

Deputy Vice Chancellor: Research and Innovation

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8296-5601>

**J. Marais\***

Department of Child and Family Studies

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2145-6889>

**M. Du Plessis\***

Department of Industrial Psychology

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3865-6959>

\*University of the Western Cape

Cape Town, South Africa

## ABSTRACT

Leadership in higher education institutions has been receiving growing interest, because of the role institutions play in developing students to become leaders in the broader society. However, institutions have to equip staff, adequately, with leadership skills, first, and one way of doing this, is through a leadership development programme for academic staff. The purpose of this current study was to explore and describe the impact of an academic leadership development programme, based on the perceptions of the participants.

In this study, a qualitative, exploratory descriptive, research design was employed. Thirteen (13) participants were purposively selected to participate in the study. Data were collected using individual, open-ended, face-to-face interviews. The data were transcribed, verbatim, and analysed, using thematic analysis.

Four key themes emerged: (1) emotional responses to the programme; (2) professional application of skills; (3) benefits from the programme; and (4) recommendations. The programme had an impact on both the personal and professional lives of the participants, which is evidence of the truly transformative nature of the programme. The study, however, is limited because the researchers only sought to explore the perceived impact of a leadership development programme. To determine the true impact, it would need to be studied, using multiple sources.

**Keywords:** academics, higher education, higher education institution, leadership, leadership development programme

## INTRODUCTION

To lead in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, higher education institutions call for the recognition of the changed nature of higher education, and the multiple purposes, such institutions serve (Lowman 2010). One such purpose is the pivotal role of higher education institutions in developing their students to become leaders in the broader society. As such, Fox and Hooper (2011) suggest that higher education institutions should be spearheading change, and there is no better place to start demonstrating exemplary leadership, than within its own walls. Therefore, change should be created in leadership in higher education institutions, regarding the manner in which they develop and adapt in the face of the societal and global challenges of the sector (Black 2015). These shifts and developments in the higher education sector emphasise the need for leadership development initiatives that will prepare academic leaders to cope with the challenges.

Leadership in higher education has become increasingly complex in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and has been described as being volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous [VUCA] (Hempsall 2014). Some of the challenges facing higher education institutions are: an increase in public scrutiny; the changes in funding models; managing the continuous changes; the inadequacies in the administrative processes; the retention and employment of high-quality staff. (Hempsall 2014). The question of what makes for effective leadership in higher education is relevant in the VUCA climate. Quinlan (2014) states that effective higher education leaders require more than a combination of discipline expertise, and knowledge of higher education. In recent years, concepts such as, transformation, collaboration, strategy, and inspiring excellence, have been used to describe leadership (Esen et al. 2020; McInnis et al. 2012).

According to Gill (2011), leadership skills can be taught and developed; therefore, interventions, targeting specific skills, can be developed. Yu Sing Ong (2012) indicates that academic leadership has four key components, namely, ensuring academic freedom, motivating staff, ensuring institutional quality, and providing effective leadership. According to Bolman and Gallos (2011), leadership for higher education can be framed in two ways. They highlight that the first aspect is intellectual where leaders are given a road map to track their trajectory and the options and challenges on the way. The second aspect is more personal and behavioural where academics are supported to acquire the necessary skills to become effective academic leaders. In addition, the authors emphasise that academic leaders need to understand in order to lead that leadership is a social process, that focuses on relationships that tends to involve the ability to influence others, to learn and to exchange ideas. Moodley (2019) highlights that higher education institutions should encourage and implement policies that support the formalization of good leadership development programmes. Current literature highlights that leadership programmes contribute to the enhanced leadership skills and competencies of academics (Grunefeld et al. 2015), including curriculum development, personal and interpersonal

competencies for leadership (Harris and Lebermann 2012), mentoring and succession planning, as well as the development of human and social capital (Haden et al. 2016). Thus, academic leadership programmes can be used as a vehicle to develop the skills of leaders to be able to influence and exchange ideas. Conversely, the lack of leadership development initiatives could result in negative effects, for example, leader ineffectiveness, and burnout (Morris and Laipple 2015).

With growing interest in the role of leaders, as well as the need for efficiently trained leaders in higher education, it has become imperative that higher education institutions take on the responsibility to train academics in leadership development. Additionally, there is a need for further research on leadership development, as well as how it links to the organisational outcomes in higher education, and performance assessments (Dopson et al. 2016). Challenges with leadership in higher education institutions are of course not only present internationally, but also locally in South Africa.

It has been acknowledged that leading in South African higher education institutions are gradually becoming more challenging (Mabelebele 2013). The function of higher education institutions is to serve society, this is accomplished through setting the foundation for viable employment, training socially responsible individuals, developing their students and staff and growing the knowledge base (Gumede 2015). A study including multiple higher education institutions in South Africa all identified that resources and funding for professional development is necessary (Leibowitz et al. 2015). According to Ngcamu Teferra (2015) many higher education institutions do not prioritize leadership development which in turn lead to ineffective leadership and leadership capabilities.

Leading and managing, in the context of South African universities, is quite complex and, in many instances, unique, as a result of the country's colonial and apartheid history, as well as institutional segregation at its core (Seale and Cross 2016). The South African higher education sector, in response to the developmental, economic, and societal needs of the country, had to change, extensively and comprehensively to ensure economic growth and development, societal equity, and consolidation (Seale and Cross 2016). Although the South African Policy framework for higher education may not be vastly different from other higher education systems around the globe, the historical context and the current socioeconomic imbalances has caused South African higher education to be beset with a distinct set of problems (Walters 2020). If not addressed this can and often does lead to instances of chaos and disorder that tend to be viewed as threats to the university. When viewed from a complexity perspective chaos and disorder are unavoidable conditions presenting opportune conditions under which leadership can succeed (Clarke 2013). Complexity should be appreciated as critical within the

university environment as this view will allow for leaders to move beyond bureaucracy, enabling leadership which is a complex interactive dynamic through which adaptation is accomplished (Walters 2020).

However, a lack of leadership preparation in higher educational institutions remains, specifically at the level of Deans (Rowley and Sherman 2003). This is further reiterated by Taylor and Machado (2006) who asserts that often employees take on leadership roles, without obtaining the essential capabilities. Academic leaders are appointed into positions of Deans and department heads, based on their success in their fields of study, with the expectation that their scholarly success will translate into effective and efficient institutional leaders (Rowley and Sherman 2003). Unfortunately, this is often not the case, and emphasises the importance for an integrated approach to leadership development for academics, who hold (or have the potential to hold) leadership positions (Gigliotti and Ruben 2017; Seale and Cross 2016).

A further issue confronting South African universities is the lack of women in leadership positions. This is not new in South African higher education, as history has revealed that women in leadership positions have been under-represented, regardless of their race. Some progress, however, has been made, where increasingly women are being given the opportunity to take up leadership positions. However, the ratio between men and women in executive positions is still not proportionate (Kele and Pietersen 2015). In light of the country's history, the lack of leadership preparations, and continuing under-representation of women in leadership, it is important that university staff are trained adequately, and prepared for leadership in South African universities. To address these challenges, collaborative practices throughout the organisation is considered important (Hempsall 2014).

For higher education institutions to be successful, in light of the demands that are placed on them, effective and competent leaders are vital. Therefore, building leadership competencies through the development of leadership development programmes is important (Hempsall 2014). When developing and implementing leadership development programmes in higher education institutions, it is important to note that leadership development is not solely about gaining knowledge, or capacity building, instead, it is a process of interrogating and acknowledging social dynamics, as they influence how people make meaning of the world (Dugan and Humbles 2018). According to Dugan and Humbles (2018, 11), "leadership is a function of the environments, cultures and contexts in which we are nested". For this reason, the ways in which people lead, would not all be alike, as different people will have different leadership styles. Development interventions, therefore, should focus on building the academics' self-efficacy, as a leader (Haber-Curran et al. 2018), through transformative learning practices.

Evidently, there is a need for leadership development programmes in higher education

institutions, to capacitate potential academic leaders, to hold leadership positions within the institution. In order to address the challenges facing higher educational institutions in leadership development, leadership programmes are being developed and implemented across the sector, to develop leaders, who are equipped to manage the changes and demands occurring in the sector. However, these programmes absorb substantial time, attention, and resources, which warrants the investigation of the impact of such programmes (Dopson et al. 2019). If the importance of academic leadership development programmes is appreciated in the higher education sector, then understanding its impact becomes important as we aim to support emerging and current leaders to operate in a VUCA environment.

This current study was aimed at identifying and responding to the need for an academic leadership programme in a local higher education institution. In addition, the objective was to explore and describe the impact of an academic leadership development programme, based on the perceptions of the participants. The importance of evaluating the perceived impact, was to determine whether the intended goals were achieved, and subsequently act, based on the lessons learned, to motivate for the future of the programme.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research setting**

The current study was conducted at a University in the Western Cape, South Africa. The structure of South African universities comprises schools and faculties, which are usually led by an academic head. Each faculty is often led by an academic dean, and two supporting deputy deans. Schools and faculties are further divided into departments, units, and centres, which are led by heads of departments (HODs) and directors. Additionally, supporting the leadership cohorts are faculty managers, and all persons in leadership positions at the university are integral to the functioning of the university (Jansen 2004).

### **Research design**

A qualitative approach, using the case study design, was employed to explore and describe the views of participants, regarding the impact of knowledge and skills gained in a leadership development programme. According to Creswell (2007, 73) “case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports”. Using this approach allowed the researchers to achieve a holistic understanding, as

well as an in-depth, multi-faceted exploration of the phenomenon (Crowe et al. 2011). The research question, “How do participants from an academic leadership programme view the impact of the programme?” guided this current study.

### **Population and sampling**

For the recruitment of participants, the non-probability, purposive sampling technique was used. The use of this sampling technique allowed for the inclusion of participants, who met the pre-determined criterion of having participated in the programme for academic and professional leaders (P4APL) programme (Babbie and Mouton 2012). Additionally, through the use of this technique, the researchers were able to recruit participants, who were able to disclose in-depth information in the face-to-face interviews. The population for this current study comprised two cohorts, namely, academics from the year 2015 (n=13), and 2016 (n=12), who had participated in a programme for academic leaders (P4AL). This implied that cohort one completed in 2016, and cohort two, in 2017. Subsequently, follow-ups were conducted 12 months later. All academic professionals, who participated in the P4APL programme, were invited to participate in the follow-ups. Ultimately, 13 scholars agreed to participate in this current study. The interviews were conducted between October and November 2019.

### **The intervention**

The programme for academic and professional leaders is a unique 12-month learning experience for academics and professional staff, to enhance their understanding of the strategic higher education environment, and to build essential, personal, and leadership skills. Participants are nominated by their respective deans to participate in the programme, and each participant has to write a letter of motivation, to explain why s/he would benefit from the programme. Each cohort participates in a 12-month programme, during which they attend workshops to develop their leadership skills. The workshops are conducted over a 12-month period, each for a duration of 1–2 days, depending on the topic. The programme is facilitated by an external facilitator, who has higher education, as well as private sector experience, and is a certified coach. This 12-month programme includes a comprehensive induction into the programme, 360 multi-rater assessments (conducted at the beginning and end of the programme), workshops, presentations, an institutional operating plan related strategic project, networking opportunities, coaching, and mentoring sessions. The participants are divided into groups of 4–5 by the programme facilitators, and are expected to participate in, at least, 4 coaching circles over the 12-month period. This allows each group member to present a challenge and, through questioning of the other group members, find a solution.

## Data collection

The prospective participants were contacted via email, in which the aim of the study was explained. Written consent was obtained from each participant. Data were collected through individual face-to-face interviews, using a semi-structured interview guide. The interviews were conducted by a trained researcher in a private setting, and at a time that was convenient for the participants. The interviews lasted between 25 and 45 minutes, and were conducted in English. All interviews were recorded, with permission from the participants. The purpose of the study, perceived benefits, assured confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time, were reiterated prior to the start of each interview (National Health Research Council 2015). Each participant was allocated a pseudonym, and during the course of the interviews, no personal descriptors of the participants were used. The data collection process ended once data saturation was reached, when unfamiliar/new information failed to emerge.

## Data analysis

Given the exploratory nature of this current study, the researchers subjected the data to thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The use of thematic analysis allows for a rich and detailed account of the participants' experiences and perceptions of their participation in a leadership development programme (Braun and Clark 2006). The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and each transcript was entered into Atlas.ti (version 8), a data analysis software tool, by two independent researchers. The transcripts were actively, and repeatedly read by the researchers, while notes and memos were recorded, to ensure familiarisation with the data. After repeatedly reading, making notes and memos of the transcripts, 203 initial codes were established, and subsequently grouped into 12 refined codes. These 12 codes and the extracts from each of the codes were collated, and consensus was reached by both researchers, giving rise to four themes, as a representation of the data, as well as a true reflection of the participants' perceptions and experiences of a leadership development programme.

## Trustworthiness

According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), the trustworthiness of a study could be ensured by meeting the following criteria: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, *confirmability* and *reflexivity*. The researchers used the strategy of persistent observation to address the aspect of *credibility*. In addition, the researchers developed the codes, the concepts, and the core category of the study, which assisted in the examination and characterisation of the data. Constant reiteration (back and forth) of the data was performed, which included reading and rereading

the interview transcripts and the analysis of the data, as well as theorising and revising the concepts and codes, before the final codes and themes were accepted (Korstjens and Moser 2018). To ensure the *transferability* of the study, a rich description of the study's background, and a description of the phenomenon under investigation, was also highlighted and discussed. (Korstjens and Moser 2018). *Dependability* and *conformability* was ensured through audit trails. The *dependability* of the study was ensured through a thorough discription of the research methodology, while *conformability* was ensured through the acknowledgment of the limitations of the study (Korstjens and Moser 2018). The researchers addressed *reflexivity* by being aware and making use of their reflective insights, through engagement in self-aware meta-analysis, throughout the research process (Korstjens and Moser 2018).

## RESULTS

### Demographic data of participants

A total of 13 participants were involved in this current study. Table 1 reflects the demographics of the participants (of whom a large percentage was female), as well as evidence that the participants had progressed in their academic careers. Four themes emerged from the data, namely, (1) emotional responses to the programme; (2) professional application of skills; (3) benefits from the programme and (4) recommendations.

**Table 1:** Demographics of the participants

Participant No.	Gender	Years in academia	Academic status at time of intervention	Academic status at time of publication
1	Female	10	Lecturer	Senior Lecturer
2	Female	15	Senior Lecturer	Senior Lecturer
3	Female	10	Senior Lecturer	Assoc Professor
4	Male	15	Senior Lecturer	Assoc Professor
5	Female	8	Senior Lecturer	Senior Lecturer
6	Male	10	Senior Lecturer	Assoc Professor
7	Female	25	Assoc Professor	Assoc Professor
8	Female	17	Assoc Professor	Professor
9	Female	15	Senior Lecturer	Senior Lecturer
10	Female	10	Lecturer	Senior Lecturer
11	Female	10	Lecturer	Senior Lecturer
12	Female	15	Senior Lecturer	Assoc Professor
13	Female	20	Assoc Professor	Assoc Professor

### Emotional responses to the programme

This programme evoked an emotional response and impression from almost everyone, who participated in it, whether negative or positive. The participants in this current study reported an array of emotions that emerged as a consequence of their nomination, by their respective deans, to participate in the P4APL programme. Many of the academic professionals highlighted

their initial emotional responses to being nominated as participants in the programme, as well as the diverse emotions that emerged at different stages, as expressed by the following participants:

“I was very excited to be part of the programme.” (P1).

“... and I didn’t get it and I think I was uncomfortable at first because I didn’t see myself as a leader.” (P10).

“... and it really brought out other skills, made you feel very uncomfortable sometimes because you are really out of your comfort zone and also team work.” (P2).

The findings highlighted how the participants moved from an initial sense of insecurity to confidence. From the insecurity of the earlier sessions, after being nominated to participate, their confidence grew, as they developed through the course of the programme. One participant highlights the sentiment in the following excerpt:

“And I didn’t get it and I think I was uncomfortable at first because I didn’t see myself as a leader, because I just graduated with a p.H., with my Ph.D. so I didn’t have access to this programme and so I did feel a bit, like a fish out of water, but I think as the year went by I developed a lot more agency and I was okay with being termed as sort of an emerging leader.” (P10).

### **Professional application of skills**

The participants spoke about, and provided examples of how they were able to transfer the knowledge they had gleaned from the programme to their daily academic activities. Being part of the programme empowered them with the capacity to modify their teaching and learning, as well as their leadership capabilities. The skills learnt were applied to mentor others, which evidenced the shift from learning new skills, to imparting that knowledge/skills to others. The following excerpts refer:

“... so because I’ve got autonomy I can use the skills I’ve learnt to implement certain projects, to recruit student assistants and mentor them ....” (P10).

“And systematically trying to work through those with that individual, I am just naming one individual at the moment, but really trying to see how can I, from a research leadership perspective, you know, open the doors for that individual to get to where they need to.” (P 3).

“... help developing leaders at all levels, you know sometimes it is an NGAP lecturer or sometimes it is a lecturer in the department, or sometimes it is another leader in a different area.” (P4).

Additionally, the participants aimed to effect changes in their departments that were considered beneficial to themselves, and others, as per the following excerpts:

“However, what I have implemented is the one was our workshop on self-management and health and wellbeing ... where I got the concept of self-care and really started implementing that for myself and because I have also found that it worked and shared it with others ....” (P3).

“So, I have tried to role model, if we are just talking about flexibility, I am trying to role model this idea of creating an open environment, a culture where staff can feel empowered to make their own decisions, I am not looking over their shoulder and I not trying to manage them, but we still make sure that we are producing and providing an educational experience for students that stays very positive.” (P4).

## Benefits from the programme

The participants highlighted what they considered beneficial as a result of their participation in the programme. From the interviews, it was evident that the participants valued the input they had received from the programme, as they were able to use the valuable information they had learnt about human resources, university operations, communication and listening skills, networks, balancing work and personal lives, as expressed by the following participants:

“I think I’m very fortunate to have, to have an inside edge or like some insight into the workings of the university.” (P10).

“Or mostly in my communication, I developed a skill on how to communicate better... So, improved my communication and it really improved also how to, to motivate or interact with colleagues in the department.” (P5).

“And I also think another big positive thing is just that I listen. I listen carefully what people’s needs are.” (P7).

“So, I have new networks now, I can phone up somebody if I need information, I have a contact in every faculty of the university ... it has actually helped me to connect outside of just my department, but with other departments in the faculty and with other departments and individuals within the university.” (P3).

The benefits extended into their personal, as well as professional lives. The participants highlighted how they were able to use the skills they had learnt in the programme, not only at work, in a professional capacity, but also in a personal capacity, to improve themselves and develop as a person. The following excerpts refer:

“The mentorship would focus more on myself or what I want to, where I want to get my career and what’s my vision and so on. So it did help very with, with my mentor, with very practical tips and all of that to really, like run the department, what, just a 15, like having the department on your team, how to combine them, because I was then the departmental chair.” (P5).

“And in terms of like personal development, yeah, I guess it just helped me to be more confident in the way I conduct myself and yeah.” (P12).

“I think to build you up as an individual, as a leader, as a strong leader and you believing in yourself because sometimes you have an opinion about yourself or you feel okay about yourself and then you are in a situation that people stop to interact with you in a way that you doubt yourself

or am I doing this the right way.” (P1).

“The other one is a sense of self-awareness. So the fact that I’m now a bit more self-aware means that I can now help other people ... the information I was getting back, the balance, and making sure your life is balanced.” (P10).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants recommended certain aspects that should be included in the programme. As the participants progressed through the programme, they contended with diverse experiences, and reflected on aspects that could be included to the programme, to make it more comprehensive, or successful. It is important to note that two cohorts participated, and some of the recommendations made by the first cohort, were already addressed and incorporated into the programme, by the time the second cohort was engaged. The following excerpts refer:

“I think something that can like, that would be mostly on the HR matters, like conflict resolutions. Because we all, the, when there’s people there will always be conflicts.” (P5).

“Where even the people on the ground, that is now the, the participants in the programme, they are given a space as to say what would you like this programme to look like.” (P8).

“I am saying, when you accept someone in the P4APL programme, already make sure that the HOD and deputy HOD are using them inside that management team, and then what they learning, they actually implement in the department.” (P1).

Additionally, some of the participants alluded to shortcomings in the programme, and recommended that these areas to be improved. These aspects were not, necessarily, missing from the programme, but instead, needed to be reworked, to become more engaging, or simply, more substantial. These following are some of the views of the participants:

“But I think there was long timeframes in between that that I would have preferred to have closer.” (P7).

“... work life balance .... It was a good section, but it didn’t really have substance if I may put it that way.” (P8).

“I wasn’t quite sure the mentor, because for this programme you had to identify a mentor that, you know, to assist you as well .... And that also didn’t work very well for me. I didn’t get much benefit from that either. So I’m not sure if it’s still the vessel that you’re using mentors.” (P12).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the views and perceptions of academics regarding the ways in which the leadership intervention, namely, the P4APL programme, impacted them. From the results, it is evident that the leadership programme had an impact on the personal, as well as professional lives of the participants. This is evidence of the personally

transformative nature of the leadership programme, which did not only impact knowledge, but also the ways in which individuals interact with others, frame problems, and view themselves (Ciporen 2010). The programme elicited an array of emotions, from the initial sense of insecurity, after being nominated as participants, to diverse emotions that emerged throughout the programme. Zuber-Skerritt and Louw (2014), similarly, highlight emotional responses, such as excitement and enthusiasm, in relation to an academic leadership programme. Additionally, participation in the P4APL leadership programme facilitated growth, as well as practical applications of the skills that the participants developed throughout and after completion of the programme. The participants were also offered opportunities to suggest improvements to the programme, based on their personally transformative experiences (or barriers to such experiences), to enhance the effectiveness of the programme.

When considering the aspect of emotional responses to the programme, the participants highlighted positive, as well as negative emotions, while there was also evidence that emotions changed from an initial sense of insecurity to confidence, which provided evidence of general self-efficacy development. General self-efficacy is defined as an “individual’s perception of [his or her] ability to perform across a variety of situations” (Judge, Erez, and Bono 1998, 170), while specific self-efficacy reflects “beliefs in one’s capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands” (Wood and Bandura 1989, 408). The participants evidently improved their specific self-efficacy, as they were able to implement the skills that they had gained from the programme, back in the workplace. It is important to note that all the participants in the programme were in leadership positions, at the time that they participated in the programme. Therefore, they were able to implement the learning gained from the programme, in their present roles as lecturers, supervisors, or managers. Improved levels of self-efficacy are important for (aspiring) leaders, as individuals’ belief in their ability to engage in leadership, could affect their willingness to participate in leadership activities, and further leadership development opportunities (Dugan et al. 2013). Considering that academic leadership and management roles are largely perceived as voluntary service roles (Magrane et al. 2018), evidence of the willingness of the participants, who gained the confidence to voice their ideas and implement changes in their respective departments, is significant. One of the participants spoke extensively on implementing flexibility in his department, where staff members were not expected to be in the office every day; however, they were expected to continue with their productivity, and even improve on their productivity and outputs.

The participants also experienced a positive impact on their social relationships in the institution; therefore, it seems that the leadership development programme helped individuals

to develop social capital, for example, building networked relationships among multiple individuals, and thereby improving organisational effectiveness (Nicolaidou and Petridou 2011). Hiller, Day, and Vance (2006) states that leadership is perceived as a function of social resources, embedded in relations, and leadership development, therefore, is influenced by notions of leadership, as a more distributed and fluid construct. While the literature on leadership is marked by the solo-heroic leadership models, which are typified by styles theories of leadership, these styles have limited value, given the VUCA environment institutions are dealing with (Ancona and Backman 2010; Clarke 2012). Inman (2011) highlights a need for universities to create the space for shared, or distributed leadership, for academics to gain experience in leading, thereby creating a culture of leadership at all levels. According to Jones et al. (2017, 199), distributed leadership is characterised by the following criteria: “the involvement of people, the establishment of supportive processes, the provision of professional development and networking opportunities and the availability of resources”. Higher education institutions in South Africa, therefore, should match their commitment, to equip academic leaders with the skills of distributed leadership, with supportive processes, policies and systems, to support leadership at all levels.

It is especially relevant for South African Higher Education institutions to pro-actively develop academic leaders who are equipped and ready to effectively and efficiently deal with, to name a few, the fast-changing environment, increasing student access (Pillay 2019), changes emanating from student protests, the need to provide change management in colonial curricula (Senekai and Lenz 2020) and so forth. At a macro level, leadership in South African Higher Education institutions is needed to steer solutions to the long-standing poverty and consequent social and health problems experiences (Zuber-Skerritt 2007). Literature has highlighted the divergent skills and competencies of leaders at different levels in higher education. According to Bryman (2007), leaders at departmental level, should be honest, have integrity, be excellent communicators, and be objective. On the other hand, a leader at institutional level, should also have negotiation skills (Spendlove 2007). Systematic training during each stage of career development is needed for professionals to develop the necessary competencies (Morris and Laipple 2015), with higher education leaders sharing responsibility for skill and knowledge development (Dickerson et al. 2011). While addressing the specific needs of leaders at different levels of the organisation may prove difficult in a training environment, coaches and mentors, job shadowing, action learning, 360-degree feedback, and real-life applications through experiential learning (Day et al. 2014; Petrie 2014) as utilised in the present study, may prove effective in addressing the specific needs of Higher Education leaders in South Africa. Therefore, impactful leadership development in Higher Education should extend beyond the

training room, and follow an integrated approach, consisting of different, and often innovative, forms of learning.

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this current study, the researchers sought to explore the impact of a leadership development programme, from the perceptions of the participants. Although the findings provided exploratory insight into the experiences of the individuals, the true impact of the programme would need to be studied, by including multiple sources of information (Dopsen et al. 2019). Using the case study approach like other research approaches does have its limitations, one such limitation is related to the case – one bounded system (participants in the study are from a single university in South Africa), therefore the results are not generalizable in the conventional sense (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2001).

While leader and leadership development programmes are essential for academic leadership development, the role of social and developmental processes should be emphasised, as it pertains to role-modelling, developing trust, delegation, and succession planning (Bolden, Petrov, and Gosling 2008).

## CONCLUSION

The researchers in this current study explored the perceptions of participants from two cohorts of a local leadership development programme in a Higher Education institution. The need for leadership development in South African HEIs is marked by VUCA conditions, lack of access to development opportunities, and the under-representation of women in senior leadership positions. From the responses of the participants, the impact of the leadership intervention was identified as improvements in self-efficacy, social capital, and skills. It is recommended that leadership development programmes in Higher Education should follow an integrated approach, consisting of a number of learning opportunities. Similarly, impact of such programmes could be evaluated by using multiple sources of information.

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