

**Becoming an ethical leader: The leader development journey of  
South African chartered accountants in business leadership**

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A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

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## **Abstract**

South Africa suffers from corporate and political scandals that highlight the need for effective ethical leadership. Despite the urgency, existing research does not understand the lifelong process that develops Ethical Leaders. All the existing research has been done in Western contexts and with a focus on adulthood development.

This study's purpose was to explore the leader development stories of South African Chartered Accountant (CA) business leaders. This population have had common professional ethical training. The study followed a qualitative narrative enquiry approach, conducting interviews with seven CA business leaders. Narrative stories were compiled using the interviews and triangulation using secondary sources. The analysis was completed with the lens of the Leader Development through Experiential Windows Model.

The findings of the study confirm the applicability of the model in the South African context. The findings show that ethical leader development begins early and is based on a foundation of parental, religious and cultural influences. Furthermore, role model and mentor relationships were identified as key mechanisms across multiple windows of development, rather than only impacting adolescence. This research contributes to the empirical understanding of Ethical Leadership and Leader development and offers practical insights for organisations seeking to identify and develop ethical leaders.

## **Keywords**

Leader Development, Ethical Leadership, Experiential Windows

## **Plagiarism Declaration**

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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3 November 2025

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# **1 Introduction to the Research Problem**

## **1.1 Introduction**

South Africa is a country rich in natural resources, a diverse population and the most industrialised economy on the African continent. Yet, it is plagued by corruption and mismanagement to the detriment of its people. This mismanagement is often perpetrated by the very leaders entrusted to manage these resources. This is fundamentally a failure of leadership. This research explored how the development of ethical leaders should be the appropriate response to these failures.

## **1.2 Societal impact of public and private impropriety**

South Africa has experienced many political and business scandals. These scandals are generally connected to a lack of management skills, little corporate governance and poor leadership (Bhana & Sachin, 2022). Politically charged public sector businesses in South Africa have become the ground zero for corruption, with politically appointed leaders leveraging their positions to benefit personally from graft (G. Naidoo, 2024). Eskom, Transnet, SABC, SAA and PRASA are just a few of South Africa's state-owned entities that have been heavily impacted by corruption (G. Naidoo, 2024). Recent business leadership failures include scandals perpetrated or enabled by poor leadership, such as the failures at African Bank and VBS Mutual Bank, where leaders made poor business decisions and pilfered customers' deposits for self-centred, luxurious lifestyles (Dhlamini, 2023). These scandals, both political and business, have negative outcomes for South Africa and its people. Both public and private sector scandals have caused major negative consequences for the individuals impacted and society at large.

Eskom has been one of the state-owned entities that has been riddled with corruption, with significant consequences for the country. While much noise has been made about corruption during the state capture period, the costs of corruption persist with the 2023/2024 financial year accumulating over R11 billion, which is fruitless, wasteful and irregular expenditure, according to the auditor general (Neethling, 2025). The consequence of corruption at Eskom is so significant because of its fundamental position as the country's electricity supplier that the cost of graft is measured relative to the country's GDP – up to 1.5% of GDP in 2023 due to loadshedding, according to the OECD (OECD, 2025). Eskom's leadership problems are not only an example of a practical business problem, that of poor leadership and operational inefficiencies, but also a theoretical problem, of how to foster leadership that prioritises social value in the long term over personal short-term gains.

## Ethical Leader Development

Transnet, another state-owned entity that has broad impacts on the country's productivity, too, has seen billions of rands in losses due to corruption (National Prosecuting Authority of South Africa, 2025). Instead of following fair procurement practices, which are designed to promote competition and ensure fair prices are paid by the state, the leadership at Transnet flouted these controls and signed on their preferred supplier at heavily inflated prices (National Prosecuting Authority of South Africa, 2025). The national prosecuting authority is prosecuting these executives, with much of the graft being uncovered and presented in the state capture report (G. Naidoo, 2024; National Prosecuting Authority of South Africa, 2025). Transnet further exposes the business problem of poor leadership and graft; it expands to show that the implementation of controls and other mitigation factors can be bypassed or overridden by business leaders. Theoretically, again, the problem is indicative of gaps in positive leadership practices at state-owned entities.

Corruption and graft are not isolated to the public sector, and while smaller, the private sector also suffers from graft, which has impacts on society. The VBS scandal resulted in the mutual bank going into liquidation in 2018 (Goba, 2024). To date, less than 30% of deposits made by municipalities and individuals have been recovered, the losses are in excess of R1billion and would be more had the South African treasury not stepped in with depositors' insurance payouts for deposits less than R100k (Goba, 2024; Siaga, 2025). Municipalities that made deposits to VBS despite direct instructions not to do so from the national treasury have lost over R1.6billion, which directly impacts society, with the municipalities not having access to resources to fulfil their mandate of providing services to society (Goba, 2024). Private sector corruption and leadership self-interest present a major obstacle for businesses where leaders are entrusted with others' capital to generate value, but instead they act in their own interests. The theoretical problem raised is the implementation and implications of fiduciary duties of leaders, and how they can act in their own self-interest despite having external oversight; the theoretical concern raised is what may mitigate these leaders' propensity toward self-interest.

In December 2017, Steinhoff CEO Markus Jooste announced his immediate resignation from the company on the back of allegations of fraudulent reporting (Rose, 2025). PWC's report uncovered evidence of years of escalating questionable behaviour, less and less sophisticated corrupt practices, weak leaders who were aware of unethical practices and how the guardrails in place, through listing requirements, including the board of directors, did not identify these failings (Rose, 2025). Within a few days of the announcement of his resignation, over R230 billion in market capitalisation had been wiped off the company; individual investors, including some of South Africa's wealthiest, as well as

everyday individuals through their pension funds, lost millions (Rose, 2025). Even in the private sector, poor and unethical leadership costs society millions. Business leaders have a fiduciary duty to act in the interests of their shareholders and implicit obligations to the societies in which they operate, which cause significant damage when operating in their own financial interests. Steinhoff, the final example presented, shows the compounding to extremes of unethical culture in a business, how traditional measures, such as a board with mostly independent non-executives, did not prevent the major fraud. This raises the theoretical question of how to control and oversee leaders, especially big personality ones.

The consequence of corruption is experienced negatively both socially and economically (G. Naidoo, 2024; Sipondo, 2025). Socially, through reductions in social cohesion and a lack of faith in institutions, while economic output is reduced through unfavourable market conditions, which reduce competition and result in reductions in investment due to a lack of trust in the system (G. Naidoo, 2024; Sipondo, 2025). With poor leadership being a key driver of these scandals, the negative consequences are largely driven by these leaders' focus on benefiting themselves (Bhana & Sachin, 2022). Fundamentally, unethical leadership is a contributor to some of South Africa's social and economic woes (Sipondo, 2025). For business, many controls prescribed to mitigate these types of scandals were in place but were bypassed or colluded against, raising the question of what would be a more practical solution to stop these types of scandals. Theoretically, there is a gap in understanding how to foster leadership that does not act in its own interests, but instead in the interests of society at large.

### **1.3 The change required**

With the breadth of examples discussed above, it could be assumed that poor leadership is pervasive within the South African political and business climate; however, good leaders can be found in South African politics, society and industry. Political examples include South African heroes such as Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, recognised as Nobel laureates. Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, of Gift of the Givers, Former Public Protector, Professor Thuli Madonsela and Former Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng are examples of social leaders. Finally, in business and academia, South African leaders who strive for the betterment of the country include Prof Bonang Mohale (Mohale, 2024). All these leaders are known for putting their interests second to those of society around them, exemplifying the African virtues of ubuntu.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu was a Nobel laureate, recognised as the moral compass of South Africa, a clear example of an ethical role model from whom South

Africans learn (Banks et al., 2023; The Elders, 2022). He was one of the many leaders who fought the apartheid regime, with his focus on non-violence (NobelPrize.org, 2025). Archbishop Tutu also led the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He is a shining example of what power an ethical leader wields. South African society looks up to Archbishop Tutu as a social role model, being a practical example of Social Learning Theory (Banks et al., 2023). Furthermore, Archbishop Tutu's non-violent approach to protest aligns with the utilitarian intentions of ethical leaders whose behaviours are not intended to harm others (Banks et al., 2023). Finally, Archbishop Tutu was not only ethical in his words but also in his deeds, evidenced by his position as chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Shakeel et al., 2020).

Dr Intiaz Sooliman, the founder of Gift of the Givers, the largest non-government humanitarian organisation on the African continent, is an ethical leader (M. Naidoo, 2022). He founded his organisation on the four pillars of ethics, spirituality, values and morals (Haripersad, 2024). His organisation has distributed billions of rands in aid to those affected by disasters and those in need (M. Naidoo, 2022). Dr Sooliman gave up a comfortable life as a qualified doctor to take on societal challenges (M. Naidoo, 2022). He is an example of a leader who acts for the betterment of society and not for personal enrichment. Dr Sooliman also reflects traits of virtue and spirituality which are often associated with ethical leaders (Gamarra & Giroto, 2022).

While business leaders do not reach the heights of some of the other leaders discussed earlier, there are examples of business leaders who have created and run organisations that strike a balance between profit motivation and the betterment of the societies in which they operate. Professor Bonang Mohale is a business leader and academic, the chancellor of the University of Free State and chairman of the board of two listed JSE companies (Mohale, 2024). He is an advocate for ethical leadership and leadership that is other-centred (Mohale, 2024). He has led multinational organisations with this approach, exemplifying what an ethical leader can do for the company and country.

These examples show the calibre of these leaders. These examples do not clearly present the quantitative benefits ethical leaders can bring to society directly; instead, indirect benefits are implicit through the mitigation of losses experienced with unethical leaders. Ubuntu's virtues of communitarian values align with Grint's assertion of the need for collaborative leadership (Grint, 2022; Sipondo, 2025). Ethical leadership is Ubuntu Ethical leadership in the African context (Banks et al., 2021; Sipondo, 2025).

South Africa needs leaders who are not self-serving. Having leaders who are not self-serving will avoid the negative outcomes noted from poor self-serving leadership. A type

of leadership that acts in the best interests of society would consider those interests and act in a manner that supports those outcomes. Ethical Leaders enact moral actions, displaying ethical behaviours (Banks et al., 2023; Mohale, 2024). Their moral actions are based on societal norms that justify actions in society's best interests (Banks et al., 2023). Ethical leadership may be the appropriate response to both business and societal scandals. While these examples do show the value of ethical leaders, they do not show the process that such leaders underwent to become the ethical leaders they are.

### **1.4 Ethical Leadership: a response to scandals**

There is consensus in academia, business and society that Ethical Leadership is needed in response to political and business scandals (Banks et al., 2021; Institute of Directors in South Africa, 2016; Sipondo, 2025). Ethical leaders are associated with positive business and societal outcomes. It is particularly relevant in a business, as ethical leadership is partly defined by broadening the scope of leadership focus beyond the shareholder to stakeholders (Banks et al., 2021).

Over the last 30 years, globally and within South Africa, there has been a shift toward the implementation of corporate governance in response to business scandals (Dhlamini, 2023). In South Africa, the King IV Report, the fourth iteration of the King Report, is the recommended standard for corporate governance; it describes ethical leadership as foundational to good governance (Institute of Directors in South Africa, 2016). While not legislated, King IV is adopted by the Johannesburg Stock Exchange as a requirement for listed businesses, which shows the regard the report has as a framework for which businesses should apply. Furthermore, King IV adopts an 'apply and explain' approach to applying the principles, no longer allowing businesses to explain away and avoid unfavourable requirements (Institute of Directors in South Africa, 2016). Government, academia and business consider Ethical Leadership as key to operating sustainable businesses.

The benefits of ethical leadership are broad. Research shows that ethical leadership is associated with successful organisations, explicitly tying leadership success with ethical actions and outcomes (Bhana & Sachin, 2022). It stands then that strong, capable, and ethical leaders are critical to South Africa's growth prospects (Bhana & Sachin, 2022; Dhlamini, 2023; G. Naidoo, 2024). South Africa needs ethical leaders; however, as discussed, there are many counterexamples of unethical leaders in the country. With examples of ethical and unethical leaders evident, key questions arise:

*What are the differences between ethical and unethical leaders?*

*If we need ethical leaders, how do ethical leaders develop (Banks et al., 2021)?*

*If we understand how ethical leaders develop, can we develop future leaders to be ethical?*

Understanding how ethical leaders develop enables actions to be taken to develop ethical leaders in future. In response to the failures of ability and questionable ethical actions, South Africa must focus on developing capable, ethical leaders (Sipondo, 2025). The process by which ethical leaders develop needs to be understood to build a foundation of future ethical leaders who act in the country's best interest.

With the majority of previous research into leader development and ethical leadership conducted in American and European contexts (Bhana & Sachin, 2022; Gamarra & Giroto, 2022; Vogel et al., 2021). There is a need for understanding these constructs in other contexts, such as the South African Context. This research will specifically look into the leader development process that results in ethical leadership.

### **1.5 Ethical leadership Gaps in South Africa**

Although research into ethical leadership continues to gain traction, Gamarra and Giroto (2022) found that few studies are set in emerging markets, with even fewer set in South Africa. Researchers agree that this cross-cultural perspective is necessary to avoid limiting ethical leadership research's ability for global applicability (Gamarra & Giroto, 2022). Where studies reviewed for this paper have been done in the South African context, they all follow a systematic review approach, with no additional empirical evidence gathered (Bhana & Sachin, 2022; Dhlamini, 2023; Naidoo, 2024; Sipondo, 2025).

Understanding that different cultures have different characteristics, it is important to explore how leaders in varying contexts and cultures develop (Vogel et al., 2021). It may be that leader development follows a similar path, or there may be new insights gained that shed light on different focus areas for leader development. The South African context is different to most Western contexts, with a more communal mindset opposing the Western individualised mindset (Kitayama & Salvador, 2024; Sipondo, 2025). This gives a fresh context in which to investigate ethical leadership development.

Past research has focused on early adult development and workplace development, raising the necessity for future research to focus on the stages of development (Eva et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Tackett et al., 2023). To focus on the other stages, finding leaders with similar experience on these common stages will add an element of consistency. When bringing in this research's focus on ethical leadership as the outcome of leader development, a similar experience needs to consider ethical leadership. To refine the focus of this research, a leadership population exposed to ethical training and

ethical dilemmas will refine the focus of the development process to the earlier years of development, where research is lacking.

### **1.6 Chartered Accountants as a scope**

Chartered Accountants (CA) in South Africa undertake significant amounts of ethical training both in their early adult educational phase and in their first few years of work within audit practices (South African Institute of Chartered Accountants, 2023, 2025). CAs are highly represented in CEO and CFO positions in South Africa, with organisational focus on leadership (Basson & Steenkamp, 2024). Identifying business leaders from this population allows the researcher to isolate the more vigorously studied early adult and work years, to look into the developments in other stages of their lives. In essence, to set a quasi-control group that has had similar exposure to ethical training. This allows for some degree of commonality in these leaders' early adult and work years.

Prospective CAs are required to undergo standardised training and are tested through comprehensive examinations before a student is allowed to become a member of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) (South African Institute of Chartered Accountants, 2025). Once qualified and registered, SAICA mandates members to complete ethical training annually as part of the Continuous Professional Development requirements; ethics training is the only Mandatory CPD requirement (South African Institute of Chartered Accountants, 2023). SAICA has also codified ethics in the Code of Professional Conduct as non-negotiable, setting out the criteria for breaches to be significant (South African Institute of Chartered Accountants, 2024).

Although CAs are often examples of capable ethical leaders developed in South Africa, they are not infallible and cannot be assumed to be ethical. Examples of this include multiple CAs implicated in state capture and in business scandals such as Steinhoff (Dhlamini, 2023; Rose, 2025). In response to scandals, SAICA has implemented these compulsory ethical trainings for qualified chartered accountants and has revamped the ethical training programme within the university programmes (Basson & Steenkamp, 2024). While not the silver bullet that will stop unethical behaviour of Chartered Accountants, it is a direct and comprehensive response.

Further to the common training background, CAs are highly represented in South African business, including JSE-listed companies, both as Financial Executives as well as Chief Executives (Basson & Steenkamp, 2024; CFO South Africa, 2022). While also being recognised locally and internationally as trustworthy and competent (ActionSA, 2023; Bizcommunity, 2023). This research will explore the stories of SAICA-trained CAs, who

are business leaders, which will provide insights into how CAs as leaders develop and how ethical leaders can be developed for South Africa (Zheng et al., 2021).

The research will also investigate all stages of the development process, expanding on existing research that primarily focuses on early adult and workplace development (Liu et al., 2021). To bring focus to the stages with less past research focus, this study will focus on leaders who have had similar early adult and workplace development, especially in the scope of ethics, namely South African Chartered Accountants.

### **1.7 Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to explore the development journey of South African Chartered Accountants who became business leaders. To understand their development journey and its impact on their manifestation of ethical leadership.

### **1.8 Conclusion**

South Africa has challenges with corruption and mismanagement that are fundamentally caused by a failure of leadership. This chapter has demonstrated that the lack of ethical leadership in both public and private sectors has caused both social and economic damage. These failures expose a practical business problem and a theoretical gap in understanding how to develop leaders who prioritise societal value over personal gain.

In South Africa, there are examples of role models who are ethical leaders; however, their examples do not explain how they developed into ethical leaders. This highlights the gap in the research, which is predominantly Western-centric and skewed towards early career development.

This research will focus on the development journey of South African Chartered Accountants who have become business leaders. To understand their stories, this research will follow a narrative inquiry approach. Chartered Accountants share a common ethical training foundation that helps this study focus on the other, less explored stages of ethical leader development. This study will help provide insight into how ethical leaders can be developed for South Africa's future.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This literature review will examine the current state of research into Ethical Leadership (EL) and Leader Development (LD). The research begins by defining EL and then expands on the current EL discourse, establishing the characteristics through which EL can be identified and the outcomes associated with EL. The chapter will then continue with a definition of LD and provide an understanding of the state of the LD field. Different leader development models were considered. A model for understanding LD over the lifespan was unpacked and then refined into a model to understand the specific LD process in which the outcome is EL.

### **2.2 Ethical Leadership**

Ethical leadership as a field of study emerged in the 1990s, with significant traction gained over the last decade (Banks et al., 2021; Shakeel et al., 2020). The traction, according to Banks et al. (2021) has been driven in response to both “corporate and political scandals, but also by a growing recognition that business should serve and promote positive outcomes for all stakeholders” (p.1).

The field does not have a specific organisational context, being broadly applicable in both the public and private sectors (Shakeel et al., 2020). This research is generally from a Western perspective (Chaiyasat et al., 2025; Sipondo, 2025). Learning about Leadership, including EL, even in non-business contexts, is valuable with implications for business, as such EL applies to all levels, macro, meso and micro (Chaiyasat et al., 2025; Palanski et al., 2021). Research has asserted that EL is an appropriate response to scandals in both the private and public sectors (Banks et al., 2021; Bhana & Sachin, 2022; Dhlamini, 2023; Ng et al., 2021; Sipondo, 2025). To understand this, it is necessary to gain an insight into what EL is.

#### ***2.2.1 Definition and Evolution of Ethical Leadership***

EL is a leadership style falling within the subset of moral leadership approaches (Gardner et al., 2020; Liden et al., 2025). EL expands on the definition of leadership by including how the influence is enacted and the normative nature of the goal/s (Banks et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2005). Thus, EL’s earlier definitions implied a trait element (Banks et al., 2021; Bhana & Sachin, 2022; Gamarra & Giroto, 2022) and a leader-follower influence. This is simplified by Brown and Treviño's (2006) characteristic pair, or ethical pillars, of an Ethical Leader being a “Moral Person” and “Moral Manager”.

Moral persons have moral traits such as honesty, integrity and trustworthiness, which they exhibit through specific behaviours and make decisions based on these values (Chaiyasat et al., 2025). A moral person uses their power for the betterment of society, not for their own betterment (Chaiyasat et al., 2025). Moral managers are leaders who take up the position of a role model, who not only expect but also demonstrate ethical behaviour, but reward or discipline followers for not living up to these ideals (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Chaiyasat et al., 2025; Liden et al., 2025). Moral Managers also clearly communicate their values and ethics (Chaiyasat et al., 2025). Finally, EL is focused externally on meeting social normative expectations, in other words, the expectations of the group, such as the expectations of the team, the organisation and the society (Gardner et al., 2020; Kelemen et al., 2023).

While this definition has been widely used in EL research (Banks et al., 2021), Gamarra and Giroto's 2022 article sees EL research converging on ethical leaders' behaviour, focusing on "integrity, trust, virtues, and values", as well as the impact these behaviours have on the "ethical climate and organisational culture" (p. 139). This definition links EL fundamentally to Ethical Behaviour, particularly Ethical Leadership Behaviours. The Banks et al. (2021) definition also focuses on ethical behaviour, expanding the EL definition to be based on ethical leadership behaviours, proposing a definition whereby the leader exhibits "signalling behaviours" toward stakeholders, portraying "prosocial values" and an "expression of moral emotions" (p. 6). Prosocial behaviours align with previous definitions in terms of EL being for the benefit of more than the leader, but expanding to consider the benefit of the group as a whole (Banks et al., 2021). While the moral emotions element is additive to previous definitions, which purely looked at cognitive definitions (Banks et al., 2021).

Ng et al. (2021) suggest EL is dynamic and can change over time and with different experiences. This is contrary to a more traditional static traits-based view of EL. The Banks et al. (2021) behavioural definition resolves the concern raised regarding the general binary perception of the EL as a static construct (Ng et al., 2021). The perception of dynamic ethical leadership behaviours does imply the possibility of change over time, however Ng et al. raise the consistency of behaviour as an element for consideration (2021).

### **2.2.2 Ethical Leader Behaviours**

Ethical leader behaviours (ELB) are then the actions that define what EL is (Banks et al., 2021). Thus, defining these behaviours is key to understanding EL. There are various aspects of ethical leader behaviours; however, over the last 20 years of research, nuance

has been raised between the different measures used to determine EL (Banks et al., 2021). Judgmentally benevolent behaviours like altruism, fairness and consistency are internal values that are manifested in ethical leader behaviours, while communicating ethically and ethical values, playing the role model and giving guidance on how to act ethically are externally applied ethical behaviours (Banks et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2005). This focus on ELB is a more clearly scoped focus on behaviours (Banks et al., 2021), with behaviours themselves being the focus of the EL definition, rather than just a category of the definition as is included in the Moral Person pillar of Brown & Treviño (2006).

Ethical Leadership behaviours themselves are the manifestation of ethical leader characteristics and include the behaviours defined in the Moral Manager pillar; through the enactment of being a Role model, the dispensing of rewards and discipline, and through the communication of ethics and values (Banks et al., 2021; Brown & Treviño, 2006). Research broadly accepts that these types of behaviours are EL characteristics or ELBs.

ELBs include behaviours living up to one's ethics and virtues (Banks et al., 2021; Shakeel et al., 2020). Ethical leaders hold moral ground if they are both seen as ethical and live by those ethical beliefs. A leader who only appears to be ethical but when caught acting unethically, forfeits their moral high ground.

EL rewards moral behaviour and disciplines immoral behaviours (Chaiyasat et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2021). Tied into communication and living up to one's ethics and values, Ethical Leaders ensure actions have consequences for their followers. Prosocial actions by followers will be rewarded, while antisocial actions will result in punishments. These consequences will be determined irrespective of the relationship with the follower.

Ethical leaders make decisions in a fair and consistent manner (Banks et al., 2023; Ng et al., 2021). As with decisions related to rewarding or punishing moral behaviours in followers, ethical leaders enact those rewards or punishments fairly. There is an internal consistency with which these actions are taken.

Ethical leaders are seen to be two-way communicators (Banks et al., 2023). As with the agreed definitions in leadership research, the leader-follower relationship is key, with the leader's ability to influence the follower being the primary tool that enables a leader to move the collective in the leader's desired direction (Vogel et al., 2021). Within EL, the direction of communication is two-way, with the leader both providing direction and instruction to followers as well as soliciting feedback and communicating openly with their followers (Banks et al., 2023). This is a communication approach that creates

transparency between leader and their followers, whether those followers are team members or wider stakeholders. This communication approach also forms a foundation of respect by leaders.

Ethical Leaders build relationships from a foundation of respect (Banks et al., 2021). Respect is an overarching behaviour; it is often the sum of the other behaviours that ethical leaders apply. Finding the value in different human beings, communicating effectively in a two-way manner, treating all fairly, and providing open and honest feedback, whether that be positive or negative.

Ethical Leaders Integrity is the manifestation of living up to their ethics and values consistently (Banks et al., 2021; Palanski et al., 2021).

### ***2.2.3 Ethical Leader Signalling***

This research defines EL as the consistent enactment of ELB, focusing on prosocial values, virtues, integrity and trust, expressed through moral emotions (Banks et al., 2021, 2023). Banks et al. (2023) applied Signalling Theory to the ethical leadership construct and identified key ethical signals leaders make to their stakeholders. Signals from Ethical leaders include both verbal and non-verbal signals, with both prosocial signals and displays of moral behaviours (Banks et al., 2023). This takes the evolution of EL to ELB a step further and clearly rounds back to the leadership foundational relationship between leaders and followers (Banks et al., 2021). An ethical signal is transmitted through a leader's behaviour and is received by the follower. For an ethical behaviour to be a leadership behaviour, it needs to be signalled to the follower; without the leader-follower relationship, the behaviour is just an ethical behaviour.

Ethical Leader signals are the enactment of the behaviours discussed in the previous section. Ethical Leaders signal to their followers their ethics and values by living up to those values, so that when a follower is aware, they are seen to be consistent (Banks et al., 2021). Ethical Leaders signal actively through two-way communication, both through their instruction and their listening (Banks et al., 2023). Being a role model or walking the walk of EL is a strong signal to followers of the expectations of an ethical leader (Banks et al., 2021).

### ***2.2.4 Ethical Leadership Outcomes***

Research has shown that EL has both positive and negative outcomes. Sipondo (2025) goes as far as saying Africa's current economic status can partly be attributed to poor ethical leadership. While these have been researched, there is still more to understand.

The benefits of ethical leadership are broad (Gamarrá & Giroto, 2022). Research shows that ethical leadership is associated with successful organisations, explicitly tying leadership success with ethical actions and outcomes (Bhana & Sachin, 2022). Ethical leaders are associated with both organisational and employee performance (Chaiyasat et al., 2025). Ethical leaders influence their followers to abide by higher ethical standards, which correlates to positive outcomes in the workplace (Liden et al., 2025). Ethical leaders promote, through reward and discipline, ethical behaviours and values in their employees, improving work attitudes and behaviours (Chaiyasat et al., 2025).

Negative impacts of ethical leadership can arise. It may be difficult for followers to live up to the expectations of EL, and the expectations can, in extreme cases, create an obsession that distracts from organisational goals (Liden et al., 2025). Research has also found that EL may lead to abusive behaviours when the leaders are themselves exposed to abusive behaviours (Ng et al., 2021). These negative side effects may also arise due to the characteristics of the individual followers, and their characteristics' moderating effect on their experience of the ethical leader (Chaiyasat et al., 2025). These research articles suggest that Ethical Leadership, taken to an extreme, breaks down the benefits of EL. At what point the breakdown in the benefits of EL occurs is not known.

Research supports the value of EL and ELBs. Although downsides are noted to EL, these appear to be more prevalent when taken to extremes. Research tells us there are material benefits associated with Ethical Leaders, to the performance of subordinates, and to a psychologically safe culture (Chaiyasat et al., 2025). It stands then that strong, capable, and ethical leaders are critical to South Africa's growth prospects (Bhana & Sachin, 2022; Dhlamini, 2023; G. Naidoo, 2024).

### ***2.2.5 Development of Ethical Leadership Behaviours***

Scholars have considered the ways in which EL is developed. It is generally accepted that the main method by which EL is learnt is social learning (Banks et al., 2021; Gamarrá & Giroto, 2022). It is a process, antecedent to ELBs, coming from learning the ethical signals of their role models (Banks et al., 2021). Ethical leaders will learn these ELBs by observing the actions of other ELs whom they consider role models; however, what is unclear is when this learning takes place. While research does agree that training, development programmes and feedback can support EL development, there is a trait-based theory that suggests some of these characteristics would need to be learned through early developmental experiences (Banks et al., 2021).

A refined definition of EL is the outcome of enacting ELBs. ELBs themselves are learnt by observing and copying ethical leaders or ethical role models. The process of learning

is not clearly defined in EL literature, as the focus is more on the classification as opposed to the process by which that classification is achieved. Further research needs to be done to understand the process by which a leader learns the ELBs, with the field of Leader Development providing more context to the development processes that leaders undergo.

### **2.3 Leader Development**

Leader Development, distinct from leadership development, is a relatively new area of leadership research (Day et al., 2021; Vogel et al., 2021). Where Leadership Development is the business process of developing leaders, LD is focused on the development journey experienced by individual leaders (Day et al., 2021; Vogel et al., 2021). LD, unlike other research in the field of leadership, is focused on the processes by which leaders develop as opposed to the characteristics, behaviours and outcomes of leadership (Day et al., 2021). LD is broadly applicable to the development of different leadership styles, traits and behaviours, including the development of ethical leadership (Liu et al., 2021). This research will focus on understanding the contexts and processes that develop ethical leaders.

#### ***2.3.1 Defining Leader Development***

To understand LD, a clear definition of leadership is required, with researchers generally aligned on the three components, namely the leader's exertion of social influence over followers to achieve goals (Liden et al., 2025; Tackett et al., 2023). It then follows that LD is the developmental process in which an individual leader acquires the ability to exert social influence over their followers to achieve goals. Where traditional leadership scholarship has been based on identifying the characteristics and qualities of leadership styles, behaviours, and approaches, LD focuses on understanding the inputs and processes of the development of leaders (Day et al., 2021). This area of research provides a lens to understand how a leader becomes, as opposed to what a leader is.

This developmental view has historically been focused on early-adult and workplace processes; however, researchers consider this definition of development too narrow (Eva et al., 2021; Tackett et al., 2023). More recent research acknowledges the need for understanding a broader definition of development over the life of the leader (Eva et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Tackett et al., 2023). Liu et al. (2021) explicitly bring in the human development definition, where development is defined as a process that occurs over the lifespan. This approach further adds specific stages of development and differing contexts to the definition of EL (Liu et al., 2021). The definition of EL considered for this

research is the development process over the life span that empowers leaders to enact social influence over the followers to achieve goals.

### **2.3.2 *The antecedents of Leader Development***

In the Vogel et al. (2021) bibliometric review, the antecedents currently understood by researchers are discussed, related to LD, specifically Personal and Contextual Antecedents. Contextual antecedents are seen as external factors that play into the development of an individual, while personal antecedents are those internal to the individual (Vogel et al., 2021). It is important to consider what elements drive the development process.

Personal antecedents raised by Vogel et al. (2021) fall within three categories: self-related, learning attitudes and motivation, and other personal traits. Circular logic presents with some of the personal antecedents, with elements such as cognitive ability being a personal trait, but also being affected by contextual antecedents, and being perceived as an outcome of the LD process (Vogel et al., 2021). This circular logic is also present in other research (Liu et al., 2021).

Other contextual antecedents that the authors note are broadly grouped into organisational interventions, informal and experiential experiences, and, with a more recent trend toward less traditional antecedents (Vogel et al., 2021). These more traditional organisational views align with the early focus of LD research on early adult and workplace experiences being the context for that research (Eva et al., 2021), with the more recent views aligning more with the broader understanding of LD, such as the consideration of Play as a contextual antecedent (Liu et al., 2021; Vogel et al., 2021). The research shows a broadening from the narrow organisational and work experience scope to a more human developmental approach, discussed by Liu et al. (2021). Having considered the antecedents of LD, research also considers the outcomes of LD.

### **2.3.3 *Leader Development Outcomes***

Various skills and attributes have been identified as key outcomes for leader development (Newstead et al., 2024; Vogel et al., 2021). However, taking a skills or attributes checklist approach to the determination of a leader's development dismisses the complexity of the process and the ongoing nature of leader development (Liu et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021). There are developmental outcomes that suggest leader development is underway or has occurred; these are grouped broadly into internal developments, external validations, and long-term impacts.

Internal development occurs primarily through a leader perceiving themselves as a leader. Development requirements also include a leader's ability to understand their position and their influence, which is qualified as a leader's self-view and includes concepts such as self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-awareness (Newstead et al., 2024; Tackett et al., 2023; Vogel et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021). Again, the research raises inconsistencies between antecedents and outcomes, with leader self-view considered an outcome by Newstead et al. (2024) while Vogel et al. (2021) consider self-view a personal antecedent. As leaders build their self-identity as a leader, self-efficacy increases with consequential increases in motivation (Walker et al., 2024). It is through knowing oneself and knowing one's leadership qualities that leaders reinforce leadership behaviours and action, which in turn improve one's self-knowledge; this is a positive feedback loop (Liu et al., 2021).

A secondary outcome of leadership is validated externally through observable behaviours. A leader demonstrates skills and competencies learnt through their developmental process (Liu et al., 2021). Leaders also learn to be adaptable, to apply the most appropriate response to different circumstances (Liden et al., 2025). Leaders develop skills and competencies, applying them in different ways based on the context. Leaders also develop specific social competency sets to enable their ability to influence followers; these competencies range from leading through positive and negative influence to shared leadership and building high-quality follower relationships. (Dong et al., 2023; Liden et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2024).

Finally, LD outcomes relate to long-term impacts, such as the formal and informal roles leaders occupy and retain, the high levels of performance leaders inspire from their teams, and the stability and well-being they achieve in the roles they hold. The outcome of LD tends towards individuals consistently occupying formal leadership roles in varying contexts and at different times in their lives (Day et al., 2021; Walker et al., 2024). These leaders occupying roles result in positive team performance, better organisational outcomes, and better outcomes for individual followers, which can be measured both objectively, through formal performance metrics, or subjectively, through perceptions of followers, teams and organisations (Liden et al., 2025). The final element of LD outcomes, which aligns with the individual development outcomes, is improved well-being despite the pressures of leadership roles (Irehill et al., 2023). Irehill et al. (2023) found this when comparing young leaders to old leaders, noting reduced burnout and improved vigour in the latter.

Research into the field of LD has found that over the life of development, there are many indicators: internal, external, and over extended timeframes, that indicate development

has occurred. While these measurement criteria are important to assess the outcomes of LD in practice, they do not yet succinctly explain the mechanisms by which the LD process occurs. To understand this further, LD models need to be considered.

### **2.4 Leader development through experiential windows across the lifespan**

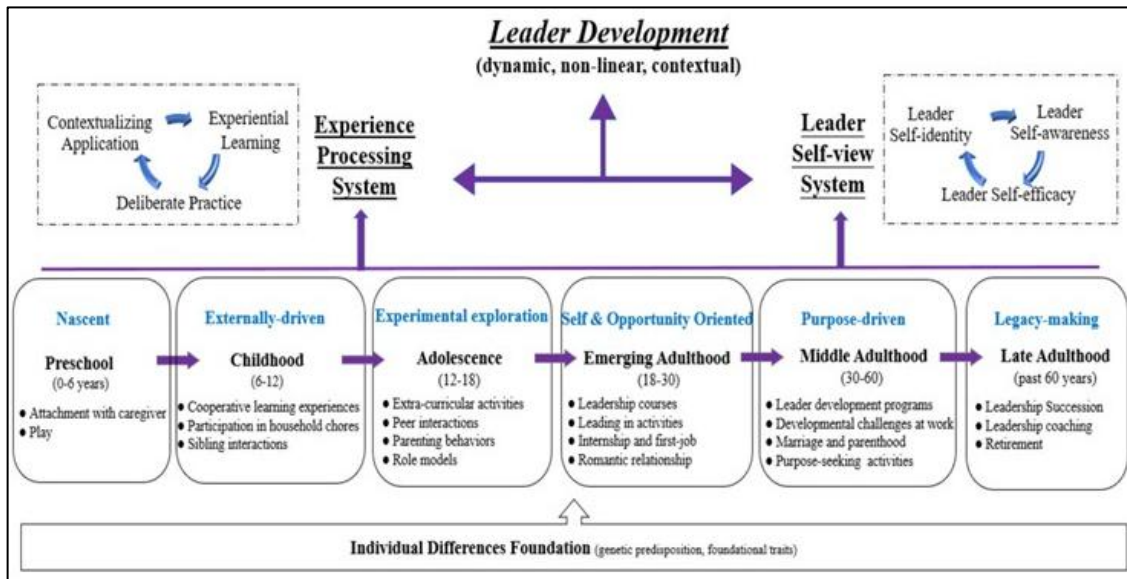
The current paradigm of the LD field is to consider development beyond the scope of the workplace and formal training, with much research being done to understand the broader processes and timeframes (Day et al., 2021; Newstead et al., 2024; Tackett et al., 2023; Vogel et al., 2021). This paradigm is effectively considered in the model development by Liu et al. (2021), which considers LD across the lifespan of a leader, with a focus on specific life development phases. This model is also considered because the development of a leader is a lifelong journey, and it gives focus to other times and places of development, which helps expand the research beyond the times and contexts that have historically had the most research focus, being the learning happening during adulthood at the workplace (Eva et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Tackett et al., 2023).

This model captures LD as a process in which context and time matter. The process of development at different times in a leader's life varies, with similar experiences at different times having different outcomes (Liu et al., 2021). For example, a project failure early in a leader's life may impact their perception of themselves as a leader, while later in life, the same failure may be used as a learning experience. A model of LD needs to consider time. Context, too, has an impact on the LD process. Social contexts, like family or peers, provide different levels of security and safety, and learning in one context can be applied in other contexts (Liu et al., 2021; Tackett et al., 2023). As an example, learning social cues with peers and how to engage with peers may enable a leader to effectively influence a follower later in life.

This research will use the Leader Development model developed by Liu et al. (2021). In this model, as shown in Figure 1 LD is understood as a lifelong development process that begins in adolescence and continues through to late adulthood (Liu et al., 2021, p. 4).

# Ethical Leader Development

Figure 1 - Leader Development across the life span through experiential windows



The model provides first for background and antecedents, such as genetic or pre-existing traits like personality, cognitive ability or other factors (Liu et al., 2021). These would be considered personal antecedents (Vogel et al., 2021). It is also important to understand at this point the contextual antecedents, like the place and its impact on development (Newstead et al., 2024). Both personal and contextual antecedents need to be explored as the platform of a leader's story.

## 2.4.1 Individual differences and foundation

Past research suggests that leadership is to some degree based on the inherent nature of the individual (Liu et al., 2021). Genetic predisposition influences characteristics that form the foundations of future leaders' basic skill sets and personality (Liu et al., 2021). Some of these traits are inherited. While these inherited qualities are not the exclusive antecedents of leadership, they do improve the probability of leadership positions. For example, past studies based on twins suggest that leadership position attainment is attributable to heritability (Liu et al., 2021).

Characteristics like intelligence, personality, gender, physical traits, and athletic ability have all been researched in terms of their influence on leadership and leadership potential (Eva et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Tackett et al., 2023). This research does not suggest the qualities that make a leader; however, they are overrepresented in leadership positions, implying some level of connection between these characteristics and leadership (Liu et al., 2021). Whether as a head-start over others that manifests in priority in future leadership opportunities or development, or as direct leadership traits themselves, these characteristics influence leadership manifestation.

### **2.4.2 Phase 1 - The preschool experiential window**

The first three windows of LD, according to the model, are considered. Firstly, the nascent period, considering the age range of birth to six years, where development is mostly associated with an individual's attachment to their caregiver and engaging in play (Liu et al., 2021). Some leaders may attribute their leadership story as far back as the nascent period or early childhood (Zheng et al., 2021). It is in this period that individuals' first relationships are forged, setting the foundation for future relationships. Positive relationships with primary caregivers may manifest in certain characteristics, while negative first relationships may manifest in others (Liu et al., 2021). Human development research places emphasis on these early relationships and their impacts on an individual's future relationships. Although experiences are not necessarily remembered during this time in one's life, large traumatic events or circumstances can persist in an individual's experiences; for example, growing up in poverty can negatively impact leader emergence (Tackett et al., 2023).

During this development phase, one begins to navigate different social interactions, primarily with family, establishing patterns and mechanisms that assist in future leadership positions (Liu et al., 2021). Learning how to navigate conflict and social organisation arises during play.

As one emerges from early adolescence, they begin to form relationships beyond their core families. They enter school environments and are exposed to more diverse social circumstances. They enter the childhood experiential window.

### **2.4.3 Phase 2 - The childhood experiential window**

Secondly, the Childhood phase continues up to 12 years of age, with the developmental process experienced through cooperative learning, engaging in chores at home and through further relationship engagement beyond siblings and family, through to peers (Liu et al., 2021). Under this experiential window, social development accelerates. Relationships with family, including siblings, deepen while peers and social structures emerge (Liu et al., 2021).

Leadership begins to emerge. Recent studies show different leadership approaches present and form in middle school adolescence (Tackett et al., 2023). With the development and refinement of these skillsets already presenting year on year through this period (Eva et al., 2021; Tackett et al., 2023). Leadership manifests both positively and negatively in this period. Up to 15% of the school population in a study was considered leaders by their peers (Tackett et al., 2023). In this study, representations of

gendered leadership styles are already present, as well as a skew towards male leaders (Tackett et al., 2023).

### **2.4.4 Phase 3 - The adolescent experiential window**

The adolescence period follows as the third window, with parenting behaviours building onto peer relationships and interaction (Liu et al., 2021). A developing Leader also gains new perspectives through extracurricular activities, and they identify and engage with role models, often other than caregivers or parents (Eva et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021).

Extracurricular activities provide opportunities for adolescent leadership. Extracurricular activities expose adolescents to social learning opportunities and to opportunities to utilise skills related to leadership (Liu et al., 2021). Research into extracurricular activities like sports, scouts, and even cultural activities suggests these activities are positively associated with leadership emergence, development of leadership skills and holding leadership positions in later life (Liu et al., 2021; Tackett et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2021).

Parental relationships evolve as children move into adolescence. The impact of these relationship dynamics can be positive, where parents give children the room to grow and develop themselves, or they can be negative, where overbearing parenting may harm self-esteem and ultimately leader emergence (Eva et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021). Different parenting approaches have been associated with different leadership styles (Liu et al., 2021). This parental impact is over and above the parental role considered through attachment theory, with the parents serving as leadership models (Liu et al., 2021).

Role models of both the same and opposite sex are important for the development process of adolescents (Eva et al., 2021). It is through mentoring and engaging with role models that adolescents can develop leadership skills, and these interactions help develop a leader's self-identity (Liu et al., 2021). Role models are of particular interest in the development of ELB (Banks et al., 2021).

### **2.4.5 Discussion of the pre-adult phases**

These first three phases of the leader development model are foundational to a leader's self-identity, establishment of relationships and social competencies, and the early manifestation of leadership skills needed in future leadership positions (Liu et al., 2021). The first two phases are distinct from the third phase, with the focus on the closer singular relationships, then progressing into broader social relationships in the next phase (Tackett et al., 2023). It is these early phases of life that require more research attention (Eva et al., 2021; Tackett et al., 2023). While more recent research has been conducted

on these foundational phases, more work needs to be done (Dong et al., 2023; Eva et al., 2021; Irehill et al., 2023; Tackett et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2024).

#### **2.4.6 Phase 4 - The emerging adulthood experiential window**

In the next two phases of the experiential window model, which are the phases of emerging adulthood and middle adulthood, most preexisting research has focused (Liu et al., 2021; Vogel et al., 2021). Development in these phases is well understood, with both formal and informal education providing growth for developing leaders (Vogel et al., 2021). First, the emerging adulthood phase.

Leader development in this phase of life is characterised by new contexts in university and first jobs, presenting the opportunity for leaders to apply the skills they have learnt through the earlier phases and develop them in the real world (Liu et al., 2021). Leadership development programmes in this phase, both during university and a leader's first job, provide opportunities to obtain knowledge and begin to solidify a leader's identity (Liu et al., 2021). Programs assist leaders to become self-aware, to understand their strengths and weaknesses (Liu et al., 2021). While these programmes are based in academic contexts, the learnings should then be applied in practical contexts during first jobs or internships (Liu et al., 2021). First supervisors often present as role models, contributing both positively and negatively to leaders' emerging identity (Liu et al., 2021). This early phase transitions into the mid-adult phase, where development continues and growth comes from additional mechanisms.

#### **2.4.7 Phase 5 - The middle adulthood experiential window**

As leaders transition from early career into mid-adult phase, they solidify their leader identity. Leaders develop through further leadership training and deliberate learning from on-the-job training and developmental challenges at work (Liu et al., 2021). The core career development phase is where leaders assume formal leadership roles. Leaders in this phase often have to balance many different stressors, such as work commitments, spouse and family commitments, and commitments to society in general (Liu et al., 2021).

Leaders continue to refine their skills and learn from on-the-job experiences. Developmental challenges at work necessitate leaders to respond creatively, learning new skills, though this is often only beneficial to the extent that feedback is provided (Liu et al., 2021; Vogel et al., 2021). The complexity of the problems presented, often high stakes and uncertain, requires leaders to solve problems strategically (Liu et al., 2021). The transition from the mid-adult phase to the late-adult phase is characterised by establishing purpose to building a legacy.

### **2.4.8 Phase 6 - The late adulthood experiential window**

The final period of LD in the model is late adulthood (Liu et al., 2021). It is this period that leaders are phasing into retirement, but have the knowledge and skill which they use to build a legacy through coaching and succession planning (Liu et al., 2021). This phase of a leader's development lifecycle is associated with legacy building, either through the development of future leaders or through legacy contributions (Liu et al., 2021). In this period, leaders share the skillsets they have built over the years and act as role models and mentors to future leaders (Liu et al., 2021). They also leverage those skill sets to make an impact in other spheres of their lives, either through entrepreneurial endeavours or through supporting other organisations in reaching their goals (Liu et al., 2021).

### **2.4.9 Systems of Development**

A key element of the model is also how leaders engage with the developmental processes in each experiential window (Liu et al., 2021). Liu et al. (2021) incorporate the "experience processing system" (p. 4) and "leader self-view" (p. 4) systems as the two methods in which the leader experiences and grows in the different windows. These systems provide a dynamic context-based approach to leader development and enrich the understanding of the development over the different windows (Liu et al., 2021; Walker et al., 2024). These systems are a lens through which the development happens, with growth occurring both within the experiential windows and between the experiential windows (Walker et al., 2024). These two systems are positioned as one internally focused and one externally focused. Both systems exhibit an element of iteration and reinforcement, whereby an experience is had, which is processed in a manner resulting in a refinement of future behaviours or responses to similar experiences.

#### **2.4.9.1 System 1 - Leader self-view**

The first system, the leader self-view system, relates to an individual's internal perception of their own leadership nature and ability (Liu et al., 2021; Walker et al., 2024). Self-view is seen as a personal antecedent to leader development and is regularly referred to in leader development literature (Vogel et al., 2021). It is seen as a foundation in human development theories, supporting the inclusion of this system into the model (Vogel et al., 2021). This system is built upon three interrelated components: leader self-efficacy, leader self-awareness, and leader self-identity (Liu et al., 2021).

Leader self-awareness covers an individual's self-awareness and how that self-awareness aligns with their followers (Walker et al., 2024). Self-awareness can be understood as the extent to which a leader has a realistic understanding of their own strengths, weaknesses, skills and abilities (Liu et al., 2021). Newstead et al. (2024) take

leader self-awareness further, that leaders need to have an understanding of why they have the strengths and weaknesses, and how different contexts affect them. This self-awareness sets the foundation upon which self-efficacy is set.

Leader self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to lead (Walker et al., 2024). Self-efficacy is strongly related to an individual's leadership motivations and their experience of being a leader in a formal or informal role (Liu et al., 2021). Self-efficacy and performance as a leader are interrelated, with self-efficacy improving performance, which in turn improves self-efficacy (Walker et al., 2024). A leader's awareness of their own skills enables their belief in applying those skills, which in turn strengthens their identify as a leader.

Leader self-identity relates to whether and how an individual perceives themselves to be a leader (Walker et al., 2024). It can be influenced by the strength of the resonance of the identity, often influenced by external recognition (Tackett et al., 2023). Social context, too, can influence leader self-identity (Eva et al., 2021). Leader self-identity is considered a fundamentally important multi-dimensional construct in the leader development field (Vogel et al., 2021). Is being a leader core to that individual's identity or just a peripheral idea? This would be considered the integration of the leader's identity. Liu et al. (2021) consider leader self-identity as the final part of the leader self-view system; however, it is not seen as static. It is also important to consider that identity is not a fixed outlook; it is dynamic and can change over time, especially with external inputs (Liu et al., 2021). Past studies have highlighted changes in leader self-view consequential to external events such as coaching, training, or other events (Walker et al., 2024).

The core relation within leader self-view is the relationship between the three sub-constructs, which are interrelated and causal. A positive leadership experience, like evidence of positive performance, needs to be interpreted through the lens of leader self-awareness, which in turn may increase leader self-efficacy, which will then increase coherence of leader self-identity, which increases leader self-efficacy and self-awareness (Liu et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021). It is this relationship between the sub-constructs that form the system of self-view. This system approach to understanding self-view and its components reconciles the issues raised earlier when considering the antecedents and outcomes of LD.

### 2.4.9.2 System 2 - Experience processing system

The second system, the experience processing system, is a more externally based system whereby growth happens through the experiences of the individual developing into a leader (Liu et al., 2021; Walker et al., 2024). Leaders have many experiences over

their lifetimes, with examples of these considered through each of the experiential windows; the experience processing system is the mechanism by which a leader connects those external events to the learning and development the leader experiences internally (Liu et al., 2021). This system is driven by intentional learning and reflection on those experiences (Liu et al., 2021).

The experiential processing system has both a temporal element and a contextual element, with the time in a leader's life impacting how experiences are internalised and the place impacting how the learnings are incorporated (Liu et al., 2021; Newstead et al., 2024; Zheng et al., 2021). Once the experiences have been contextualised, they can be processed into the leader self-view system, ultimately contributing to the LD process (Liu et al., 2021).

With the model considering the full development life cycle, the development and application of leadership skills are considered through this model, allowing researchers to understand the story behind the leader (Liu et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021). This research will gain an understanding of leaders' development across their lifespans through the experiential window model (Liu et al., 2021).

### **2.5 Ethical Leader Development over the Lifetime**

Researchers have already established a connection between EL and LD (Banks et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021). Banks et al. (2021) imply that the capacity for Ethical Leader behaviours develops over the lifespan, such as through childhood experiences, aligning with the Experiential Windows model (Liu et al., 2021). The existing research aligns with the dynamic nature of leader development. Banks et al. (2021) further note the lack of empirical evidence of the causes of ELB, which this research considers as the developmental causes of ELB, notwithstanding contextual or other conditions for a causal relationship (Newstead et al., 2024).

This research then takes the experiential windows across the life span, with a specific focus on understanding how ethical leaders develop. The research looks into what events trigger experiential learning and how that then impacts a leader's self-view as an ethical leader. This research will investigate ethical leadership development through experiential windows across the lifespan.

### **2.6 Conclusion**

The review of the literature confirms that ethical leadership is the necessary and appropriate response to corporate and political scandals, including those in South Africa (Banks et al., 2021). Ethical leadership literature has progressed from the moral person

and moral manager, toward Ethical Leader Behaviours understood through Signalling Theory (Banks et al., 2023). This view shows that Ethical Leaders need to be consistent, visible, and benefit all stakeholders through prosocial values (Banks et al., 2021, 2023). This shift supports that ethical leadership is dynamic and can develop over time (Ng et al., 2021). The Leader development field then provides the process by which a leader can develop (Vogel et al., 2021). The lens of development of ethical leadership behaviours is considered through the leader development through experiential windows model (Liu et al., 2021). This is a dynamic model of leader development that incorporates development across the lifetime (Liu et al., 2021).

Despite these fields showing the process of leader development and the current state of the ethical leadership field, there are some gaps in the research. The gaps relate primarily to the exact process of Ethical Leadership development (Banks et al., 2021; Gamarra & Giroto, 2022), the lack of depth of research into the development that occurs in the earlier phases of life (Eva et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Tackett et al., 2023), and the limited research on ethical leadership in non-Western contexts (Chaiyasat et al., 2025; Sipondo, 2025).

To address these gaps, this research will explore the life stories of Chartered Accountants who are business leaders. This allows the research to focus on the earlier periods of development, as CAs share rigorous professional ethical training, providing a similar adulthood development. This research will provide insights into how CAs as leaders develop into ethical leaders, outside the well-researched areas of early adult and workplace windows and in the South African context (Liu et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021).

### **3 Research Questions**

Based on the synthesis of the literature on the fields of Ethical Leadership and Leader Development, this research aims to explore the leader development processes and experiences that shape ethical leaders in the South African context. Existing research into Ethical Leadership has established its necessity as a response to both business and political scandals, however, the research falls short of explaining the processes by which Ethical Leadership is developed. This is where the leader development across life span provides a process and mechanisms for development to occur; however, this research is lacking empirical evidence outside of Western contexts.

It is this gap, that this study aims to fill, by conducting a narrative inquiry into the lives of South African Chartered Accountants who have become business leaders. This population provides the research with a refined focus on the earlier less researched stages of the experiential development model, because of the standardised training and work experiences they have undergone through university and in their early careers that provide a foundational ethical exposure. The research questions are designed with these theoretical frameworks in mind, helping to focus the research on the elements that lack empirical evidence.

*RQ1 - How do business leaders develop ethical leadership behaviours?*

This overarching research question sets the foundation for understanding the development of leaders from their individual perspective. The question is intentionally broad, allowing for a wide range of qualitative data expected from narrative inquiry aims to capture the complexities of lived experiences. The question is based on the Leader Development model over the lifetime, which underscores a non-linear temporal and contextual development process.

*RQ 1.1 – What role do the experiential windows of childhood and adolescence play in the development of ethical leadership behaviours?*

This sub-question is based on the Liu et al. (2021) model, which stresses the importance of the early life stages in developing a leader's self-identity, social competencies and relationships. This question helps provide a clear focus on the research gap of the understudied early development phases. This question will explore whether the pre-adult life experiences, including family and peer relationships, extracurricular activities, or role models, have influenced the development of ethical leadership values and behaviours.

*RQ 1.2 – What other cultural, contextual or personal attributes develop business leaders into ethical leaders over their lifespans?*

This sub-question expands the scope to consider the entire leader development model. It opens the research to the exposure of both contextual and personal antecedents to leader development. The question opens the scope to focus on the broader, more communal South African context. This question will enable the investigation into how factors like cultural background, major life events, formal training - including SAICA's ethical training requirement - and other personal attributes contribute to the development towards being an ethical leader.

By addressing these questions, this research will provide new insights into the development of ethical leaders. These questions help expand on these two bodies of research, connecting them and providing the basis for empirical evidence to support them in the South African context. The following section will elaborate on the methodology chosen to address these questions.

## **4 Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter covers the methodological approach taken for this study. The chapter covers the methodological choice, key elements of the processes undertaken and review the ethical considerations.

### **4.2 Methodological Choice**

#### ***4.2.1 Purpose of Research Design and Philosophy***

The literature details the current state of the field, with research having been conducted on leader development. This research, however, is fragmented and needs more empirical evidence to support theoretical gains (Liu et al., 2021; Vogel et al., 2021). The research design was descriptive and provided deeper insight into the existing theory.

Leader development is a complex lifelong process (Eva et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021). Each leader's story is nuanced and different. To capture this subjective reality, an interpretivist philosophy enabled this research to unlock new understandings of the complex social study of leader development in the narrative context of their stories.

#### ***4.2.2 Approach***

A qualitative inductive approach was undertaken. This approach was the most suitable to explore the complex and nuanced topic of ethical leader development. The focus was on understanding the real world to contribute to the body of knowledge (Ajjawi et al., 2024). The approach was ideal because the fields of research in leader development and ethical leadership are not yet fully mature, and further empirical evidence is needed to support the theories (Banks et al., 2021; Vogel et al., 2021). As an example, more recent research raised concerns with the established measures of EL, primarily survey-based measures, being exposed to the observational bias inherent in surveying followers (Banks et al., 2021; Ng et al., 2021). These concerns align with the suggestion of Shakeel et al. (2020) for the further development of new measurement scales aligned with the broader definition of EL. Furthermore, with the theories developed in similar Western contexts, there is still more to be learned and validated by the life experiences of business leaders in emerging markets like South Africa (Gamarra & Giroto, 2022; Sipondo, 2025).

### **4.2.3 Methodological Choices**

The method chosen for this study was a multi-method qualitative study. Gamarra and Giroto (2022) recommend more qualitative research into ethical leadership. The multi-method approach allowed for data to be collected from interviews and additional secondary data sources. Secondary data was collected from the media, including LinkedIn, regular media such as digital print news articles and finally company, association and other digital sources. This data was collected and used to triangulate the narrative interview data. This multi-method approach results in more nuanced and confirmatory data being collected.

### **4.2.4 Research Strategy**

The research strategy was a narrative inquiry. A narrative inquiry is a research strategy that values the sequence a story is told, linking context and the evidence that the narrator provides, creating meaning for the researcher (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Understanding the stories of leaders provided insight into their development journey throughout their lives (Zheng et al., 2021). As noted in the literature, leader development is lifelong and multifaceted, incorporating experience, training, skills development and self-understanding (Day et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021). These are all difficult to pin down to specific instances in time and are best understood within the context of the development story (Adhikari, 2021; Liu et al., 2021). A narrative inquiry methodology was ideally suited to understanding stories across time and places, like a leader's development story (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Pino, Gavidia and Adu (2022) further assert that the cultural, social, economic and institutional elements emerge through storytelling, which this research was fundamentally interested in.

The research intended to conduct and compile an authentic contextual narrative, both presenting the story in accordance with the narrator's intended view and including all relevant contextual information (Younas et al., 2023). A narrative inquiry provides a broad scope and long horizon, in this research, a lifetime, for the narrator to provide information (Ajjawi et al., 2024). Development does not happen at distinct intervals but during the times in between. The collection of this information through a narrative allowed contextual impacts to emerge that may not have emerged with a more targeted approach. This strategy also allowed the narrator to bring attention to the times they believe development has occurred, which supports answering the research question.

### **4.2.5 Time Horizon**

The time horizon of this research was cross-sectional. The data was collected at a point in time after a leader's development journey had matured. With the research objective of

“how” being key, a point-in-time narration provided appropriate insights. Researchers suggest incorporating the dynamics of time within the cross-sectional methodologies to account for the development and changes in EL (Banks et al., 2021). Narrative inquiries provide a temporal understanding of leaders’ ethical development journeys (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). The cross-sectional time horizon enabled an understanding of themes to emerge from the development outcomes leaders experienced over their lives.

### **4.2.6 Research Techniques and Procedures**

The research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with supporting secondary data triangulation. The interviews ranged from sixty minutes to an hour and five minutes. Embarking on qualitative studies that include approaches like interviews and observation was suggested for understanding the nuances of EL (Shakeel et al., 2020). Interviews with leaders give deep insight into their lives and their development as leaders over their lives (Adhikari, 2021; Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). A semi-structured format allowed for sufficient flexibility for conversations to flow on differing natural tangents, which gave more fruitful outcomes while enabling the research to guide towards them (Lim, 2024; Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

The secondary data was sourced both before and after, with LinkedIn Profiles referenced before to gain an understanding of the leader's career background, then, after the interview, further data was sourced to support or contradict the participant. A Google search for relevant articles from online news sources, organisational websites and other social media profiles was done after the interviews. Multiple sources were used for triangulation (Stanley & Robertson, 2024). Both corroborative and contradictory information was sought and considered to enrich the data received from the semi-structured interviews (Stanley & Robertson, 2024). Specific keywords were searched; these are detailed in the Measurement Instrument section. The articles and data collected were retained as part of the raw data used for this research. The collection of the secondary data enabled timeline verification, contextual cross-reference and comparisons to existing narratives (Stanley & Robertson, 2024). The only contradictory information was related to the timing of certain career milestones, which was simply explained as an error and not deceptive intent.

### **4.3 Population**

The research study's population consists of active or retired SAICA-registered Chartered Accountants who were business leaders of large organisations. The study considered business leaders as the individuals primarily responsible for the strategy, management and outcomes of the organisation.

## Ethical Leader Development

The criteria for participation in the study were:

- Chartered Accountants – this was verified.
- Leaders of businesses or business units.
- Leaders who have been in leadership roles for ten or more years provide a sufficient time horizon. All of the leaders were 45 years or older.
- Both active and retired leaders are considered for their experience.
- These business leaders have upheld ethical conduct and shown no evidence of unethical actions in their careers.
- The size of the companies these leaders led or oversaw was large organisations of 250 or more staff.

The participants met the definition of Elite Informants, and as such, special considerations were necessary (Solarino & Aguinis, 2021). An organisation includes companies, subsidiaries, or divisions of companies, that by itself has above 250 employees, this being the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's definition of a large enterprise (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020).

These individuals interviewed were significant for the study because they had a high ethical standing and were business leaders. Their stories' differences and similarities provided insight into the development of leaders over their lifetimes. This supported progress towards resolving South Africa's leadership problems. Research also called for: geographical diversity (Gamarra & Giroto, 2022), cross-cultural (Shakeel et al., 2020) and the ability to address biases and inequality (Day et al., 2021). It was with these requirements in mind that diversity in the population was required and planned through sampling across culture, race, and gender. By participating in this study, leaders contributed to the body of knowledge on leader development. They enabled potential future leaders to learn from their stories. This was in line with the leader's legacy-building tendencies. While the sample is ethnically and culturally diverse, there is a bias toward white males based on the responses to requests for interviews.

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
<b>Gender</b>	M	F	M	M	M	M	M
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Caucasian	African	Caucasian	Caucasian	Indian	Indian	Caucasian
<b>Age</b>	70-75	50-55	50-55	45-50	70-75	50-55	70-75
<b>Interview Duration</b>	1h45	1h15	1h15	1h10	1h15	1h05	1h00
<b>Document Stored</b>	4	10	7	5	14	7	2

*Table 1 - Key details regarding participants and interviews*

#### **4.4 Unit of Analysis**

The focus of this research was on the leadership development journey of business leaders. The research focused on the narrative stories of these leaders; thus, the unit of analysis was at the micro-level: a business leader.

#### **4.5 Sampling Method and Size**

A target sample of ten individual business leaders was sought; however, only seven participants were interviewed. All the participants' stories were varied and content-rich. Common themes emerged from the second interview, with diminishing additional themes presented by the sixth interview, with the final interview providing no additional new themes. Past qualitative studies of a tight scope saw, on average, a saturation range of nine to sixteen (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022); however, with a deeper scope required of a narrative inquiry, six to 12 participants, with an absolute minimum of three, was suggested (Adhikari, 2021). This research achieved saturation by seven interviews.

The sampling method took a non-probability sampling approach. Obtaining a complete list of all Business Leader CAs was impractical, as it would be constantly changing and unreliable after short timeframes. In line with the research using qualitative methodology and based on the smaller sample size required, a purposive sampling approach was leveraged within the organisation where the researcher is employed, as well as other personal contacts (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The researcher leveraged LinkedIn professional networks to contact other possible participants; however, this was unsuccessful. Judgment was applied by the researcher based on the criteria set out in the population discussion. Sampling was done via snowball sampling, leveraging existing sample participants who made recommendations and referred other business leaders (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Solarino & Aguinis, 2021).

Research participants were contacted either via email, via instant messaging services or through their LinkedIn profiles. An initial contact email or message was sent, with follow-up correspondence used to confirm possible interview times – this was done with personal assistants on several occasions. Had the data triangulation raised any material inconsistencies or omissions, a follow-up interview was planned; however, the need for follow-up interviews did not arise. All correspondence was carried out per the considerations detailed in the Research Ethics section.

#### **4.6 Measurement Instrument**

The measurement instrument for the research was a Semi-structured interview guide (Adhikari, 2021). The interview guide was prepared and vetted before being used for

interviews. The guide was used to direct the interview and allowed for the adaptability required when engaging Elite Informants (Solarino & Aguinis, 2021). This was done practically by providing the overarching question to the leaders, then allowing them to tell their stories with limited interruption. The semi-structured interview includes eight question sections, which is between Adhikari's (2021) recommended six and ten questions. This question set was used as a guide and enabled the researcher sufficient flexibility.

The interview guide was developed based on themes identified in the literature, based on direction from Saunders and Lewis (2018), and based on the experiential windows identified in the Liu et al. (2021) model. The guide also leveraged guides prepared for similar existing research (Zheng et al., 2021). The focus was on enabling the participant to give a detailed narrative of their life and leadership story. Before the interview guide is used on participants, it was vetted by a seasoned qualitative academic researcher to corroborate the usefulness and appropriateness of the question plan (Lim, 2024; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Please refer to Appendix B – Research Instrument for the instrument built for the semi-structured interview.

The secondary data used to triangulate the semi-structured interview data was sourced online. Basic searches were conducted into online media, corporate communications, published reports and LinkedIn and other media posts. To begin, simple searches using the participant's name were conducted, with further refinement in terms of subjects such as “leadership”, “ethics” and “development”. The name searches provided the data used for triangulation. No additional articles were identified using the refined terms. The leaders having names in common with other people was identified as a problem, with careful consideration of details and times of the articles were vetted to ensure that only the correct information was captured.

### **4.7 Data Gathering Process**

The data collected falls into three categories: oral stories, written stories and lived stories (Adhikari, 2021). The recordings are evidence of the oral stories; social media, digital media, publications and other online research sum up evidence included as written stories, while the lived stories were observed by the research and documented in field notes (Adhikari, 2021; Ajjawi et al., 2024). The primary data was gathered via recordings of the semi-structured interviews. Transcriptions of those recordings were made with the assistance of Microsoft Word's transcription functionality, which was then reviewed and edited to capture the essence of the interview. The recording, the raw transcription, and the clean transcription were all stored.

The recordings and transcriptions were then used to compile narrative portraits. Field notes were detailed by the researcher and captured electronically in scanned PDF format. The social media, digital media and other publications were saved in PDF format. No relevant social media content was obtained. The professional designation verification was done using the professional body's member verification website, with JPG screenshots captured for each leader.

The interviews were conducted online for four of the leaders, with the other three interviews conducted in person at the leader's office or at the university campus. Online interviews were conducted via video call using Microsoft Teams and Zoom. This allowed the research to fit the participant's schedule, as recommended by Solarino and Aguinis (2021).

All interviews were recorded, with the participant's permission. Video recordings were done; however, due to data size constraints, only the voice recordings were retained. All seven leaders' interviews were voice-recorded. During the interview with participant 3, there was a break in the recording. None of the business leaders appeared to be intimidated by the recording process, nor significantly influenced by the process. The recordings did not materially bias or impact the outcome of the interview (Rutakumwa et al., 2020).

The recordings were transcribed first using transcription software and then manually vetted by the researcher. Reading the script while listening to the recording allowed the researcher to identify discrepancies and correct the transcription. Field notes were captured while the interview was in progress; these notes were supplemented with observational notes based on the recording after the interview (Rutakumwa et al., 2020). Using all the information collected, the data was sorted and organised, which enabled the researcher to describe the narratives (Adhikari, 2021). Research portraits were compiled based on the stories of the participants as a means of reporting the stories (Adhikari, 2021).

### **4.8 Analysis Approach**

The data collected was analysed, coded, categorised and themed using Atlas.Ti. A descriptive coding approach was undertaken which established keywords and phrases that emerged. A thematic analysis was done to identify patterns emerging from the data (Juntunen & Lehenkari, 2021; O'Kane et al., 2023; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Descriptive codes were aggregated into categories and finally consolidated into five themes (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; Lim, 2024; O'Kane et al., 2023; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The transcription data was uploaded into Atlas.Ti, a powerful tool that assisted with the

analysis of all the data (O’Kane et al., 2023; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Leveraging the Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software, Atlas.ti, came with multiple benefits to simplify the analysis process (O’Kane et al., 2023). Classifying and interpreting the transcripts of the interview helped the researcher identify the deeper meanings (Adhikari, 2021).

Data in the tool is primarily the transcripts of interviews. Triangulation of the data collected was done between the data sources, with desktop research to corroborate the data analysis approach (Stanley & Robertson, 2024). Secondary data was specifically used to verify the narrative timeline, it established contextual cross-references and was used to corroborate and contradict the interview narrative against existing narratives in secondary data (Stanley & Robertson, 2024).

### **4.9 Quality Controls**

Quality controls were implemented to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected and the processes followed. Further, controls were implemented to mitigate bias in the sample selection, data collection and analysis phases.

To build credibility, field note conventions were established and applied consistently. Frequent checking in with the participants, and circling back to key comments also supports credibility (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). It is important to note that on some emotionally charged comments, for example, an instance of the loss of a parent, the researcher did not press for any further detail. Software, Atlas.ti, was leveraged to assist with the analysis of the data, which helped ensure coding quality and consistency (O’Kane et al., 2023). The coding process was also iterated several times to ensure consistency.

The data was triangulated between field notes, transcripts, recordings and desktop research to support assertions made, timelines and outcomes (Lê & Schmid, 2022; Solarino & Aguinis, 2021; Stanley & Robertson, 2024). The researcher used their common status as a chartered accountant and the prestige of the university, to maintain an appropriate power dynamic with the leader (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019). Further, the researcher was well prepared for the interviews, both in terms of theoretical content as well as background information of the subject through research, a form of self-acquaintance (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019). The leaders interviewed asked for a steer for preparation for the interview, and a high-level overview of the objective of the interview was given. The semi-structured interview guide also provided a level of control for the researcher.

To ensure transferability, purposive sampling was applied to select and identify appropriate participants. Leveraging standardised questions in the interview guide also enabled the research to be transcribed and field notes to be validated against the intention of the research. Making detailed notes of descriptions and background of the interviewees supports the transferability (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

To enhance the dependability of the data, again, the field notes were standardised and applied consistently; this will be done as part of a clear audit trail created to evidence the process step by step (Lê & Schmid, 2022; Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). The triangulation of the data obtained was also used to support the dependability of outcomes (Lê & Schmid, 2022; Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022; Solarino & Aguinis, 2021; Stanley & Robertson, 2024). Finally, to support the confirmability of the data outcomes, the research has clearly articulated, in Section 4.3, the criteria set for the purposive sampling; the interview guide was vetted to ensure the questions are not too explanatory or leading; triangulation was leveraged to confirm or contradict inaccurate recollection of events; and the researcher employed bracketing to mitigate observer bias (Lim, 2024).

### **4.10 Limitations**

The research was exposed to certain limitations. Firstly, the research has limited ability for the findings to be generalised back to the population (Lim, 2024). The research findings may not be transferable to the development of other business leaders. Secondly, the research is limited in terms of replicability (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; Lim, 2024). As specific leaders' stories are being told, replicating the exact stories told by the leaders is not possible; however, the processes followed would be replicable. The research was conducted as a qualitative narrative inquiry; the outcomes of the research will not be quantifiable. Thirdly, research has been conducted after the fact and is exposed to retrospective bias (Banks et al., 2021). Finally, the researcher can't remain truly objective throughout the research process.

To mitigate these limitations to a reasonable level, the quality control section of this report notes key steps that were taken. These steps included: the researcher implementing audit trails of each step of the data collection, preparation and analysis processes; aligning codes, categories and themes with literature; and triangulating data with field notes and observations. While these mitigations were implemented, the underlying limitations remain.

### **4.11 Research Ethics**

A study of leaders and their narrative stories, like any research involving human participants, raised the need for clear ethical considerations. To protect participants'

rights and confirm they were appropriately informed, the researcher obtain a signed informed consent letter from each participant.

At the start of each interview, the research purpose, nature, and procedures were explained to the participants. An explanation of the voluntary nature of the research was stressed, with confirmation of ensured confidentiality. All participants were informed that the interview was voluntary and that they could exit the study at any point in time, and any collected data would then be destroyed. Participants were informed that the data collected would only be used for research purposes and would remain confidential.

Data collected from the interviews, including recordings, transcripts and field notes, as well as data obtained for triangulation, is stored securely. The data is securely stored on a Google Drive Cloud Server, with field notes and other hard copies in a protected folder for ten years, per GIBS research requirements.

### **4.12 Conclusion**

This chapter has summarised the methodological approach that was taken in this study. A narrative study will help understand how ethical leaders develop over their lifetime.

## **5 Findings**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This research was undertaken to gain an understanding of the ethical leader development that occurs over the lifetime of chartered accountant business leaders. The results of the study are presented in narrative stories and a summary of the key themes that arose from the interviews and data search. The narrative flow sets out the leader's stories in chronological order. Each leader was assigned a pseudonym when narrating their ethical leadership development story.

### **5.2 Presentation of the results**

#### ***5.2.1 Participant 1 – Anthony***

Anthony is a white English-speaking male aged between 70 and 75. He is a man of tall stature with a gentle and warm nature. He was born and grew up in Johannesburg. His father's parents were of English and German descent. His mother's parents were Irish Catholics. Their home language was English. Anthony was the only boy of four children, with one older sister and two younger sisters. His mother was one of seven children, which resulted in a large extended family; this included 17 or 18 cousins on his mother's side. Anthony saw his home life as very simple and comfortable.

Anthony's father went to Jeppe High School, which he considered a very good disciplinary school. His father joined the South African Air Force after school as a pilot during the Second World War. He spent the next four years flying, including his final year moving equipment and people around Africa after the war ended. After the war, his father couldn't find a job as a pilot, so he joined Goldfields as a clerk in their ex-officer's program, which was intended to assist those who had returned from the war to catch up to their peers who had not served. Anthony's father progressed quickly, progressing into management and eventually to the role of Mine Secretary, a respected financial position. Throughout his life, Anthony relied on his father's guidance. Anthony's father was an orderly and disciplined person with a strong work ethic.

Anthony attributes his values to his strong Catholic upbringing and the large family structure. Anthony noted that he always felt accountable to many people. He said that there was an "expectation that you did things properly and you did the right thing". Anthony attended catechism every Monday throughout his school career. It was in this environment, with a large family, a focus on discipline, and his Catholic upbringing, that Anthony established his value system. Anthony believes there was a motivation to

always do the right thing, not because of the risk of punishment, but instead, there was a positive motivation to do so.

Anthony grew up in a small mining town on the East Rand of Johannesburg, where his father worked. He attended junior school and high school at the state schools in the area. Anthony described his school as having good discipline, although it had a perception of being “rough”. At school in a mining community, he was exposed to a cross-section of society, which he attributes to his ability to deal with anyone.

Anthony was a talented sportsman playing both team and individual sports, such as cricket, rugby, tennis and squash. Sport was important to him and his family, with his father playing inter-departmental cricket at the mine up to the age of 62. Anthony played squash provincially. Anthony continued playing sports through his time in military service and into his early career

Anthony describes the school environment as straightforward and honest regarding academic ability. Students were streamlined based on ability, with the A stream being those with university entrance marks, the B stream with non-university diploma level marks, and the C stream for those who are likely to become apprentices after standard 8. This structure motivated students to work hard to stay in the A stream class. Anthony noted the competitive edge needed to meet the standards to achieve this.

After finishing high school, Anthony was conscripted into the army for a year. Although he applied for the Air Force, he was not accepted and was put into the infantry. Anthony found this a good experience. He was able to continue playing sports during the army, which made his time there easier. It was his time in the army that he values as having taught him discipline and structure, and it was his time in the military that motivated him to work harder at university.

Anthony went on to do a Bachelor of Commerce at a university in Johannesburg. Being away from home, Anthony stayed at an on-site residence during university. At the beginning of this time there he underwent a humorous and fun initiation process, which resulted in him getting to know all the other students in the residences, and fostered a strong community feeling, which made his next three years much better. Anthony considers his university time as one of his favourite times in his life.

Anthony joined an international accounting firm for his articles. He was able to get into the firm because of his father’s connections at the mine. Interestingly, Anthony considered his placement at the accounting firm “pure, solid, honest, nepotism”. Articles meant days of long hours of work and lectures in the evenings. It was a tough time in his life, but a positive experience. At the time, he was living in Hillbrow, where Anthony

continued playing racquet sports at the local club and spending time after work socialising. Lectures in the evenings were in preparation for board exams, which Anthony was able to pass. Anthony qualified and registered as a chartered accountant in 1978.

During his articles, Anthony had exposure to several different industries and clients, from mines to retail fast-moving consumer goods. During this time, on one engagement, his co-worker identified errors on a particular site, to which he recommended follow-up procedures. The outcome of these procedures also corroborated the errors. At this point, he communicated with the partner, as his manager was on leave. Anthony was impressed with the manner in which the partner handled the confrontation, directly and honestly. Anthony looked up to these partners.

When Anthony came to the completion of his articles, he had discussions with the partners about his future in the firm. Although he enjoyed auditing, he aspired to do the work and not just check the work. He decided to leave the audit firm on good terms and pursue a career in industry. It was one of the partners who then assisted Anthony in obtaining his first post-articles job at a large American carbonated beverages company.

At the new company, Anthony observed that structure through quarterly reporting and three and five-year budgets was a key oversight function within the entity. The company worked through forced orderliness, structures, systems, and procedures. While not explicit in its ethics at a group level, it was implicit that truth and honesty were key and that, in financial reporting, there was no place to hide.

Anthony initially joined the finance department and had progressed to the financial director of the South African entity when the company decided to pull out of South Africa in 1986 due to apartheid. The company was sold to another South African beverages company, which was also publicly listed. Anthony observed that the new group financial director had a religious background, as a deacon in the Anglican church, and the ethics and values were clear through his leadership.

Anthony stayed within the group of companies, moving from financial director to chief executive officer. Anthony led the South African Subsidiary from 1993 to 1999. This was a particularly strong period of growth, with South Africa having emerged from Apartheid with substantial foreign capital flowing into the country. Anthony's time at the company saw him lead one of the company's European subsidiaries, Poland, as well as a leading role in consolidating and improving the South American subsidiaries, as well as heading up various audit committees.

At the age of 55, Anthony decided to take early retirement, despite being at the height of his earning capacity. He had just gotten tired of the corporate world, which he perceived

as getting busier. His plan was by no means to stop working. Anthony had already bought a farm and had other investments that he needed to manage. He now has two farms, on two different continents, which he runs with his two sons.

### **5.2.2 Participant 2 – Brenda**

Brenda is a black female aged between 50 and 55. She was the second daughter of five sisters, born to academic parents. Brenda believes having no brothers was an important part of her story. For both of her parents, education was seen as a key tool to break the poverty cycle, as both were the first generation of graduates in their families. Her parents took the role of encouraging and supporting education across the broader family, even supporting cousins' education.

Brenda's upbringing was strict, with both her parents being disciplinarians. There was a household mantra of "you did things the right way". Without having any brothers, Brenda and her sisters often did "boy things" with her father, which she attributes to having given her confidence and prevented her from seeing gender as any limitation. Brenda recalls that growing up, she and her sisters were in the minority of girls who had bicycles, and they often played with the boys with bicycles.

His father was both an academic and an author who provided a profound example of work ethic for Brenda. She recalls him waking up at 3:00 AM, even in the dead of winter, to work or write. The children were encouraged to work hard and were limited to the amount of time spent watching TV or lazing around during school holidays, but were instead encouraged to read books, often doing so sitting in her father's office. Brenda applies this work ethic herself, often waking up at 3:00 AM to study or focus on large work projects.

Brenda's mother was a strong woman who, despite cultural structures, "always had a say in how things [got] done". Her mother provided direction and leadership in the family. When Brenda's father passed away in her early 20s, her mother took the role of leader in the family, which also reinforced Brenda's perception of the strength of women.

Brenda's Dr. influenced her school career. From an early age, Brenda already showed an inclination towards education, indicative of the influence of her family. At about four years old, when moving on to the next school year, Brenda refused to go back to preschool and demanded to go to Grade 1. In a compromise, her parents intended to make her repeat Grade 1; however, this never happened, showing her capability.

At the end of grade 2, her father received an opportunity to move to the new city of Mahikeng for a role at the University of Bophuthatswana. For this opportunity, the family

moved at the end of her Grade 2 year. At the time, Mahikeng was in a growth phase, attracting skilled and educated people such as doctors, teachers, and businesspeople. It was a multiracial environment which, over the years of her schooling, gave Brenda exposure to many different people in a politically sheltered environment. She attributes her desire to become a businesswoman to observing those around her, including parents of her friends, in Mahikeng who were businesspersons.

Brenda, who had been educated in her home language for Grades 1 and 2, was forced to repeat Grade 2, as her new school was English. Going into Grade 3, Brenda became aware of other students joining the school who were allowed to do an assessment as to whether they needed to repeat Grade 3 or whether they could progress onto Grade 4 immediately. Brenda of her own accord went and spoke to the principal, who she noted was an intimidating old woman, and she argued for the right to do the assessment herself. Brenda thought it was very unfair that other students were given the opportunity, and she was not. The principal gave in to the demands of young Brenda and allowed her to write the assessment. Brenda informed her mother of this agreement with the principal. She successfully passed the assessment and progressed straight to Grade 4 from her second round of Grade 2.

Continuing through school, Brenda participated in sports such as netball and swimming as well as other extracurricular activities like dancing. While she was on the teams, she did not consider herself to have been the best at any of these. Brenda did not take up any formal leadership positions in school. She did develop a small but strong group of friends but does not consider herself the ringleader or the “main lead” within her friendship group. It is around these people that she realised that she dislikes “yes people” and is instead attracted to friends who have strong personalities and independent thought. Qualities she would look for in followers going forward throughout her career.

Brenda attended the University of Port Elisabeth to be “as far away from home as possible” and to be by the sea. She studied a Bachelor of Commerce, in line with her aspirations to become a businesswoman; however, Brenda does acknowledge she enjoyed her first year a bit too much and had to repeat. That allowed her to align with her age group. Lectures were held in Afrikaans, which was a barrier, but she was able to overcome this using the English textbooks, and she was able to be examined in English.

Her university experience was a cultural shock, with her joining in the twilight years of the apartheid regime; it was the first time she fully experienced segregation and racial discrimination. Having been raised in the more multicultural Mahikeng, Port Elizabeth was a shock. *“I got a bit of a shock when I got to UPE. And you know when it was like*

*white people one side black people that side. And there was a bit of racism still being practised. So it was a bit of a shocker to my system.” – (Brenda)*

During her time at university, she was invited to a leadership camp. She was surprised as she had not applied and was unaware of the camp. Being one who does not miss opportunities, Brenda decided to attend the camp. When she arrived, she was the only commerce student and the only black student. Brenda did not respond negatively; she saw it as an opportunity and found the camp a “good learning point”.

Having completed her qualification at university, Brenda took up her first Job at Sanlam in Cape Town, fulfilling the requirements of a bursary. She spent the two years required by her contract. It was not a positive experience due to the conservative “Afrikaans” culture. Her next role was with BP, which she found much more enjoyable, with a more relaxed “English” culture. It was here that Brenda encountered a frustrated colleague, who was overlooked for a promotion because a younger Chartered Accountant was given the role. The colleague expressed frustration because they did not have the required qualification. It was at this point that Brenda decided that she would not be held back by a “glass ceiling” and to further her career to become a CA. Again, Brenda responded positively and with the intent of overcoming a barrier to her career.

Around this time, Brenda got married. Brenda returned to Port Elizabeth and began working at one of the Big Four accounting firms there, whilst completing her CA studies part-time. Being aware of the value of being surrounded by those in practice, Brenda deliberately stayed at the firm until she had completed her board exams. Brenda qualified and registered as a chartered accountant in 2003. During her 4 years at the firm, Brenda got exposure to a broad range of clients, from financial institutions to mining operations.

After completing her articles, Brenda joined the local Water board as a divisional financial director. She managed the Finance, HR, IT and procurement teams. The CEO at the time took a chance on Brenda and supported her through the new leadership role. Brenda admired him, how he managed himself in meetings with government officials and municipalities, she “saw how he carried himself, never flinching on what is right and would never set a foot wrong. I mean, never.” Her time at Amatola was also her first formal leadership position, which came with the anxiety of a new role; however, with time, she settled into the formal role, and after sharing and getting buy-in to her vision, she was able to settle those anxieties.

From Amatola Water, Brenda then continued to De Beers, where she landed a job for both herself and her husband, a medical doctor, who was looking to move out of private practice. Brenda joined as a member of the mine’s executive, where she was the only

female on the team. Despite being the only female, she never changed her character to fit in.

While on a mine visit, she witnessed another exco member calling out underground team members in a derogatory manner because they had not cleaned the work area. When back at the office, Brenda confronted her exco peer to point out the unacceptable manner of the interaction, while acknowledging the workers had not been correct, she was not happy with the way they were spoken to. Later, when Brenda had decided to leave the company, that exco team member acknowledged that interaction with praise.

It was here that Brenda had a career discussion with her boss about her career progression through the mine into different financial director roles. Brenda, however, had a different idea for her career plan; she was not interested in Financial Director roles, “that’s not what I want to do... I want to run a mine.” This was the inspiration to move on to the next phase of her journey, and the catalyst to move away from “becoming a specialist in the accounting field” was her decision to complete an MBA.

Brenda completed her MBA in 2007. After several roles, including at SAICA and a CFO role at a logistics company, Brenda took on her role as a director at an investment holding company, with the progression to Chief Executive Officer after a year. It is in this role that Brenda was able to move a small BBE investment vehicle into an influential business partner.

Over her 14 years at the helm of the company, Brenda built an effective team to manage the growth of the business, which expanded by 4 times during her tenure. It was here that Brenda also broadened the focus of the business away from exclusively chasing the highest return, but to look for investments where the firm could be a legitimate strategic partner. She intended to move the value of the firm away from being just a BBE firm. The firm focused on investments where they were able to add strategic value, which also gave Brenda access to other major firms in South Africa.

Brenda has been an independent executive on several listed boards, including two separate banks, once as a representative of the investment firm and her more recent appointment as an experienced non-executive to another bank. Brenda has held other independent non-executive roles, a path she now pursues in her personal capacity.

Brenda has resigned from her CEO position and has moved into the next stage of her career, where she is focusing on further personal and business growth. She is planning to register for a doctoral program at GIBS, having recently completed her third qualification there, the most recent being a high diploma in research. She is also expanding her horizons into public speaking, taking up guest speaker roles as an

experienced executive, and she recently purchased a restaurant franchise. Brenda is at the height of her career, having set the foundation, and she has begun to build her legacy.

### **5.2.3 Participant 3 – Christian**

Christian is a White Afrikaans-speaking male aged between 50 and 55. He is the chief executive officer of the largest property investment company with a primary listing in South Africa.

Christian was born in and raised in Port Shepstone, on the southern KwaZulu-Natal coast. He is one of two children. His parents both chose careers of service, with his father an Afrikaans teacher and his mother a nurse. The family was very religious, with Christian attending Sunday school during his youth. This set a very high ethical standard. Christian grew up as an “Afrikaans kid in an English neighbourhood”, which taught him to learn to cooperate.

Christian looks back on his childhood and reflects that his parents kept him sheltered from the South African context in which he grew up. His family environment was sheltered and stable, with good relationships with both his parents. Christian is a large, natural people person who draws energy from those around him.

Christian joined school a year early in Port Shepstone. He attended an Afrikaans junior school but then proceeded to an English High school. Academically, Christian was always in the “top half of the draw”, although he “was not the smartest kid in school”, which gave him access to the best teachers and a good education. Christian was not the biggest in school and needed to learn early to negotiate, although he did learn not to avoid necessary conflict.

Christian thoroughly enjoyed sports at school. He was very competitive, playing rugby and swimming seriously in school. This early competition and his ability to perform led Christian to captain his sports teams and early school leadership roles. Christian was a prefect in junior school and in high school. He captained his school sports clubs and was a prefect. During sports and other social activities in school, Christian learnt about leadership, he learn to work with people, how to get buy-in from the team and how to motivate his team members. Christian to this day is very active, exercising more than five times a week on average.

Christian was awarded a Rotary Society exchange to Australia after finishing matric. He travelled to Australia, north of Brisbane, where he learnt independence. He found it to be a wonderful learning experience, which also gave him an outside perspective on the South African political climate. He participated in sports and even organised sporting and

social events while on the exchange. Returning from his Rotary Exchange, Christian, Christian decided to study Marketing and Sales.

Christian attended the University of Johannesburg, then the Rand Afrikaans University, staying on campus in Residence. He joined the house committee of his residence and gained further leadership exposure, including formal and informal training. He refers to this period, as well as his earlier sports, academic and social experience, as “little building blocks” toward developing leadership skills. Particularly, he attributes this time to reinforcing his natural inclination to lead, making him “not uncomfortable to take the lead” in these group settings.

It was also at this time that Christian’s entrepreneurial spirit emerged. Each year, during the first week of the academic year, university students take part in RAG (Remember and Give) week social and charity events. During this time, students often undergo initiation and generally assume “uniforms” which in South Africa are often overalls. Christian undertook buying Overalls in bulk to sell to students during RAG week. He was able to earn enough to pay his university tuition and residence fees. He even expanded the enterprise to sell to his sister’s university. Christian says that selling is one of his talents.

In his third year, Christian was a representative of the university during an international conference held at the University. The conference was held in the context of South Africa’s changing political landscape. Delegates were invited from around the world, including different foundations, the US and other governments, as well as representatives of both the ANC and NP. Christian gained exposure to high-calibre individuals and further expanded his horizons, which helped him develop confidence in speaking to large groups, further building blocks in his leadership development. Immediately after the conference, Christian was selected as a representative of the university for an international seminar in Taipei.

Having represented the university at major events and completing his degree, Christian was required to complete his military service. He was part of the second-to-last cohort to be conscripted. He managed, through a family friend connection, to have his post be in Pretoria, not Kimberly, where it was originally planned. During his time, he became a medic and was promoted to a Lieutenant. Although not a high rank, for Christian, it was “better than being a trooper”. During his service time, he also enrolled in a second-year accounting course to minimise the time spent there; however, this would later prove valuable when committing to becoming a chartered accountant.

## Ethical Leader Development

Christian's first job was in the marketing department of Eskom, where he worked for 3 years. His role was a Business Analyst, which built a further skill set in understanding systems and processes. Christian considers this another valuable skill set. The catalyst for Christian to leave was not being considered for a leadership position, due to a "profile thing". This led Christian to move on to Investec, where he started out as a private banker and then private client team manager. It was during this time that Christian learned a lot about personal finance, tax structuring and real estate. He started to feel that the role was focused on retail, and he had more of an interest in corporate wholesale.

It was around this time that Christian also decided to return to studying and become a Chartered Accountant, as he had been weighing up doing studying to be a CA or studying an MBA. He started his bridging certificate and completed his CTA, while signing up for a new SAICA programme at Investec, for training outside of public practice. In the bank, he was able to leverage experience gained in his role as a manager and then did short rotations through internal audit and some finance departments to sign off on his training contract. He completed his board exams, qualifying and registering as a Chartered Accountant in 2003.

Having completed the requirement in 2002, he moved into the corporate finance and deal-making side of the bank. Here, he was involved in business building, taking over companies and managing funds. He took up the role as a fund manager of one of the bank's industrial funds, effectively taking ownership of the fund. Christian and his colleague executed a management buy-in to take the fund to being internally managed and assumed the role of an executive. From here, they executed multiple transactions to make the company the largest in the country.

The business continued executing large transactions, both locally and internationally. The company was one of the first to convert, in line with international norms, into a Real Estate Investment Trust. Christian holds the chairmanship of the industry organisation promoting these types of funds. Christian took over as the CEO of the local business in 2017. With this significant growth phase taking place through turbulent years in South Africa's political landscape, it has had material negative consequences on the economy, with organic growth difficult to achieve.

Coming into 2020, there were signs of turbulent times ahead, with the COVID-19 pandemic emerging in the east and spreading rapidly. Christian was personally called by an executive of one of the banks to warn him of the impending shutdowns and economic fallout that was likely. He immediately pulled his contacts together, leveraging his position in industry bodies, to establish a property industry group and establish a unified front in

response to the consequences of the Pandemic and lockdowns. It was this group that he led that negotiated with banks, bond markets, retailers, and the government to mitigate the fall out that the Property industry was likely to face – being generally a lower risk category, a major economic disruption was likely to lead to major litigation and financial leakages.

The colleague Christian worked with to separate out the business has been the group CEO of the company. Christian has been named to replace him as group CEO. He has been a role model and older brother figure to Christian during their time together. His ethical foundation and approach to business have been instrumental in setting the cultural foundation that he and Christian have set for the organisation. In the organisation, they focus on honesty and curiosity, with ethical behaviour being paramount on a foundation of “old values”. The company takes an innovative approach, allowing for mistakes and learning; however, they have a zero tolerance for unethical behaviour. This is a tone that is clearly set from the top.

“[I]f you've agreed a deal, just do it, it doesn't matter how bad it is, obviously you can negotiate, but I mean, the bottom line is, is we, we still work on those old values.” - (Christian)

Christian is married and has two children. His wife, Candy, has been very supportive of his career, having sold her training and recruitment business to give him the space to focus on his incredibly demanding Job. The two children are out of school, one completing university and the other about to start. They, too, have a positive impact on Christian.

### **5.2.4 Participant 4 – Dawie**

Dawie is a White Afrikaans-speaking male aged between 45 and 50. Dawie is the youngest of seven children, with a large age gap between him and his siblings. In stature, he is of a large build and has red hair. Dawie has ADHD, making him very energetic with a short attention span. Although not destitute, he had a tough upbringing.

He suffered early family trauma with the loss of his mother at the age of six. This left young Dawie in an “orphan-type of state” with him moving in with his sister and brother-in-law from the time of his mother's death until he started high school. Growing up within this dynamic, Dawie felt largely left on his own, and he believes it was part of the reason he learnt how to fight for himself. In response, Dawie developed a proactive tendency, becoming a doer and an organizer.

Dawie's brother-in-law, the father figure in the household, was a twin, with both men being role models to Dawie growing up and throughout his life. The twin brother is a qualified chartered accountant, and in hindsight, this too was an influence on Dawie to follow the career path. Both men were role models whom Dawie had observed he "always did things well" and he "always had a good job", both things Dawie looked up to and respected. His Sister, a teacher by profession, was, by contrast, more strict, treating him like a child. Dawie learnt the value of family with his sister and her husband treating him as "one of their own children" alongside their two children. He is grateful to have had a "borrowed" home.

Going into high school, Dawie returned to his father's home. Dawie had not spent much time with his father up until then, and it felt like his father and his new wife did not really know how to deal with him. He was given freedom and left to his own devices on condition that his schoolwork remained at a high standard and that he didn't need bailing out. During school, Dawie was a rugby player and played sports, gaining a love for sports that persists to this day, with many of Dawie's role models being sportspeople in different disciplines.

Dawie was a self-proclaimed "very naughty child", often getting into fights and arguments, which he partly blames on his hair and feisty temperament. In school, he was a socialite and organiser, engaging in underage drinking and partying, demonstrating an early ability "to make those types of things happen". His approach, however, was measured by academic performance, gaining him favour to mitigate the risk of getting expelled. Although Dawie "got a hiding almost every day of [his] life at school", he learnt the value of loyalty to friends, even taking punishments for them.

From very early on in his life, Dawie began working and asserts that he has continued every day since. From the age of 12, he would find any job, including spending weekend nights at driving ranges or racecourses. From age 13, he spent every holiday at the distillers packing bottles, boxes and trucks. Dawie's early entry into the working world was driven by the desire not to be reliant on anybody and needing "[his] own money in [his] pockets" to pay for any of his needs. This is an early example of his drive and work ethic.

Entering Grade 10, Dawie did not know what he wanted to do after school. So pragmatically, he took the daily newspaper and looked at the workplace classifieds section. He was looking for what had the most demand and paid the most money, and being good with numbers, he decided then to become a chartered accountant. Although his teachers were not convinced, laughing when he said he wanted to become a CA, he

selected the appropriate subjects and worked his hardest to get the best possible points for that career.

In 1992, Dawie registered to attend Rand Afrikaans University to study towards his Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting and Business Management, to meet the requirements to become a CA. During his studies, he continued to work despite being registered as a full-time student. In his honours year, Dawie was able to be a “Full-time-part-time” student, taking advantage by attending lectures in the evenings with Wits Students at the UJ campus, which was moved there in response to political tensions. Dawie was able to work full-time and attend these evening lectures, which also included shared notes and transparencies that the RAU students did not receive.

During his university time, he often worked for a blind businessman based in Hillbrow. Dawie gained an understanding of the value of procedure, persistence and innovation while working for him. Being blind, he ordered only R10 notes, because he could still count the notes to pay staff while still having control, despite his visual impairment. This procedural insight, Dawie would refer to as key to gaining control of a larger business later in life. In terms of persistence, his employer was operating as a lawyer and running multiple other businesses despite his blindness, showing Dawie that there was no excuse not to perform. Finally, his innovation was through gaining business with fliers; however, unlike anyone else giving out fliers, they used a catch phrase of “going bananas” with the fliers attached to physical bananas when being handed out. Dawie recalls his tenacity and the lessons he learnt at this time fondly.

Dawie completed his university studies and joined one of the Big Four accounting firms for his articles. He completed his articles, passed his board exams and registered as a chartered accountant in 1999. Dawie spent 8 years at the firm working on a wide variety of clients. One of his clients was a travel company. Through encouragement from the then CEO, he interviewed for a role at the company, despite working for a travel company not being in his life goals.

His first day at the company was a Saturday, and within a few years, he was to make the improvements required. However, he bargained with his boss that the finance role was short-term, as his objective was to move out of finance into a more operational role. The CEO created a new role for him. He emphasised that one needs to make their outcome materialise and not wait for others to do what they want done.

From there, Dawie moved within the business according to the needs of the business, but also to further his goals. He was sent to run the coastal region of the business. Then, within 12 months of moving with his family to Cape Town, he was asked to return to

Johannesburg to create and lead the head office finance function. Around this time, Dawie assisted in the business's delisting as a private consortium took over the business. In 2009, he applied for and was offered the CEO position of the business travel services division. The role he currently holds. He is one of the five divisional executives within the business. He has been part of the driving force that increased the business's headcount over 10x and the revenues over 80x, with his division being the largest player in the market.

Dawie attributes much of his success to his “dogmatic go and get it, make it happen” style. He maintains positive relations with his people, with an open-door policy and a focus on the important things in the office. He has created a work-hard but have fun culture, which has helped him effectively integrate his work and life – he does not believe in work-life balance. To maintain stability, he also engages in physical activities like golf and does daily meditation. When it comes to Dawie's children, he has taken a very different approach from the way he was raised. His children understand the clear boundaries he has set, which he has put in place in response to his mischievous youth.

### ***5.2.5 Participant 5 – Edward***

Edward is an Indian male aged between 70 and 75. He is a warm and humble person who displays a more introverted, quiet confidence, which is corroborated by instances in his story. He comes across as contemplative and collaborative. Edward is an early riser, waking up around 3 am. He practices Yoga and meditation every day to help ground himself. This helps him give of his best each day and to keep a “calm mind” in a complex world.

He was born and raised in South Africa, though his parents are first-generation immigrants from India. Edward's parents immigrated from India because of social injustices there. His parents had moved to South Africa for better opportunities. Both his parents were strong Gandhian believers, meaning he grew up with a strong influence of the Satyagraha, or passive resistance movement. From his parents, he was taught fundamental ethical rules such as standing your ground, being ethical, doing no harm, and caring for those around you.

Edward is one of five children, with the family having three elder boys and two younger sisters. Because of health reasons and family commitment, his father and mother were often not around, returning to India, which left Edward and his younger siblings to be raised by his brother, who was six years older than him.

Edward classified his life as having two distinct parts, one before the abolition of apartheid and one after. Throughout his story, there is a clear difference between how

he experienced these two parts. Early on in his life, at the age of one, his family was forcibly removed from their home in Sophia Town because of the implementation of new apartheid laws. The family moved to Fordsburg, where for the rest of his childhood, he was exposed to and interacted with prominent apartheid activists. Edward grew up in a diverse environment, exposed to various religions, being Hindu himself, going to mosque with his Muslim friends, and having Christian family members and family friends. Edward grew up in a community of tolerance and togetherness. It is not surprising then that Fordsburg was an area where one grew up in an environment of political awareness

Having moved into Fordsburg, Edward attended the local Indian primary school there. While there, Edward recalls the trauma of having the principal at the time removed from the school because he was white. This was another early example of the absurdity of the laws from young Edward at the time. Edward recalls this as something that “kind of hurts you still now”, remembering the principal bought everyone in the school a small pastry as a parting gift.

Moving into high school, Edward had to commute to Lenasia, 35km away from home, because that was the location of the only Indian high school. This daily commute meant Edward could not engage in extracurricular activities. Growing up, he was required to do his share of family chores when he returned each day after 3:30. Edward does recall playing sports in the neighbourhood streets with friends on weekends at the time. Edward’s academics progressed well with the support of the “very, very good” teachers at his school who were “passionate about what they were doing”.

Having completed high school, Edward decided to attend university to complete his Bachelor of Commerce. Despite there being two institutions almost within walking distance of home, he had to attend university in KZN, at the University of Durban-Westville campus. Here, Edward was again exposed to individuals who would go on to become prominent struggle icons and members of government in future. After completing his undergraduate studies, Edward tried again to register at WITS University but was still unable to study at an institution close to home for his honours qualification, so he did so with the University of South Africa.

Having completed his studies, Edward applied to many companies. From certain companies, he was explicitly told that they “don’t have employment for black people here.” Eventually, Edward joined a firm that would merge into one of the Big Four accounting firms, where he was the first person of colour the firm employed. He joined the firm in 1976.

## Ethical Leader Development

The environment at the time was very hostile, with the 1976 Soweto uprising happening within months of his joining date. It was during this time, Edward recalls being in offices in Johannesburg CBD, overlooking what would later become Gandhi Square, but at the time was a military base, and seeing the activity in response to the uprising. He recalls with pain seeing the “army of Saracens” pouring out and heading South towards Soweto. His feeling was compounded by the understanding that, as this was at the time of military conscription, his peers would or had served in the military. This was the environment he found himself in when working.

Edward’s managers would have to ask clients permission to allow him to join audit engagements. On engagements in some more conservative areas like Boksburg, he had to make requests through junior team members. Despite this, Edward endured, working diligently, doing his best and proving himself. On one engagement, he had an interesting interaction with a rude Afrikaans client. He had been sent and was working at the client’s premises; his manager was not on site at the time when the client, a senior person in the company, needed urgent assistance with a document for court. After back and forth, Edward’s manager could not come on time, and he was told to assist the client. The client was “quite rude” in the interaction, but Edward “kept his cool”, focusing on the task at hand. Edward diligently read through the entire document, despite the pressure, and assisted the client in finalising the process. A few days later, Edward was called into the client’s office, expecting the worst, he was politely offered tea. The client told him he was “a little different” to what he had been told about persons of colour growing up. He concluded simply that Edward “must work hard” and later told the engagement partner that he was “a good kid”.

Having completed his articles and having passed his board exams on his first attempt, Edward qualified and registered as a chartered accountant in 1979. Edward stayed at the audit firm, where he met and worked with several individuals, like the partner on the engagement in Boksburg, whom he would learn from and maintain close relationships with for the rest of his life. One Senior partner, Edward, noted as “tough as nails” yet “upright” and ethical, was an ethical role model for Edward.

Edward progressed through the ranks at the audit firm, first becoming a technical accounting partner. These roles included a time as the Human Capital portfolio of the firm when the company underwent a merger, which formed the business as it is today. However, with this new HC role, Edward requested that it be in addition to his current role as the technical head. His love for the technical also gained him exposure in the professional body, and he headed up the team that harmonised the South African standards for both accounting and audit with the international standards. The team,

which included a professor from the university he had not been able to attend earlier in his life, was able to compare the Local and international standards, and make recommendations for changes to the international standards where the South African standards were superior. Edward felt a real sense of pride when, in 2005, South Africa adopted the international standards; he considered it one of his “biggest win[s]”.

Edward assumed leadership roles both within the firm, eventually taking up the mantle of CEO of the South African business and merging all the African firms, where his predecessors had not managed, which landed him the CEO of the African firm as a whole. Edward also took up leadership roles in the professional body, as well as leadership positions on the international standard body. He has and still holds several board of director roles, including chairmanships, and recently spent time chairing the oversight committee for an international agency, which made a deep impact on the world during the pandemic. Edward has held many other leadership positions.

Edward and his wife have 4 children, all of whom are chartered accountants. All of whom he is proud of for each of their contributions and progress. They work in different firms, but all have an interest in sustainability and contribute to the greater good.

Edward is “starting to slow down” and focus more on the Philanthropic side. Edward is a trustee on several leadership and developmental organisations and to date has mentored over 50 people through formal leader development programs. The final task in the program is to summit a mountain. He likens leading a team on a mountain to leading a team in the board room, as it requires care, teamwork, excellence and leadership.

Edward reflected on his life story, and he believes the most critical factor is the values acquired from family, peers and the environment. He claimed that when it comes to ethical behaviour, poverty is “no excuse for anything”. He values family, culture and education as key to development. And was appreciative of key role models in his formative years. His advice to aspiring leaders is to “Grow People. Develop People” and to make sure an aspiring leader is passionate about their work. Despite the difficulties of his past, he does not hold grudges or hatred against anyone. His final piece of advice was that leadership is less about being the best and more about caring for others.

### **5.2.6 Participant 6 – Frank**

Frank is an Indian male aged between 50 and 55. Frank is a calm and friendly gentleman with a warm demeanour. Frank came from very humble beginnings; he is the only child of his two hardworking parents. He was born and raised in Lenasia, south of Johannesburg. Both of his parents worked exceptionally hard; his mother worked seven days a week in a cafe, while his father worked six days a week. Very early on in his life,

Frank gained the appreciation that there's no substitute for hard work, and he focused his competitiveness against himself to continuously improve.

Frank did not have a very lavish lifestyle. Frank was raised a Hindu with his parents always on the straight and narrow, avoiding flashy things or keeping up with the Joneses. As a child, Frank did not understand the value of money, and because he was aware of the family situation, he wasn't a very demanding child. He was always taught to tell the truth and not to lie, and that he should aspire to do everything above board.

For Frank's school time was mostly about sport, and he didn't really concentrate on academics. He participated in the Soccer League from under 8 all the way through to grade 11. Frank attributes his ability to deal with failure to the different team sports he played. He believes this helped him build character and learn sportsmanship. He learnt that winning fairly was more important than winning and never to cheat.

In school, Frank always found himself in a "very mischievous crowd". He reflects on that time, when mischief was tolerated when he was young, pondering that the stakes are often high later in life, and school is the right time to get that out of one's system. Playing club soccer, Frank found himself exposed to different groups of people, including some teammates who were part of the wrong crowd. Through these teammates, Frank was exposed to drinking, drugs and smoking; however, Frank stayed away from these vices because of his strict parents and this fear of the consequences. In hindsight, this exposure made him "street smart" and helped him understand his surroundings.

Going into grade 11, Frank's academics were not very good. Around this time, he realised that his affluent cousins and friends had the fallback of family wealth. Frank had nothing to fall back on. Around this time, his father had a serious health scare, which he came through. With his father's health scare and the realisation that he had no safety net, Frank marked grade 11 as a turning point, committing to his studies. He and one of his school friends, who also had been labelled mischievous, worked together, leveraging their shared natural talent for accounting and mathematics. They were both able to get provisional acceptance to WITS with their Grade 11 marks and supported that with their final matric marks.

Going into university, Frank quickly realised that it was at a different level to school, when, after six months, he was failing accounts one. This was another turning point for Frank, and he knew that with no safety net, the blame would be entirely on him if he failed. This built resilience, and from this point he applied his parents' lessons of hard work, openness and honesty. Frank was able to overcome this initial mishap and managed to

pass his first year. From his second year onwards, he was aware of the level and managed to find a balance with his studies from then on.

During university holidays, Frank was fortunate enough to get into one of the Big Four accounting firms' vacation student programs. During his second and third years, Frank would work during the June and December holidays, gaining real-world experience that helped him integrate the theory of his studies with practical implementation at work. Frank also used this time to observe the senior managers and other staff, to see what the CA qualification could provide, which further motivated him.

Having finished his university degree, Frank joined one of the Big Four accounting firms for his articles. Completing his honours part-time while working. Frank qualified and registered as a chartered accountant in 2001. He worked for the firm for a further two years. At this time, he was able to build strong relationships and connect with his first work mentor, a manager. Having completed his time at the audit firm and having acquired his professional designation, Frank decided to move from practice into industry. Frank joined one of the largest banks in South Africa.

Frank headed up the finance department of the home loans business. He gained an understanding of how a bank works, especially during the 2008 financial crisis. Over the next 20 years of his career, Frank went on to head up the finance departments in a local hedge fund, then returned to the bank to head up the finance function for one of its divisions. Finally, Frank joined a competitor, heading up the finance function for the entire banking division.

Frank has two children, who are his motivation to succeed. He marks the birth of his son as a “massive” realisation, that his life was more serious and he needed to continue working hard. Although he still looks after his mother, with the children, he realised they are 100% reliant on you. He found this also a clear ethical motivator; he tests his action on the basis of his perceptions of himself as father and role model: “If I got caught, and my kids had to look at me, what would I tell them?”

Frank also came to realise that in his career, his roles would provide him with information that was valuable and could be used as a powerful tool to progress at the expense of others. He released this after a peer used information against him, not prewarning him that they would raise concerns before a meeting with the CEO. When the opportunity arose that he had information on that peer later, he decided against only raising it in a meeting with their CEO, but instead he raised the matter privately and provided the peer the opportunity to prepare for the information that needed to be raised. It was the guidance of his mentor, his manager from articles, that assisted him in understanding his

own approach in this situation. The advice was that, although this approach may be perceived as a “limit” or to “slow” his career progression, as he chose not to one-up his peer, ultimately, the “good leaders will see what you’re doing”. Frank stayed true to his values.

He puts forward this example as one of the many decisions he has discussed with his mentors. He asserts that you cannot navigate the corporate world alone. Although he has always made his own decisions, when he hit “troughs” in his career, he would always reach out to his “go-to person” for advice. That relationship is always based on 100% honesty, so they have the full story. Frank also raised that having different mentors for different circumstances was important too. This gave him a breadth of opinions and advice to consider when making decisions.

### **5.2.7 Participant 7 – Grant**

Grant is a White male aged between 75 and 80. He has retired from Johannesburg, where he was born and lived most of his adult life, and now lives in the Western Cape, where he lives with his wife. He is a firm and structured person with a dry sense of humour. He was originally born in “the sticks” and then moved to Boksburg for better opportunities for his parents. He is of Croatian descent. Grant was raised as a catholic and is still practising today. He is the father of three children.

Grant attended Christian Brother College, Boksburg, for his entire school career. It was a private school, which his father “battled to pay the fees”, and he realised that he was not one of the richest in the class. He was aware quite young that his peers had more than him, which “instilled in [him] a need to be financially acceptable... to be okay”. Grant considered himself average academically. He also participated in sports at school, but did not take up any formal leadership roles at school.

Having completed school, Grant completed his year of military service. He was conscripted into the Navy. His time in the Navy was sobering. It was an environment where intellect was secondary to following orders. It was an environment where people with “half your intellect [were] telling you you’re a fool”. He would use it as motivation to work and make something of himself later in his career.

Having completed his conscription, Grant needed to decide on his career. His father had suggested possibly become a draftsman because of his tidy and ordered nature, but “he didn’t know of any millionaires in that field.” So, considering wages at the time, he decided to become an article clerk. He then used the local newspaper to go through adverts looking for the biggest advert, as they were clearly in need of staff.

Grant interviewed on Tuesday and joined a local audit firm in Boksburg on Thursday. That Saturday, he was taken by the partner to Wits to register for his undergrad accounting course. In the meantime, he completed a three-week bookkeeping course from the Transvaal Society of Accountants, which taught him basic accounting and auditing. One of the key messages he received was how society's motto, "integritas", was drilled into course takers and within the profession. During his time, Grant saw little that made him question the integrity of the profession. Where he did see something questionable, it left a "big impression" on him.

While working full-time, Grant studied part-time five nights a week, including Saturday mornings. This was brutal, meaning he had no time to do anything besides work and study. He did not have the time or money to continue playing sports after school until much later in his life, when he took up golfing again. Having completed his articles and finished his studies, Grant qualified and registered as a chartered accountant in 1974.

Soon after completing his articles and registering as a CA, Grant was exposed to several peers with MBAs, including his "best buddy". Grant knew this was the next step for his career, and he decided to register for an MBA at the University of Cape Town, where he learnt that "chartered accountants [did not] know everything". He was exposed to a broad array of businesspeople, including those who had studied fine arts, law and the sciences, which gave him a "different view on things". Grant recalls the course's difficulty and his handing in his final submission and returning to Johannesburg. He did manage to pass.

He joined an informal debt collection company after completing his MBA, where he stayed for two years. Grant realised the role was not ideal and left when an opportunity was presented by a recruiter. Although it was not ideal for a chartered accountant with career aspirations, he moved to a large pharmaceuticals business, where he was in the credit division that assisted pharmacists in buying pharmacies. He, however, joined just as the company was going through a time of turmoil because of the recently fired executives, unethical dealings. He was sorting out problems. However, with the imminent retirement of the FD, there was the possibility of progress. 18 months before the incumbent FD's retirement, he met with the CEO and was offered the role upon the departure of the FD. He accepted. In this role, Grant built strong relationships with the CEO and chairman. The CEO was a mentor who demanded that you "[do] things properly" or you would face serious consequences.

For the next few years, Grant assisted the company through a successful period. However, by 1993, a corporate restructuring happened with the company's owners pulling two major divisions together. Grant was strategically moved to an

underperforming subsidiary within the amalgamation. The transition was not very amicable with the previous CEO, and Grant was asked to come in and turn the division around. After several difficult years, Grant told group management that the division needed to close as it was not viable. He executed the closure, then was asked to move to another division. He decided that was not in his interests, as his objective was to “play soccer on the team”, not to “sit on the bench”. He was offered a package to leave, which he took.

The ex-chairman of the major pharmaceuticals company contacted him with a request for assistance at an appliance rental company. He was a key relationship Grant had built in his original time with the pharmaceuticals business. The bank balance was R50m in the red, with bankers close to calling on the debt. He was asked to assist and interviewed with the CEO, with no feedback. A few weeks later, the CEO was replaced, too. Grant was brought in to assist, and they turned the business around to a R200m positive bank balance within 18 months by chasing the good debt, not old bad debts. This put the business in a strong position, as a large telecoms business offered to buy the hire purchase division out. This was executed, and the business was sold.

After a short amount of time working in the Large Telecoms business, he realised that he did not align with the leadership there. He was expected to work 24 hours a day for his new boss. This escalated when he left a Saturday work function early for a family commitment. He left the company and worked freelance for a couple of years before returning to the appliances company to run the television rentals business.

Running the television rentals business, he managed exclusively, with his agreement with the group CEO being that communication was honest and open, with nothing hidden. On that basis, Grant ran the business with no interference. He led his team with the same approach, of clear honest and open communication. His two fundamental rules were “don’t lie to me” and “don’t lie to the customer”. With any dishonest staff being removed swiftly, theft was reported to the police.

In the final year of his career, Grant pondered and solidified his thoughts on leadership. In addition to honesty, he believes consistency and fairness are key, with people knowing what you stand for. Not to be a pushover, because your team will notice. When delegating tasks, as the leader, you must be clear in what needs to be done, why it needs to be done, who must do it and by when. And that the SOS rule applies, which is an old Navy rule whereby the receiver of the message holds responsibility until the signal is received and acted upon by the required party. His team understood that the SOS principal meant

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delegating to the team did not mean the responsibility passed too. Grant ran the business for the next 11 years until retirement in 2011, when his son finished school.

In his retirement, Grant has assisted with an NPO that he administratively assists. The NPO is related to the church. He has also continued managing his investment portfolio. Grant continues to play golf. He moved with his wife down to the Western Cape to retire on a farm there with his daughter and her husband.

### 5.3 Emerging Themes

#### 5.3.1 Common Themes Identified in the leader's stories

Having read the leader's stories, several themes have surfaced. While some themes are common to all or a few of the leader's stories, other themes arose in individual stories. In the individual stories, overarching motivations appeared.

Research Question	Main Theme	Sub Themes	Key Codes Groups	
RQ 1.1) What role do the experiential windows of childhood and adolescence play in the development of ethical leadership behaviours?	Leader Development overtime	Some development that happens across the life time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lifelong Learning and Perception of Education</li> <li>○ Role Model and Mentors Influence</li> </ul>	
		Specific life time development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Adulthood Development - Parenting Experiences</li> <li>○ Childhood Development - Extracurricular Involvement</li> <li>○ Childhood Development - Strong parental relationship</li> <li>○ Fairness with Consequences</li> </ul>	
	Ethical Leader Qualities	Ethical Leadership Qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Integrity</li> <li>○ Takes Accountability and Ownership</li> </ul>	
		Importance of Structure and Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Finds value in Structure</li> <li>○ Follow the rules</li> </ul>	
		Importance and Variety of Motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Goal Orientation</li> <li>○ Positive response to Barriers</li> </ul>	
	Motivation & Skills	Varying Skill sets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Coping Mechanism - Family, Exercise and Meditation</li> <li>○ Leadership Awareness</li> <li>○ Responds Practically to Problems</li> </ul>	
	RQ 1.2) What other cultural, contextual or personal attributes develop business leaders into ethical leaders over their lifespans?	Common and Differing Character Traits	Broad Range of Character Traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ No fear of choosing the Hard Path</li> <li>○ Confidence and Extraversion</li> <li>○ Finds value in others (Pro-Social)</li> </ul>
		Broad Contextual Impacts	Experiences that form a foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Audit Environment</li> <li>○ Military Service</li> <li>○ Mischievous Childhood</li> <li>○ Quality Schooling</li> <li>○ Experiences of Segregation</li> </ul>
Parental, Family and Cultural Dynamics				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Varying Family Dynamics</li> <li>○ Hard-working Parents</li> <li>○ Religious Upbringing</li> </ul>

Table 2 - Key Themes

These themes and motivations are described and discussed below.

#### 5.3.1.1 Early Ethical Foundation set by the parental figures

Across all the leaders' stories, an early impression of values and ethical foundations is present. Regardless of the make-up of their families or the harshness of their upbringing, all the leaders had a clear and strong foundation of ethical behaviour. While some of the leaders tell of their mischievous childhoods, this appeared to be a learning phase upon which they established their ethical foundation. For other leaders, it was one or both parents who set an early example of a fair and honest way to behave.

Participant 1's family dynamic with a hard-working father and a large family to whom he was responsible meant that there was an "expectation that you did things properly and you did the right thing". Participant 2's family mantra of "you did things the right way" echoes this sentiment despite differences in her cultural background from participant 1. Participant 5, who was raised and exposed to a harsh political environment growing up, also had a core foundation in "doing no harm" and caring for others. All three leaders from different backgrounds had strong parental figures who taught them these value systems.

Participant 1,3,4, and 6 all indicate that in their youth, they were mischievous. For all of them, it was part of growing up. However, with all the instances, they appeared to have boundaries which they would not cross. Participant 6 was mischievous, but even though he was exposed to individuals who used drugs, he never took them. For participant 1, he had several people, including four aunts, who held him to account when he did stupid things in his youth. Participant 4 was the social organiser and was often in fights, which he attributed to his red hair; however, he knew that as long as he maintained his academics, he would not be expelled, and his father would not intervene. What was clear, though, was that this was mostly a phase of establishing boundaries in their youth and that as they progressed out of school and into adulthood, they had established their value systems.

### 5.3.1.2 Structure, Discipline and Work Ethic

Across all the interviews, the interviewees indicated a need for hard work, discipline and structure. For some, this structure was a result of family background and observation of a role model; for others, it is a mechanism that is put in place to more easily manage the complexities of the world. However, across the board, the leaders expressed the need for hard work and consistency in the form of discipline.

Participant 1 indicated that his father's discipline influenced him. His father was in the military, having served in WWII. While participant 2 also indicated her father's influence on her, however, she attributes his discipline to his academic and author background. This is evidenced by the example of participant 2's father rising at 3 am to work, even in winter, to work and that she too does so when she needs to execute and project or to study.

Three of the participants, 1, 3 and 7, were conscripted into the army for a time in their early adult life. Both indicate that during this time, they entrenched a level of discipline and hard work. While not all of them consider the time fondly, all three do see the value of what they learnt during this time.

### 5.3.1.3 Education and lifelong learning

A very strong theme across all the leaders was the importance of education and lifelong learning. However, this sample may have a bias, as it is composed of leaders with professional qualifications. While all the leaders have achieved an honours equivalent as well as the professional designation, this was for most the minimum, with several of the leaders having multiple other qualifications. All the leaders in some way refer to leadership development programs that they either attended or have facilitated. Many of the leaders have gone on to do further educational programs at different international institutions.

While not all the participants expressed that they excelled in school, all of them indicated some level of academic prowess. Participants 1 and 3 both indicated that they worked hard enough to stay in the better classes, with access to good teachers. Participant 4 used his academic ability to mitigate worse punishments for his bad behaviour. Participant 6 expressed that after his turning point in grade 11, he and his friend focused on academics, enabling them to get into university. While participant 6 implied his teachers had mostly given up on him, this was not the case for the other leaders. Participant 5, while having a tough time commuting to school, expressed admiration for his teachers and the passion with which they taught. Participant 2, coming from a family of academics, had a clear focus on education. She demanded to attend school early and skipped a grade in response to the perceived unfairness that other children were afforded the opportunity.

Several of the participants have completed additional post-CA qualifications. Participants 2 and 7 both have MBA qualifications. Participant 2 has completed a Higher Diploma in Research with the intention of completing her doctorate. Participant 5, with the most decorated academic, completed his master's in commerce, and has been honoured with a doctorate for his contribution to the accounting profession. Participant 4 has completed several courses with a world-renowned American institution. While not all the leaders have gone on to complete further formal qualifications, they all express further learning and development that they have experienced. Participant 1, retired, having purchased 2 farms which he now runs with his sons, a completely new field he entered at 55, while participant 2 recently purchased a restaurant franchise.

### 5.3.1.4 Role Models or Mentors

A prevalent theme emerged of leaders having memorable mentors and role models as a key foundation to their development stories. These role models did not appear at a specific point in time but emerged for different leaders at different times in their lives. For

the majority of leaders, they had role models that emerged from a parent or close family member. Several had examples of role models or mentors who presented in school or university, but all of the leaders had some form of role model that emerged during their early to mid-career. These role models all presented not only as someone the leader aspired to emulate in terms of actions and behaviours, but for most, they were someone the leaders looked up to for ethical values.

For many of the participants, their parents were their first role model figures or close family members. For Participant 1 and 2, their fathers both had a clear influence on their stories. For participant 4, it was his brother-in-law and his twin brother who both represented a positive influence in his early life. Participant 5, both his parents, had an influence; however, it appears his mother's words played a significant part in his life.

Later in life, the participants all indicated at least one role model whom they sought advice and guidance from. For some, their parent still played a part, others it was managers, leaders or peers at work that they admired and sought counsel. Participants 1 and 5 had strong experiences with partners at the audit firms that they would refer to over their careers. Participants 2 and 3 had key individuals at important times in their careers, who at one time were their manager or leader, who have mentored or guided them. For Participant 3, it was his manager at the time of the management buy-in to the investment vehicle; he later became the CEO of the firm and is the incumbent that Participant 3 is planned to replace at the helm of the entity. For Participant 2, having completed her CA studies, her first true leadership role was given to her by the CEO of the company, who bought into her career and supported her in that first leadership transition. For Participant 4, he did have close role models, but he also looked further afield at sports persons that he could emulate specific characteristics from. As an example, he looks up to Ernie Els, the South African golfer, as a true representation of a gentleman.

### 5.3.1.5 The Value of People

All the leaders expressed a strong perception of value from their teams. For some, it was various teams that they worked with over the years, for others, it is key teams that they have put in place. All of them in some way expressed the value that they saw in their teams and how they treated their teams to get the best out of them.

For Participant 3, his management team around him is the foundation of his ability to get the job done. He gained insight into the value of people from his time playing sports. Understanding that each person has their own skills and abilities, the leader brings them together to perform as a team. Participant 6 also echoes team sports as an area in which

he learned to play and lead. For Participant 5, his main advice to aspiring leaders is to develop people. Part of his story is the future leaders he mentors in formal programs. He indicated the value of learning to lead in nature is the same skill set needed to lead in the boardroom, and he has invested his time and effort into developing over 50 aspiring leaders.

For participant 2, one of her managers gave her the advice that if you pay peanuts, you get monkeys, which she has taken to heart. She believes that you need to best teams to operate, and to get those teams, you pay them according to their value. In her story, she also showed that giving hard advice is a key part of valuing your people; when she gave difficult feedback to her peers, they responded positively. Participant 4 echoed the sentiments of pay and treating staff properly. His example is related to flexibility and dress code. him giving room for his staff the flexibility to attend school functions, but trusting them to still get their jobs done.

### ***5.3.2 Themes arising in some, not all, leader development stories***

Some themes arose within a subset of leaders' stories or presented with contradictions between different leaders' stories. With the research following an exploratory approach, raising all themes that emerged is the intent; as such, this report discloses the items that emerged regardless of their frequency. Furthermore, any contradictions are important to raise to show the true complexity of human development. Below, we discuss key themes that emerged from some leaders and themes that raised contradictions between the different leader development stories.

#### **5.3.2.1 Religion is the value system basis**

Religion, or exposure to a religious upbringing, also appears to have played a part in the establishment of the ethical foundation for most of the leaders. Regardless of the religion in question, several leaders expressed Christian-based belief systems, while others expressed a Hindu-based belief system. Though the continuing practice of religion in later life by the leaders appears inconsistent, the early life experience of ethical codes based on the back of religious belief is clear. Furthermore, the parents, or parental figures, of the leaders appear to be the influencers in terms of their religious upbringing.

Participants 1 and 7 are both Catholic, one of German and Irish descent, the other of Eastern European descent; Participants 5 and 6 are both Hindu males of Indian descent; and Participant 3, who is Afrikaans, all identified a religious upbringing as part of their foundational value systems. Participants 1 and 7 are the only interviewees who explicitly continued to practise their religion. Participant 5 was clear that his Gandhian upbringing set the foundation of passive resistance, an element of stoicism that arose in his story.

He also indicated that though he was Hindu, his father was friends with a prominent Anglican priest, and that he often attended the Mosque with his Muslim friends. While Participant 6 and Participant 3 both had religious upbringings, neither practices today, they both indicated some level of spirituality that they still live by.

What is common in most religions is the foundational ethical principles of treating others with respect and dignity, and of doing the right thing. All the leaders interviewed indicated these common values as foundational to their own value systems. These values are presented through parental figures.

### 5.3.2.2 Family and Community as a basis for value systems

The community also had a large impact on most of the leaders. Whether that be their direct family as a community or the greater family or community, there was a responsibility to meet the requirements of a bigger group than their direct families. Their value system arose both from seeing role models in the wider community and from a sense of responsibility to that community to behave in a particular manner.

### 5.3.2.3 Intention and Motivation

Intention was an interesting theme to consider when reviewing the leader's stories. Some leaders communicated explicit intention throughout their stories. They established clear goals and actively worked towards those goals. Other leaders were not as clear as to whether they had explicit goals and were moving towards those, or whether they were considering their options as they arose. Regardless of the explicit or implicit nature of their intentions, each of the leaders was motivated to progress and perform. This is considered further in the individual leader themes discussed below.

### 5.3.2.4 Response to the demands of leadership

Several of the leaders raised the stress and strain that come with holding leadership positions. Each of the leaders had strategies to manage this. The two main approaches were yoga, meditation and mindfulness and secondly, sport and physical exertion, such as the gym. All the leaders were in some way either physically active or had adopted mindfulness techniques, or both. All the leaders interviewed were in their mid to late careers and have been able to establish coping mechanisms for the stress of their roles.

For Participant 4, who is self-described as having ADHD, meditation and mindfulness help him manage his workload and mentality. Participant 5 rises early and begins his day with Yoga and Medication. Participant 3 exercises extensively, often 5 days a week, with a mixture of padel, squash, and gym. Participant 6 also exercises extensively, again often 5 days a week, with his concern more related to health than coping with work stress. The

leaders make use of coping mechanisms to assist them in managing their high-stress workloads.

### **5.4 Perception of the professional body**

All of the leaders interviewed are professionals who hold or held the designation of Chartered Accountant South Africa, with their memberships verified with the professional body SAICA. Some of the leaders followed the outside public practice route; the majority followed the inside public practice, getting exposure to the audit process. All the leaders agree on the significance of the development process in their leader development stories, and all of them saw the value in attaining the designation. However, some leaders held strong opinions about the state of the profession. Though there was general acknowledgement of some of the concerns in South African leadership today.

Participant 1 was disappointed with the state of the professional body, considering all the scandals that have occurred in recent South African history and the members of the professional body who have been exposed in those failures. He asserts that the leaders he was exposed to in his early developmental periods in public practice were “absolutely above reproach”. His concern is raised with the multiple examples of failures of CAs in business and government, and of the failings of the audit firms in their exposure to these scandals. Interestingly, some of the participants had spent time directly involved or with oversight over the professional body. This may influence their perception of the organisation.

Other leaders still place a very high regard on the qualification and its ability to open up opportunities in their careers. Three of the participants explicitly mentioned acquiring the professional designation in response to either perceived glass ceilings or related to the demand and pay of CAs. Both participants 2 and 3 did not immediately work toward the qualification, but in response to interactions with disgruntled employees in their organisation at the time, decided to complete the requirement later in their careers. Participant 4 decided to become a chartered accountant in school after viewing salaries and demand for individuals with the designation.

### **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the seven leader development stories of South African Chartered Accountant business leaders. Some leaders are at the peak of their careers, while others are at the latter end of their careers. The leaders are from a broad cross-section of Chartered Accountant leaders in the country. Although each story is unique, themes emerged from the stories that help us understand the development of ethical leaders. These themes have been discussed and presented in this chapter. Having

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completed the review of the findings of the interviews with business leaders, this research now contrasts these findings with those identified in the literature.

## **6 Discussion of Results**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the findings of Chapter 5 in relation to the literature identified in Chapter 2 with the intent of addressing the research questions raised in this paper. Chapter 5 has raised several key themes. These themes are interpreted and compared to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. This chapter discusses the findings that relate to the research questions raised in Chapter 3. The study made use of a narrative enquiry of seven business leaders in South Africa to gain an understanding of their leadership development stories across their lifetimes.

### **6.2 Discussion of findings for Research Question 1.1**

Research question 1.1 was concerned with the experiential windows of a leader's early life before adulthood. The question focused particularly on the first three experiential windows raised in the Liu et al. (2021) model, the nascent period, or early childhood, the childhood period and the adolescent period. These windows are considered first then the impact of these developmental windows on their ethical leadership development is considered.

#### ***6.2.1 Leader development during early childhood***

During the nascent period in model, the two key developmental factors are attachment to caregivers and play (Liu et al., 2021). These factors can give rise to leadership behaviours and skills at an early age. The leaders' stories indicate that their development did occur over time and began at an early age, which is in line with the assertion made by Zheng et al. (2021) of leadership approaches being attributed to this early stage. For some leaders, this is a period of 60-70 years, and as such, some leaders were less detailed in their early life stories than others.

This early life development appears to be largely related to the relationships those leaders have with their parents (Liu et al., 2021). Despite some leaders being raised by siblings more than parents, the experience of those key relationships, with both involved parents and siblings, still came through. In most of the stories, both parental figures had an influence, with all seven leaders having two parental figures. The findings of this research appear to support the dynamic of relationships with primary caregivers (Liu et al., 2021).

The experiential window model also suggest play has a leader development impact (Liu et al., 2021). In most of the leader stories, this is an overlooked element. Although some leaders refer to play and mischievousness in their youth, this is not specifically

referenced to their early childhood. This is not to discount the value of play in the model; however, it did not arise prominently in the nascent period in these leader stories.

Research also suggests that Traumatic events may have an impact on leader development (Liu et al., 2021). Two of the leaders' stories referenced some type of trauma in their early lives, either the loss of a loved one or societal trauma. For both leaders, the actions after the trauma mitigated the damage to some extent. This would likely be part of the reason these leaders had the negative consequence mitigated, too.

The same research also raised growing up in poverty as negatively impacting leader emergence (Tackett et al., 2023). This appears to be contradicted, as several of the leaders were raised from lower-income beginnings.

The leaders across the board spent relatively little time in their stories discussing their very early years, with relatively more focus coming through on school years. The next section discusses the childhood development experiential window.

### **6.2.2 Leader development during Childhood**

The next experiential window considered in the research question is the childhood window. During the childhood period in the Liu et al. (2021) model presents three key developmental factors, namely cooperative learning, sibling Interactions, and household chores.

In many of the leader stories, there was no clear distinction between the nascent and childhood phases. This does not contradict the existence of distinct phases, as these leaders were recalling story details from several decades before.

Cooperative learning, many of the leaders indicated that already in this period, they had begun learning through social interactions (Liu et al., 2021). These skills would present as valuable skill sets in later life and would be continuously developed (Tackett et al., 2023). Leaders were exposed to different contexts, but all emerged with improved social skills, whether they were raised in a mining community, or as the only outsider in a different community or even when they did not follow gender norms. Negotiation and easy communication skills emerged.

While in childhood, sibling interactions are included as developmental in the model, they did not present as a factor in the leader's stories, except to the extent that the leaders were raised by siblings; however, that relationship is more a parental role (Liu et al., 2021). Of the leaders interviewed, their position in the family appeared to hold no significance, with the leaders covering the full range of possibilities: youngest, oldest, middle and only child.

The research suggests that doing household chores may develop responsibility in leaders (Liu et al., 2021). Household chores only arose in one of the leaders' stories, and it was in response to reasons for not participating in extracurricular activities. Not to say other leaders were not doing chores, but it did not arise in those stories.

### **6.2.3 Leader development during Adolescence**

The final stage of the early leader development model considered in the research question concerns the adolescent window (Liu et al., 2021). As children progress into adolescence, their developmental spheres expand further, with four key developmental factors: peer interactions, parenting behaviours, extracurricular activities, and role models (Liu et al., 2021). All four of these factors are presented in the leaders' stories.

Past research suggests that Leaders' relationships with their parents as they grow into adolescence can promote or stunt their leaders' development (Eva et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021). This research has found that the leaders emulated their parental figures, corroborating the literature. The emulation in some instances was even related to specific behaviours, such as early rising – a common theme with most of the leaders.

In most of the stories, the leader actively engaged in extracurricular activities in school, primarily sports and often team sports. Several of the leaders directly attribute developing social skills, leadership skills, and motivation to team sports. One leader attributed early tests of fairness, a key ethical leadership construct, and winning the right way to playing team sports in adolescence. This outcome aligns with research, which suggests that extracurricular activities provide both social learning opportunities and real-world practice of leadership skills (Tackett et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2021). Several of the leaders continued sports into adulthood.

Review of the literature gave strong credence to the role model impacts on adolescents (Eva et al., 2021; Tackett et al., 2023). Choice of, and interaction with, role models is seen as a core the leader development in the adolescent experiential window (Liu et al., 2021). The value of role models and their guidance throughout leaders' careers emerged as a factor across leaders' lifetimes, not just in adolescence. Many had family role models, even from early in their lives. While others had and have role models and mentors whom they still engage with in their middle adulthood. This research suggests that the engagement with a role model or mentor may be more appropriate to consider as impacting multiple experiential windows and not isolated to adolescence.

Many of the leaders also attribute their learning of ethical behaviour to key role models throughout their lives. Both parents as role models, but also from work peers, managers

and other leaders. This aligns with leader development research and ethical leadership research (Banks et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021).

### **6.2.4 Ethical Leadership Development**

The final element of Research Question 1.1 is the development of ethical leadership qualities in these windows. When looking at the cross-section of these two research areas, several areas of interest related to ethical leaders' development arose. Specifically, Ethical leadership research has attributed the development of specific leadership traits in the early developmental period; the necessity of two-way communications; and the development of relationships on the foundation of respect (Banks et al., 2021, 2023; Liu et al., 2021). More recent research has interestingly suggested that ethical leadership can change with time and experiences (Ng et al., 2021). The research is corroborated by the findings of this study.

Past research has suggested that trait-based ethical leadership qualities are established and learnt early development periods (Banks et al., 2021). All the leaders interviewed attributed their ethical development more to their childhood than later in life, with their parental figures playing a foundational role.

Prosocial values emerged thematically from the leadership stories. All leaders expressed the ability to build relationships, with the single most prevalent code across the interviews being finding value in others. This evidence the necessity of Ethical leaders to be seen as two-way communicators (Banks et al., 2023). Relationships with subordinates, peers and superiors are examples of solid relationships built by ethical leaders on the foundation of respect (Banks et al., 2021).

An interesting theme that arose in several stories was related to mischief in the leader's early life. While some leaders attributed this to harmless fun, others saw this as a necessary period of establishing boundaries. This, along with the other elements of ethical leadership discussed in the prior paragraphs, corroborates the findings of Ng et al. (2021) of Ethical Leadership being dynamic and changing, and developing over time and with different experiences.

### **6.3 Discussion of findings for Research Question 1.2**

Research Question 1.2 was concerned with the cultural, contextual, and personal attributes that are part of a leader's life development. The question did not focus on any experiential windows; instead, it focuses on the cultural, contextual and personal attributes, regardless of when these occurred in a leader's lifetime (Liu et al., 2021).

These factors are personal and contextual antecedents understood to impact leader development (Vogel et al., 2021).

### **6.3.1 Culture, including religion, is a developmental factor**

Cultural background did not clearly present as a relevant element from the leaders' stories; however, religion did arise as foundational to the leaders. The leaders interviewed were skewed to Caucasian males; however, they were of different cultural backgrounds, with one of British descent, one of Eastern European descent and two Afrikaans leaders. The other leaders were of Indian and African descent. Broadly, their cultural background did not appear to have a significant impact on their leadership development stories. The religion did appear to have an impact, with the religion practised by the parental figures being significant. Though not necessarily that those leaders went on to practice the religion seriously themselves. The leaders practised both Christian and Hindu faiths.

It appeared that the leaders were influenced by parental influence, with religion being a foundation on which moral direction was taught. This foundation is the basis on which leaders developed their integrity and prosocial behaviours; living up to one's moral compass is a key characteristic of Ethical Leaders (Banks et al., 2021; Palanski et al., 2021).

### **6.3.2 Context and the experience of context**

The experiential windows model has two overarching development systems, the leader self-view system and the experience processing system (Liu et al., 2021). The experiential processing system provides a mechanism by which leaders have an experience, they learn from that experience and put into practice the learnings from the experience (Liu et al., 2021). This system allows for experiences that improve, worsen or have no impact on a leader's skillset and behaviours, which can be impacted by context and place (Liu et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021).

The leaders all referenced key experiences in their lives that impacted their development. Some experiences were of people and places, while others were events. Events varied for the leaders, including early life trauma, like the loss of a parent or experiences of segregation and racism, while other experiences were of family dynamics, experiences of high-quality education, and even for some, their time spent in compulsory military service.

### **6.3.3 Personality attributes that arose**

Both traditional leadership and ethical leadership, considered trait-based leadership outcomes (Banks et al., 2021). While the leaders interviewed did not fit into a single personality type, there were common traits that presented consistently across all the leaders. The leaders did not have a fear of taking difficult paths, with all having a strong appreciation for the value of hard work.

From an ethical qualities perspective, the leaders all expressed conviction when discussing fairness, but with consequences. This aligns with Ethical Leadership research, which finds that ethical leaders reward moral behaviour and discipline immoral behaviours (Chaiyasat et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2021). Also, the leaders were able to accept their own failures and take accountability for their actions. In fact, all the leaders tended to take ownership. Leaders also expressed or showed through their stories, the perception of value in people and their teams, a prosocial outlook. This was presented through strong two-way communication with followers and peers, aligning with research (Banks et al., 2023).

#### **6.3.3.1 Role of the profession**

All the leaders are registered chartered accountants, though their stories of how they received the designation differ. Some leaders were drawn to the profession for its prestige, while others considered it a necessity to progress in their careers. All the leaders found value in the process of becoming a chartered accountant, with those who completed audit articles finding value in that period. All the leaders are in good standing, but have varying opinions of where the profession is.

### **6.3.4 Discussion of overarching research question RQ1**

#### **6.3.4.1 Narratives aligning with the experiential window approach**

A clear pattern of alignment is presented in the narratives of the leaders. While some present more strongly than others, a clear pattern emerges of leader development occurring across the participants' lifetimes. Where the model is sufficiently dynamic, it does present the windows as distinct periods in which specific key development occurs. These windows are founded on human development theories, which support these windows of learning. The data gathered largely support a distinct period of development.

#### **6.3.4.2 Ethical leader development**

The research outcome related to ethical leader development supports the literature of ethical leadership being developed largely through strong role models in key early periods in a leader's life. The presence of role models emerged across every leader

interviewed. The common religious upbringing and/or strict parents also set the foundation of their ethical leadership approach.

### 6.3.4.3 South African Chartered Accountant Business Leader Context

The findings of this research support the generalisability of the Leader development through the Experiential Windows model to the South African context. The business leaders in South Africa who are perceived as ethical leaders have stories that show their development over time.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

A thorough review of key academic articles, in Chapter 2, has provided the foundational understanding of the topics of leader development and ethical leadership. The findings in Chapter 5 of this research have been contrasted with the literature. The major themes that emerged in the leaders' stories aligned with the literature. The context did not present any material differences when considering the applicability of the experiential windows model. The stories of chartered accountant business leaders are aligned with the core model of both ethical leadership and leader development.

## **7 Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **7.1 Problem statement and research questions**

South Africa is a country of potential that has failed its people because of poor leadership. South Africa has a wealth of resources and opportunities, yet it has not lived up to its potential. One of the key reasons for not living up to this potential has been government and corporate scandals (Dhlamini, 2023; G. Naidoo, 2024). The scandals are primarily due to failures of leadership, which the country has experienced over the past decades (Bhana & Sachin, 2022). These failures, both in politics and business, have led to significant losses for the people of South Africa (Neethling, 2025). These losses have been committed by leaders acting in their own self-interest (Dhlamini, 2023). It stands to reason that South Africa needs leaders who do not act in their own self-interest but in the interests of society.

Ethical Leaders are leaders who act in the best interest of society and lead by following their moral compass, which is informed by the needs of society (Banks et al., 2021; Sipondo, 2025). South Africa needs Ethical Leaders to guide the country forward, reduce scandals and lead in the interests of society. Ethical leadership has also been associated with positive organisational performance (Bhana & Sachin, 2022). While there are some examples of Ethical Leaders in South Africa, there are also examples of unethical leaders. These past examples suggest there is a need for new ethical leaders. Future Ethical Leaders need to be developed. This gives rise to the need to understand how leaders develop.

Literature was consulted to gain an understanding of ethical leadership and leader development. A comprehensive review was conducted of both constructs.

Ethical Leadership was understood based on the traits and behaviours exhibited. Ethical Leadership was defined by this research as the dynamic leadership process by which a leader engages with stakeholders through prosocial behaviours (Banks et al., 2021; Ng et al., 2021). This leadership style is a subset of moral leadership styles with a focus on two-way communication and acting consistently according to the leader's moral compass, which is aligned with the benefit of society as a whole (Banks et al., 2023; Shakeel et al., 2020). These elements of the definition are primarily behavioural and can be understood through the signal's leaders give their followers (Banks et al., 2021). This understanding then requires leaders to develop these ethical behaviours; however, further research into how these behaviours are developed was needed.

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Leader development is the process by which an individual develops into a leader (Day et al., 2021). Development implies temporal processes (Newstead et al., 2024; Tackett et al., 2023; Vogel et al., 2021). Historically, leader development research has focused on adulthood research; however, more research has identified that development begins earlier in a leader's life (Liu et al., 2021). Leader development was understood by the antecedents and outcomes, which led to the identification of a recently published model for leader development (Liu et al., 2021).

The model proposed by Liu et al. (2021) is the leader development through experiential windows model. This model consists of three layers that culminate in leader development. The first layer incorporates individual differences coming from personal and contextual inputs (Liu et al., 2021). The second layer incorporates the different human developmental time periods, splitting a leader's life over six time periods: nascent, childhood, adolescent, early adult, mid adult and late adult. These individual differences and human developmental periods are processed through two systems: the "Experience Processing System" and the "Leader Self-view System" (Liu et al., 2021 p. 4). All these inputs culminate in leader development.

While research does exist on these two fields, leader development and ethical leadership, there is a need to understand more deeply the relationship between these two fields of leadership research. Furthermore, there is little research done within the South African context (Gamarra & Giroto, 2022). With South Africa's diverse cultures and complex recent history, research conducted in Western contexts may not transfer to the South African context. Literature highlights a lack of sufficient research in the South African context and notes that the focus of past research has historically been on adult leader development (Eva et al., 2021; Tackett et al., 2023).

This research considers Leader Development and Ethical Leadership together. It specifically considers the development of Ethical Leaders in the South African context. The research was further scoped to Chartered Accountant business leaders in South Africa, as they have common ethical training in their early career and ongoing ethical training is compulsory (South African Institute of Chartered Accountants, 2023). Focusing on CA business leaders enables a focus on the development of ethical leadership behaviours in earlier experiential windows. This research paper aimed to understand this gap.

The review of the literature concluded with the overarching question raised: "How do business leaders develop ethical leadership behaviours?". Research question 1 was further bisected into two sub-questions: "What role do the experiential windows of

*childhood and adolescence play in the development of ethical leadership behaviours?”*  
And *“What other cultural, contextual or personal attributes develop business leaders into ethical leaders over their lifespans?”*.

## **7.2 Summary of findings**

To gain insights into the real-world complexities from these questions, a qualitative inductive approach was required (Ajjawi et al., 2024). A narrative enquiry research strategy was employed, with a cross-sectional horizon considered. Business leaders were identified and contacted for interviews to understand their life stories through the lens of ethical leadership development. Seven leaders responded to requests and were interviewed over a month-long period. Transcriptions of these interviews were compiled and compared to other data to triangulate the leader stories. Additional data was considered both for its corroborative and contradictory ability. This secondary data helped fill in the gaps on the leader’s stories and corroborate details of their stories.

The transcripts and secondary data were used to compile leader narratives. The interview transcripts were inductively coded, with 73 codes emerging, which were aggregated into five themes, with nine sub-themes. The outcomes of the research were presented through the leader developmental narrative frames of the seven leaders and a discussion of the key themes.

The findings of the research provided answers to the research questions. The nascent, childhood and adolescent windows have a significant role in leader development, especially ethical leadership development. This role is through parental relationships, family role models and parental behaviours. Cultural, through a strict and/or religious upbringing, and personal attributes also had an impact on ethical leadership development.

From a theoretical standpoint, the research found that the leader development through the experiential windows model is applicable in the South African context. The findings suggest that role model and mentor relationships may be more multi-window than isolated to the adolescent window.

The research also supports Ethical leader development occurring through experiences at different times in leaders' lives. Some themes arose that align with leader development generally, such as the focus on lifelong learning, experiential learning over time and with specific contexts, and during the different experiential windows.

### **7.3 Contributions and implications for management**

Having answered the research questions, the practical value of the findings arises. The qualitative nature of the research means interpretation is limited in terms of direct cause-and-effect; however, some insights have been gained that provide value to business. This value is not specifically related to developing ethical leaders, but rather to their identification and the value of understanding a leader's story.

Firstly, organisations should focus specifically on employing leaders who are of a high ethical standard. Research has provided criteria that identify ethical leaders, with this research supporting the applicability of these criteria in the South African context.

Second, taking an interest in how these leaders have developed over their lifetimes is also valuable to organisations. Understanding the development process will provide insight into what to look for in a leader who asserts they are ethical. Understanding their development in different windows of their life may also be useful to provide support and guidance to supplement any underdeveloped experiences.

One of the key themes emerging from this research was the importance of role models and mentors across a leader's life. And the quality of these role models impacted the leaders throughout their lives. This research suggests that organisations should focus on programmes to support current and future leaders with appropriate role models and mentors. It also stands that leaders in organisations should actively be role models inside and outside their organisation to support the development of future ethical leaders.

Fourth, organisations need to support individuals with lifelong learning aspirations. Past research suggests that leader development happens over the lifetime with many different influences. This was supported by the strong emergence of a focus on lifelong learning in the findings. The leaders actively seek to build skillsets and learn throughout their careers. Organisations should focus on providing the foundations for leaders to continue to develop.

Finally, organisations need to establish and maintain visible support and disciplinary structures. Ethical Leaders have a core attraction to fairness and provide appropriate consequences to both positive and negative actions. They are also active role models embodying their ideals. Organisations should build systems that support and encourage the transparency and fairness of Ethical Leaders' actions.

These recommendations are made based on the literature covered, supported by the findings of the narrative enquiries. These recommendations, however, are limited in their applicability.

### **7.4 Limitations**

This research initially set out to engage with business leaders in person; however, based on the leaders' requirements, only four of the interviews were able to be held in person. For these online meetings, to still gain some insight into body language, mannerisms, and other physical characteristics, these interviews were held with cameras on and recorded as such.

While culture was a factor built into the research design, race and gender were not specifically considered. With only seven candidates interviewed, there was not sufficient depth of profile, with the sample being skewed towards white males. The research was skewed to males, with only one female leader interviewed. The research was also skewed geographically, with all leaders working for businesses primarily based in Johannesburg; the outcomes of the research are skewed to urban locales.

This research suffers from the inability to truly assess Ethical Leadership separate from Ethical Leader Behaviours. Ethical Leadership is generally measured through perceptions of leadership, with self-reporting on Ethical Leadership also being flawed. Furthermore, self-reporting on characteristics like ethics, especially for individuals who belong to a professional organisation that has ethical codes of conduct, has limited value as there are possible consequences to not abiding by those codes. This would motivate these leaders to only positively report. This has been mitigated to a limited extent, where possible, by triangulation of data.

Doing cross-sectional based on a life story may lead to bias both in terms of hindsight and in terms of recency. Except for major trauma, it is unlikely that a leader will be able to recall fully the impacts of decades-old past events. Individuals are more likely to recall more recent events. Also, the lens through which one recalls both long past and recent events is influenced by hindsight bias; for example, a leader may interpret a negative event as a positive with the outcome known, whereas at the time of the event, it may have been experienced differently.

### **7.5 Recommendations for future research**

The findings of this research have added to the body of knowledge of leader development and ethical leadership; however, they have also given rise to further directions for future research to pursue. The following topics should be pursued in future research:

- a) Leader development research into the earlier phases of life should be completed with individuals in those phases at the time they are in those phases. As a review

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in hindsight places more significance on more recent occurrences rather than older historical information. The leadership development in hindsight is also considered through the lens of a leader, which also influences the perception of impacts.

- b) Leader development research into factors that prevent or prohibit leader development.
- c) Quantitative research to establish correlations between childhood experiences and ethical leadership behaviour scores.
- d) Ethical Leader Development study that looks into the comparative differences between Chartered Accountant business leaders and other professional business leaders or non-professional business leaders.

Research into these areas will expand the understanding of how to develop ethical leaders.

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**Appendix A - Consistency Matrix**

**Title:** Becoming an Ethical Leader: The Leader Development Journey of South African Chartered Accountants in Business Leadership

<b><u>Research Question</u></b>	<b><u>Literature Review</u></b>	<b><u>Data Collection Tool</u></b>	<b><u>Analysis</u></b>
RQ1 - How do business leaders develop ethical leadership behaviours?	(Banks et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021)	Question 6	Narrative and Thematic analysis on open-ended questions
RQ 1.1 – What role do the early experiential windows of early childhood, childhood and adolescence play in the development of ethical leadership behaviours?	(Banks et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021)	Questions 2, 3, 4 and 5	Narrative and Thematic analysis on open-ended questions
RQ 1.2 – What other cultural, contextual or personal attributes develop business leaders into ethical leaders over their lifespans?	(Banks et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021)	Question 1	Narrative and Thematic analysis on open-ended questions

**Appendix B – Research Instrument**

<b><u>Category</u></b>	<b><u>Example main questions</u></b>	<b><u>Example follow-up questions</u></b>
<b>Cultural, Contextual and Personal Attributes</b>	1) Please tell me about your background, your self-perception and what makes you ? 1.A) Tell me about your family, culture, and community. 1.B) What do you think makes you a leader? 1.C) Describe your value system and where and how that came about. 1.D) What makes you ? Please describe your Personality.	
<b>Nascent Window</b>	2) Thinking of your early childhood (0 - 6yrs old), what role did this period of your life play in you becoming a leader? 2.A) To what extent and how do you think your relationship with your caregiver impacted you? 2.B) To what extent and how do you think playing impacted you?	How did early relationships with your caregivers or siblings impact your development as a leader? Did you see your role models as ethical leaders?
<b>Childhood Window</b>	3) Thinking of your primary and secondary school years (6 - 12yrs old), what role did this period of your life play in you becoming a leader? 3.A) To what extent and how do you think shared learning experiences impacted you? 3.B) To what extent and how do you think household chores impacted you? 3.C) To what extent and how do you think your relationship with your siblings or extended family impacted you?	Do you think participating in chores gave you a sense of responsibility? Do you think you saw yourself as a leader of your siblings? How did you relationships with parents or caregivers manifest in you being a responsible individual?
<b>Adolescence Window</b>	4) Thinking of your high school years (12 - 18yrs old), what role did this period of your life play in you becoming a leader? 4.A) Did you participate in extracurricular activities? What were they, and to what extent do you think they impacted you? 4.B) To what extent and how do you think your relationship with your peers impacted you? 4.C) Did your relationships with your parents or caregivers change? If so, how and to what extent do you think this impacted you?	

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<u>Category</u>	<u>Example main questions</u>	<u>Example follow-up questions</u>
	4.D) Did you start identifying role models? What drew you to them and how did that impact you?	
<b>Remaining Windows</b>	5) Now think of your early adulthood, work and current life, what role did this period of your life play in you becoming a leader? 5.A) What value do you place on formal and informal training you embarked on in making you? 5.B) What about your chose education path contributed to you and your leadership journey?	What kinds of leadership programmes did you attend and what was the extent of ethical focus?
<b>Experiential learning</b>	7) How did you experience each of these windows in your life? 7.1) When and to what extend and when did you take deliberate actions to grow and develop? 7.B) When and to what extent did you actively apply some of the leadership skills you had grown?	
<b>Leader Self-view</b>	8) When and how did you experience each of these windows impacting your perceptions of yourself as a leader? 8.A) Please describe when and how you began to identify as a leader. 8.B) How did perceiving yourself as a leader help you focus on being a leader?	
<b>Ethical Leadership Behaviours</b>	9) What behaviours do you think define your leadership style? 9.A) What ethical behaviours do you exhibit	

**Appendix C – Qualitative Codes**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Grounded</b>
○ <b>_Contextual - Experiences</b>	<b>52</b>
○ Context - Experiences - Audit Environment	8
○ Context - Experiences - Class Dynamics	3
○ Context - Experiences - Early Trauma	2
○ Context - Experiences - Health Issues	3
○ Context - Experiences - Key Turning Point	2
○ Context - Experiences - Military Service	3
○ Context - Experiences - Mischievous Childhood	4
○ Context - Experiences - Political Landscape	6
○ Context - Experiences - Quality Schooling	6
○ Context - Experiences - Segregation	16
○ <b>_Contextual Dynamics</b>	<b>33</b>
○ Context - Family Dynamic - Cultural	7
○ Context - Family Dynamic - Large Family	4
○ Context - Family Dynamic - Middle child	3
○ Context - Family Dynamic - Unusual Family Structure	2
○ Context - Family Dynamic - Youngest Child	1
○ Context - Parental - Educated Parents	2
○ Context - Parental - Hard-working Parents	6
○ Context - Parental - Religious Upbringing	9
○ Context - Parental - Stable family dynamic	2
○ <b>_Ethical Leadership</b>	<b>58</b>
○ Ethical Leadership Qualities - Fairness with Consequences	18
○ Ethical Leadership Qualities - Integrity	13
○ Ethical Leadership Qualities - Respect	7
○ Ethical Leadership Qualities - Speaking up in spite of adversity	2
○ Ethical Leadership Qualities - Takes Accountability and Ownership	19
○ Ethical Leadership Qualities - Trust	5
○ <b>_Leadership Development - Non-Window</b>	<b>89</b>
○ Development - Assuming Leadership Positions	13
○ Development - Formal leadership training	7
○ Development - Internal Alignment	1
○ Development - Lifelong Learning & Perception of Education	29
○ Development - Role Model and Mentors Influence	39
○ Development - Self-Awareness	4
○ <b>_Leadership Development - Windows</b>	<b>24</b>
○ Adulthood Development - Parenting Experiences	3
○ Childhood Development - Chores	1
○ Childhood Development - Extracurricular Involvement	11
○ Childhood Development - Not a prefect	1
○ Childhood Development - Prefect	1
○ Childhood Development - Strong parental relationship	8
○ <b>_Leadership Motivations</b>	<b>94</b>
○ Motivation - Early to Rise	4
○ Motivation - Entrepreneurial Mindset	6

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○ Motivation - Focus on Legacy	6
○ Motivation - Goal Orientation	30
○ Motivation - Mentoring & Being a Role Model	4
○ Motivation - Performance Orientated	11
○ Motivation - Response to Barriers	23
○ Motivation - Response to Opportunities	20
○ <b>_ Leadership Skills</b>	<b>53</b>
○ Coping Mechanism - Family	2
○ Coping Mechanism - Meditation	2
○ Coping Mechanism - Sport	3
○ Skillset - Communication	7
○ Skillset - Leadership Awareness	10
○ Skillset - Responds Practically	20
○ Skillset - Storytelling Skill	11
○ <b>_ Personality or Character Trait</b>	<b>129</b>
○ Character Trait - Clear Self-Identity	7
○ Character Trait - Comfort in Discomfort & Choosing the Hard Path	20
○ Character Trait - Confidence & Extraversion	18
○ Character Trait - Conscientious	16
○ Character Trait - Consistency	8
○ Character Trait - Openness	2
○ Character Trait - Optimism & Valuing What You Have	5
○ Character Trait - Outspoken	5
○ Character Trait - Persistently Curious	5
○ Character Trait - Resilience	3
○ Character Trait - Resourceful	4
○ Character Trait - Self-Belief	3
○ Pro-Social - Care for people	5
○ Pro-Social - Finds value in others	33
○ Pro-Social - Sense of Community	2
○ Pro-Social - Tolerance	2
○ Pro-Social - Transparency	5
○ <b>_ Structure and Discipline</b>	<b>32</b>
○ Structure and Discipline - Discipline	8
○ Structure and Discipline - Follow the rules	6
○ Structure and Discipline - Strict Upbringing	5
○ Structure and Discipline - Value in Structure	20
○ <b>Opinion - Perception of Profession</b>	<b>6</b>