The evaluation of a strength-based facilitation skills training programme for post-graduate students in human resource sciences

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Mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree *Magister Commercii* in Industrial Psychology at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

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COMMENTS

The reader should bear the following in mind:

- The editorial style follows the format prescribed by the Publication Manual (6th edition) of the American Psychological Association (APA). However, a modified version of the format is used in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. The format used for the research article is in accordance with the guidelines for authors for the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology (SAJIP).

- The revised research proposal forms the first chapter of the mini-dissertation. Therefore, this chapter is presented in a different voice when compared to subsequent chapters which report on actual results.

- The mini-dissertation is submitted in the form of three chapters, which include one research article (chapter 2). Chapter 1 and 3 have numbered sections according to the formatting followed in the research unit, WorkWell.

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby certify that I have language edited the dissertation, "The Evaluation of a Strength-Based Facilitation Skills Training Programme for Post-Graduate Students in Human Resource Sciences", prepared by Willem P. Klynveld, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Commercii in Industrial Psychology at the North-West University. I am satisfied that provided the changes I have made to the text are effected, the language is of a standard fit for publication.

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Declaration

I, Willem Klynveld, hereby declare that the mini-dissertation titled, "The evaluation of a strength-based facilitation skills training programme for post-graduate students in human resource sciences", is my own work. The views and opinions expressed in this work are those of the author and relevant literature references are shown in the literature lists.

I further declare that the content of this manuscript will not be submitted at any other tertiary institution for qualification purposes.

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SUMMARY

Title: The evaluation of a strength-based facilitation skills training programme for post-graduate students in human resource sciences

Key terms: Human Resources, strengths, facilitation, strength-based training, facilitation skills

Human Resources (HR) has the potential to add value to the human capital in any organisation. Satisfied customers, healthy workplaces and the well-being of employees are determined by effective HR Management. HR practitioners should therefore have effective skills to facilitate growth in the workplace. By focussing on developing strengths an individual shows increased engagement, well-being, confidence, and self-awareness. Yet literature shows HR graduate students lack intra-and interpersonal skills when they enter the workplace.

The main aim of this study was to evaluate a strength-based facilitation skills training programme for post-graduate students in human resource sciences at a tertiary institution. An experimental (pre-test, post-test, post-post-test with control group) design from a mixed-method approach was used to achieve the aims of this study. The Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS-II) was used to obtain the quantitative data, while focus groups were used for the qualitative findings. After the pre-test a three day training programme was presented followed by the post-tests. The participants in this study were limited to post-graduate HR students ($n=36$) at a tertiary institute in South Africa. A simple-random sampling technique was utilised as a sampling strategy. SPSS was utilised to obtain descriptive statistics, and paired sample t-tests were used to determine the statistically significance of the results. Content analysis was used to explore the focus group findings.

The results mainly indicated that after the training the participants were inclined to relate better to others, choose and perform better in tasks, and were able to identify and develop their own and others strengths. The findings indicated that participants were more aware of their strengths showing increased self-acceptance, self-confidence, resilience, locus of control, and more authentic behaviour. Finally limitations of the study were identified, and recommendations for future training of post-graduate students and for future research were made.

OPSOMMING

Titel: Die evaluering van 'n sterktes-benadering opleidingsprogram in fasiliterings-vaardighede vir nagraadse menslike hulpbron wetenskap studente.

Sleutelterme: Menslike hulpbronne, sterktes, fasilitering, sterktes benadering, opleiding, fasiliteringsvaardighede.

Menslike hulpbronbestuur (MHB) het die potensiaal om waarde tot enige maatskappy te voeg. Kliënt tevredenheid, 'n gesonde werksplek, en die welstand van werknemers in die werkplek word bepaal deur effektiewe menslike hulpbronbestuur . MHB praktisyns moet dus vaardighede toon om groei te fasiliteer in die werkplek. Om op sterktes te fokus vir groei en ontwikkeling toon individue verhoogde welstand, self-vertroue, self-bewustheid en betrokkenheid tot werk. Literatuur toon egter dat nagraadse student in MHB inter- en intrapersoonlike vaardighede kort, wat as kardinale vaardighede gesien word om suksesvol fasilitering aan te bied, en sukses in die werkplek te verwerf.

Die hoofdoel van die studie was om die opleidingsprogram te evalueer wat daarop gerig was om die sterktes van studente te identifiseer en te onwikkel terwyl die fasiliteringsvaardighede program aangebied is. 'n Eksperimentele (voor-, na-, na-na-toets met kontrole groep) ontwerp vir die gemengde metode benadering was gebruik om die doelwitte te bereik van die studie. Die 'Personal Growth Initiative Scale' (PGIS-II) was gebruik om die kwantitatiewe data in te samel, terwyl fokusgroepe vir kwalitatiewe data invordering gebruik was. 'n Opleidingsprogram was aangebied oor 'n drie dag periode nadat die voor-toets afgeneem was, na die program is die na-toets afgeneem om die impak van die opleidingsprogram of intervensie te meet. Die deelnemers in die studie was beperk tot nagraadse studente in MHB (*n*=36) by 'n tersiêre opleidingsinstansie in Suid Afrika. 'n Eenvoudige ewekansige steekproefneming tegniek is gebruik as steekproef strategie. SPSS was gebruik om beskrywende statistiese data weer te gee, terwyl n tweeledige deelnemende t- toets gebruik is om die statistiese betekenisvolheid van die resultate te bepaal. Inhoudsontleding is toegepas om bevindinge te ontleed van die fokusgroep.

Die resultate toon dat die kandidate meer geneig was na die program om beter met andere te assosieer, verbeterde keuse en uitvoeringvan take te maak, in staat was om eie sterktes en ander se sterktes te identifiseer en ontwikkel na aanvang van die opleidingsprogram. Die bevindinge gee 'n aanduiding

dat die kandidate 'n hoër mate van bewustheid van die "self" getoon het, asook verhoogde self-vertroue, self-aanvaarding, lokus van beheer, en meer outentieke gedrag. Die beperkinge is geïdentifiseer, en voorstelle vir toekomstige navorsing en opleiding vir nagraadse MHB studente is gemaak ter afsluiting.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This mini-dissertation is presented in the form of an article titled, the evaluation of a strength-based facilitation skills training programme for post-graduate students in human resource sciences. The main aim of the study is to evaluate a strength-based facilitation skills training programme for post graduate students in Human Resource Sciences. In this chapter, the problem statement and the research objectives are provided, followed by the research method and an overview of the chapters.

1.1   Problem statement

South African companies are facing many challenges, such as skills shortages and a high unemployment rate (Van Schalkwyk, Du Toit, Bothma & Rothmann, 2010). Employee costs are rising because of the shortage of skilled individuals and the 'brain drain' characterised by the emigration of highly skilled people to Europe, the United States of America and Australia (Peralta & Stark, 2006). Literature indicates that sustainable economic opportunities cannot be productively explored due to a lack of skills (Burmeister, 2011; Sharp, 2011). In the area of human resource (HR) management, shortage of skills is a major concern (Sasol Infonet, 2011). Skills and knowledge of employees are amongst the main competitive enablers, and organisations cannot ignore the significance of attracting, retaining and developing the organisation's human resources capital (Botha, Bussin, & De Swardt, 2011; Ulrich, 2008). Tshilongamulenzhe (2012) indicates that both the employee and employer have become increasingly aware that investment in continuous development and training are of the outmost importance to ensure organisations succeed in a highly competitive environment. Vermeulen (2007) further emphasises the importance of HR development and the motivation of human capital to optimise organisational performance. The demand for skills seems to be on the rise, since overseas organisations (especially London) are headhunting South African professionals due to the country's business culture, education and work ethic (Gray, 2007). The importance of skills development is emphasised by the Human Resource Development Strategy of South Africa (HRDSA) 2010-2030, and implies that addressing skills shortages is a long-term strategy involving several stakeholders.

Human Resource Science

Stone (2008) defines HR management as the 'productive use of people in achieving the organisation's strategic objectives and the stratification of individual employee needs' (p.4). Typical HR functions within organisations entail (1) job analysis and design (2) recruitment, selection, orientation, and internal staffing, (3) appraisal, training and development, and career management, (4) compensation and health, (5) labour relations, (6) HR information systems and research solutions (Wärnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield, 2014). Kochanski and Ruse (1996) identified skills imperative for an HR practitioner as influencing, leading and facilitating, analytical thinking, and written communication skills. These skills are also included in the competency model suggested by the South African Board for People Practices (SABPP), namely leadership and personal credibility, organisational capability, solution creation and implementation, interpersonal and communication skills, and citizenship for the future (Meyer, 2012). It is clear from literature that facilitation is an important skill for the HR practitioner to be effective (Baill, 1999; Kochanski & Ruse, 1996; McEvoy *et al.,* 2005); fulfilling an important role as change agent (Jensen, 2005; Rynes, 2004; Ulrich, 2014), and contributing to organisational performance and effectiveness by effective training, communication and empowerment (Haynes & Fryer, 2000). Employers however expect graduate students in behavioural sciences to facilitate processes when they start working, but they are often lacking the interpersonal skills, knowledge and intrapersonal awareness to be able to perform effectively in a facilitation role expected (Rothmann & Van Aardt, 2002).

Facilitation

According to Hansen (2002), HR practitioners foster transformation in organisations through facilitating change with planned strategies and processes. Organisations who implement facilitation effectively can expect positive results in areas such as organisational transformation, leadership, team building, empowerment, solving issues that were deemed impossible, evoking democracy, conflict resolution, and personal effectiveness (Morgan, 2009). Facilitation refers to the creation of an environment where the self-actualising tendency can be released. The process of facilitation assists individuals or groups to take ownership for direction, and learning takes place, where individuals learn from one another through their individual contributions (see Cilliers, 2000).

Hansen (2002) found that the skills most needed from HR graduates are facilitation, leadership, oral communication, organisational dynamics, oral communication, and leadership, followed by computer, decision-making, and team building skills. There seems to be a gap between the readiness of graduates and the requirements of the employer in terms of skills and personal attributes when graduates enter the workplace. Literature shows evidence for facilitator training to be successful in enhancing skills of students in intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal effectiveness (respect, empathy, genuineness, and concreteness) (Du Preez & Jorgensen, 2012; Rothmann & Van Aardt, 2002). Research indicates that facilitator development/training should be included in training and on the job development in order to ensure a constant level of awareness and sensitivity towards the dynamic intra- and interpersonal behaviour in the workplace (Cilliers, 2000). Being able to effectively facilitate a process requires competency in intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal effectiveness (Cilliers, 2000). Kubica and LaForest (2014) describe intrapersonal awareness as self-awareness. Intrapersonal awareness is deemed as being more important than applied techniques during the process of facilitation (Schacht, Howe & Berman, 1989).

Intrapersonal awareness and self-actualisation are terms that belong to the field of positive psychology. A strength-based approach falls within the domain of positive psychology and relates to identifying and developing a person's strengths (Smith, 2006). When people become aware of their talents and strengths, they are in a position to know what their potential is and would be able to integrate skills and knowledge with their talents in order to develop their strengths (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Sustainable well-being and energised experiences can be achieved by focussing on the use of personal and psychological strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). A strength is constructed out of an individual's talents, knowledge and skills; being a natural pattern of thought, feeling, or behaviour (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Buckingham (2011) found that less than 13% of employees often utilise their strengths at work; and the teams that excel are the employees that do utilise their strengths at work most of the time. Various studies indicate that strength-based training leads to enhanced engagement, subjective well-being, confidence, direction, hope, increased self-awareness, satisfaction with life, and increased subjective well-being (Guse, 2010). Further studies showed that relationships were perceived as more meaningful as well as an increase in self- and other-respect (Guse, 2010). Hodges and Clifton (2004) found that focus on developing strengths was

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associated with greater personal growth which correlated with strength awareness, strengths application, and overall strengths.

Strength-based approach

In order for the HR post-graduate student to become aware of his talents and strengths, it is important that a facilitation programme should be presented from a strengths-based perspective to increase the skills set of the facilitator (see Guse, 2010). HR post-graduate students can apply their strengths within the facilitation context when they are aware of and utilise their own strengths, while also being aware of identifying strengths in the employees they train and develop. Literature indicates that a training programme in facilitation skills for HR practitioners should include the concepts and skills of facilitation from humanistic psychology (Schneider, Bugental & Pierson, 2001), the Person-Centred approach (Rogers, 1995) and the human potential movement (Carkhuff, 2009; Rothmann & Van Aardt, 2002).

It is thus clear that an effective HR practitioner should possess sufficient facilitation skills and be functionally intra- and interpersonally aware enough to be able to assist clients within a strength-based perspective. Currently, no research is available in the field of Human Resource Science addressing facilitation skills for HR practitioners from a strength-based perspective.

1.2 Research questions

Based on the problem statement, the following research questions arise:

- How are the terms facilitation and strengths conceptualised in the literature?
- What are the effects of a strength-based training programme in facilitation skills for HR post-graduate students?
- What recommendations can be made for training of future HR post-graduate students?
- What recommendations can be made for future research in strengths-based facilitation skills training programmes for post graduate students in Human Resource Sciences?

1.3 Expected contribution of the study

1.3.1 Contributions for the individual

By functioning from a strength-based focus, the HR practitioner as a facilitator directly influences the growth and learning of the employees they train and develop. By being intrapersonally aware, the HR practitioner as facilitator personally grows and changes cognitively, affectively and behaviourally, shows ability to be aware of feelings, to understand their own strengths and weaknesses and to express feelings and thoughts non-destructively (Bar-On, 2006; Robitschek, 1999).

1.1.2. Contributions for the organisation

The expected contribution of this study to the organisation relates to empowerment of the workforce and increased productivity and performance in organisations, where the principles of intrapersonal awareness and psychological well-being are implemented (see Everson, O'Flaherty, Howard & Loos, 2006; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). The study thus aims to contribute to the effectiveness and performance of the HR practitioner who has a direct impact on the performance of the organisation.

1.1.3. Contribution to industrial/organisational literature

The discipline of positive psychology has evolved during recent years to form a strong basis within the Industrial/Organisational literature. Developing employees' talents and strengths contributes to employee wellbeing and enhanced performance. Thus it is important to also focus on the growth and development of HR practitioners whose tasks inherently relate to working with people and directly so to their training and development. This study aims to identify important skills and competencies that can lead to the development of a training module for HR students, to better equip them as facilitators in the workplace.

1. 4   Research objectives

The research objectives are divided into a general objective and specific objectives.

1.4.1 General objective

The general objective of this research is to evaluate a strengths-based facilitation skills training programme for post graduate students in Human Resource Sciences.

1.4.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of this research are to:

- Conceptualise facilitation and strengths from literature;
- Evaluate the effects of a strength-based facilitation skills training programme in facilitation skills for HR post-graduate students.
- Make recommendations for future training of HR post-graduate students in strength-based facilitation skills.
- Suggest recommendations for future research in strengths-based facilitation skills training programmes for post graduate students in Human Resource Sciences.

1.5   Research design

1.5.1 Research approach

The research entails an experimental design from a mixed-method approach. The mixed method approach gathers interpretations from qualitative and quantitative data in order to explore the strengths of each approach that can add value to any research study beyond what each of them could contribute alone (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). When undertaking a mixed methods study, the researcher uses qualitative research methods for one phase or stage of a research study and quantitative research methods for the other phase or stage of the research study (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). The qualitative research method used in this study focus from a social constructivism paradigm that is based on specific assumptions that reality is constructed through human activity where individuals create meaning through their interactions with each other, and learning is a product of social interaction and does not take place only within an individual (Kim, 2001). Within this paradigm the participants are exposed

to the same phenomenon (a strength-based facilitation skills training programme), the way in which this phenomenon is experienced, however may differ between participants (Schwandt, 2007). Qualitative research is highlighted by the relationships between the researcher and participants (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000). Qualitative research involves understanding the research topic from the participant's perspective and therefore initiates the research in a relatively open and unstructured manner rather than relying solely on theory to provide the participant with a framework of the research (Struwig & Stead, 2001). Participants from this study are selected because of the commonality of being HR post-graduate students at a tertiary institution (see De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2005).

A quantitative approach is also followed in this study where the survey method is used to gather the data required to achieve the objectives of this study (De Vos *et al.,* 2005).

1.5.2 Research strategy

This research strategy utilised for this study falls within the experimental research design and refers to an experiment focussing on testing hypotheses, and establishing effect (see Botma, Greeff, Mulaudzi, & Wright, 2010). A pre-, post-, post-post-test with a control group is utilised to achieve the aims of this study (De Vos *et al.*, 2005). The same measuring instrument, Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS-II) is administered to both the control and experimental groups pre- and prior to the training. A focus group is used to obtain the qualitative impressions from the experimental group, prior to, and after the training. The training involves a three day programme consisting of strength-based, and facilitation skills training. Both the control and experimental groups is subjected to a one semester facilitation module prior to the study. The control group only receives the training after the post-test.

1.5.3 Research method

The research method describes the literature review, research setting, the roles the researcher assumed and the details of the study such as the participants and data collection method.

1.5.3.1 Literature review

A complete review is done of a strength-based facilitation skills training programme for an HR post-graduate student. The sources to consult include the following:

- Internet-based search engines such as Google Scholar and Yahoo;
- Article databases, which include EBSCOHOST, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, SAePublications, Sabinet Online and Emerald;
- Relevant textbooks; and Journal articles from various publications, including *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*; *The Academy of Management Journal; SA Journal of Industrial Psychology; Journal of Personality Assessment; Australian Journal of Psychology.*

1.5.3.2 Research setting

The study is conducted at a tertiary institute in South Africa. The setting for the data collection is at the School of Human Resource Sciences at the University of Potchefstroom (PUKKE). Research is conducted during class sessions, where all participants are present daily. In doing so any inconvenience to the participant is avoided. The setting is convenient for practical work and the use of video and audio material.

1.5.3.3 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

The researcher gains entry to the participants through the study supervisor. An invitation letter is sent to the whole class group of post graduate HR students to partake in the study. An information session is held with the interested participants to inform them about the training programme. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will adopt various roles in order to successfully complete the research study. Firstly, the researcher will ensure that the study is planned accordingly to answer the research questions. The planning will focus specifically on selecting a representative sample of the entire population in an attempt to generalise the results to the bigger population. In essence, the researcher will attempt not to stray away from the outlined boundaries. Secondly, the researcher takes on an analysing role. This means that after the data has been collected, the researcher will utilise a qualitative data analysis technique in order to effectively analyse the obtained data so that meaningful conclusions can be drawn. In addition, the researcher will adopt the role of consulting co-coders (current Industrial

Psychologists) to assist with the analysis of the obtained data. Lastly, the researcher will play an ethical role to ensure that the research study is at all times conducted in an ethical manner.

1.5.3.4 Research participants and sampling methods

The participants for this study include a complete class group of from a tertiary institution in South Africa. The population consists of post graduate Human Resources (HR) students who obtained at least a Bachelor's degree in Human Resource Science. In order to take part in the study all participants have to be fluent in English.

The sample size for this study is determined by using a simple random sampling technique from the willing participants (see De Vos. *et al.*, 2005). With this technique each student has an equal opportunity of being selected for either the experimental or comparison group. With random sampling it is ensured that the sample is representative of the population. The rational and procedures of the proposed research is presented to the class group at the beginning of their semester and the participants are invited to join the training programme during the semester.

1.5.3.5 Data collection methods

Two instruments namely the biographic instrument and Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS-II) is used to collect the quantitative data. The focus groups will are utilised to collect the qualitative data for this study:

A *Biographic Questionnaire* is utilised to obtain a profile of the demographic characteristics of the population in terms of gender, race, age, language and qualification.

The *Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS- II)* is used to measure the students' intention to grow. The PGIS-II consists of 16 items with four subscales, and is scored on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). The reliability of the PGIS-II is found to be acceptable by Malik, Yasin, and Shahzadi (2013), ranging from 0.65 to 0.87.

Focus groups are utilised to collect qualitative research data in an informal setting that involves a small number of participants engaged in a group discussion that is focused on a specific topic (Wilkinson, 2004). The specific topic in this research is strength awareness, knowledge and perception of the importance of strengths, intrapersonal awareness, and facilitation skills.

Focus groups are effective in social sciences to obtain data from multiple participants in a short period of time (Krueger & Casey, 2000; De Vos *et al.,* 2005). The method is however not appropriate for generalising results to the larger population. Some of the questions to be asked during the focus group are; 1) How important do you think interpersonal skills / facilitation skills are for the HR practitioner? 2) What specific skills are necessary for an HR practitioner? 3) Working with people with different personalities; will the interpersonal skills help you? 4) What do you think of interpersonal skills training from a strength-based approach? 5) Talking about personal strengths, utilising you skills from a skills based perspective, what do you think of that? 6) How will these skills prepare you for your job?

1.5.3.6 Recording of data

Before data can be collected permission is obtained from participants. It is further explained to the participants that the data is kept safely and dealt with confidentially. Data recording takes place by means of a survey, and an audio recorder, while field notes is made during the recordings. Data is then transcribed into an excel sheet after the completion of the focus group sessions. The voice recordings are matched with the transcribing to ensure that all data is intact for interpretation and coding.

1.5.3.7 Data analysis

For the quantitative analyse the statistical analysis is carried out using SPSS (SPSS Inc., 2014). Descriptive statistics is used to analyse quantitative data, while paired-sample t-test is utilised to analyse data from the experimental group and the comparison group during the pre-test and post-test. The paired-sample t-test indicates the statistically significance differences in the mean scores between the pre-test and the post-test (Pallant, 2007).

The (qualitative) findings from the focus groups are analysed by means of content analysis. Maree (2007) define content analysis as the process of interpreting raw data by exploring and understanding the data from various angles in order to identify key findings. The data is organised and prepared for analysis, which involves transcribing the data onto an Excel sheet in order to make sense of the data. Creswell (2009) suggests the following steps when analysing data. 1) Organise and prepare the data: The data is organised and prepared for analysis, which involve transcribing the data onto an Excel sheet. 2) Read through the data: the researcher read

through the data to acquire a good understanding of the meaning of the information. Data is then cleared from unnecessary data, and unclear statements. 3) Coding: themes and sub-themes get extracted by means of coding (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). Coding refers to separating the data into significant analytical units and coding them. 4) Description: the themes and sub-themes are analysed and shaped into a general description. 5) Presented: the description is presented in a discussion of the findings. Visuals, figures or tables and be used to present the findings. 6) Interpretation: the final step was to interpret the data findings or lessons learned (Creswell, 2009).

1.5.3.8 Strategies employed to ensure quality data

In order to ensure trustworthiness of the qualitative data the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability is adhered to (De Vos, *et al.*, 2005). The researcher ensures that the data is consistent and reliable by documenting procedures and steps of procedures to ensure data and findings are reliable (Creswell, 2009). Transcribes are checked to ensure that no mistakes are made during transcribing. The researcher ensures that themes and meaning of codes are consistent by comparing data with the coding (Creswell, 2009). A co-coder is consulted to co-code the transcribed material with the purpose of identifying themes independently, contributing to the validity and credibility of the data (Hesse- Biber & Leavy, 2004).

1.5.3.9 Reporting

Both a quantitative and qualitative reporting style is utilised in the study. Themes and subthemes are extracted from the topics deriving from the focus group discussions. For explanatory purposes, the responses of participants are inserted in the findings. Modifications to the excerpts are made to the extent that the excerpts are easier understood, this however is done without changing the meaning or context of what is said. The words are made dense, with nonsensical noises such as 'um' being excluded from quoted text (Lombaard & Mouton, 2005).

1.5.3.10 Ethical considerations

During a research study it is important to follow ethical practices during all phases of the study (Creswell, 2009). Ethical dilemmas need to be anticipated and actively addressed. The principles identified in the code of ethical behaviour according to the American Psychological Association are adhered to in all phases of this study. The study aims to do no harm and respect privacy of the participants. A first step is to submit the research proposal to for ethical authorisation and permission from the ethical board from the tertiary institute. The entire process is required to adhere to all ethical aspects in qualitative research, during which participants' written informed consent gets obtained and their right to privacy and anonymity. The privacy of participants is respected by giving informed consent and are allowed to withdraw from the process at any stage of their choosing. Upon completion of the research, all findings are readily available to all participating parties. Personal information is held confidential at all times, permitting participants consent to reveal personal information.

The purpose and structure of the research gets explained to all participants and they are afforded the opportunity to ask questions in order to ensure trust and mutual understanding of roles. The participants are informed that participation in the project is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any given time if they wished to do so. It is also highlighted that there were no evident risks involved with participating in this study. The researcher provided each participant with a printed consent form that stated the information obtained during the research process would be used for research purpose only and that it would be confidential. The researcher also verbalised that she would be available following the research for feedback or questions

In addition to the code of ethical behaviour, the American Psychological Association has found it necessary to include the following five principles in the ethics code which was incorporated in this study: a) a researcher must be competent and qualified to undertake research, b) all research must be executed with integrity, including an honest, fair and respectful researcher, c) the specific profession of the researcher must be respected, and the researcher must be willing to be held accountable for his/her actions, d) researchers must at all times respect the participants' rights, privacy, cultural preferences, gender and racial heritage, and ensure that discrimination based on any grounds does not take place during the research, and finally e) the research project must do no harm, and must benefit the participants (American Psychological Association, 2010). Ethical codes are thus designed to protect the participants, fellow researchers as well as research conducted within the social sciences.

1.6 Chapter division

The chapters in this mini-dissertation are presented as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction.

Chapter 2: Research article.

Chapter 3: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

1.7 Chapter summary

In chapter 1 an overview was given of a strength-based facilitation training programme for post-graduate students in Human Resources Sciences. A problem statement for the research was provided resulting in the general and specific research objectives. The research design and method used to answer the objectives was explained.

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CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The evaluation of a strength-based facilitation skills training programme for post-graduate students in human resource sciences

ABSTRACT

Orientation: The Human Resources function is under great pressure to contribute to organisational success. Facilitation skills can be used to effectively develop and maximise human capital in order to contribute to organisational outcomes. It therefore seems appropriate to train HR post-graduate students in facilitation skills. The positive psychology field has proven successful by focussing on strengths during skills training.

Research purpose: The general objective of this research was to evaluate a strengths-based facilitation skills training programme for post graduate students in Human Resource Sciences.

Motivation: Organisations expect HR graduates to be skilled in roles such as facilitation when they enter the workplace, but students lack the necessary intrapersonal awareness, interpersonal skills and knowledge to be effective in their job. A strengths approach proved successful in research to enhance the intrapersonal skills (self-awareness), which led to desirable individual and organisational outcomes.

Research design, approach and method: The research entailed an experimental design from a mixed-method approach. A simple random sampling technique was used to select the participants for the experimental and control groups. That participants consisted of 36 HR post-graduate students at a tertiary institute in South Africa The pre-test-post-test with a control group was utilised to collect quantitative data in the study. The paired-sample t-test was utilised to analyse data from the experimental group and the control group during the pre-test and post-test of the PGIS-II in order to measure the impact of the intervention (strength-based facilitation training programme) on post-graduate HR students. The qualitative research data was collected by means of focus groups, making use of verbatim audio recorders. For the purpose of analysing the data from the focus groups (qualitative), the verbatim transcripts were analysed by means of content analysis.

Main findings: From the results it was apparent that participants mainly indicated that utilising strengths will assist in relating better to others, choose and perform better in tasks, adapt to different situations, and assist in identifying and develop their own and others' strengths they assist. There was also a strong indication that the participants would be more inclined to use their strengths to address their weaknesses. Finally the findings indicated that awareness of

strengths led to self-acceptance, increased self-confidence, increased resilience and locus of control, with a sense of being authentic.

Practical implications: The findings in this study assisted towards shaping the training and development of HR post-graduate training programmes by focussing on strength-based development.

Contribution: The study contributed by equipping the HR post-graduate students with knowledge and skills in facilitation in order to enter the workplace better prepared, narrowing the skills gap between tertiary education and the demand in the workplace.

Key words: Human Resources, facilitation, strengths, intrapersonal awareness,

Introduction

The results of a talent and HR trend global survey conducted by Deloitte and Touche shows that reskilling the HR function ranks as one of the top 5 most important trends (Njoroge, 2014). Du Toit and Van Tonder (2009) identified under-investment in skills development as a major contributor to the skills shortage in South Africa. This has a direct negative impact on South Africa's economic growth and job creation (Kraak, 2008). The Global Competitiveness Report 2014/2015 ranked South Africa's economy 56th out of 144 countries (making smaller countries such as Bahrain and Lithuania ranked more competitive than South Africa) (Schwab & Sala-i-Martín, 2014). This was due to sustainable economic opportunities not being productively explored due to a lack of much needed skills such as managerial, professional and technical skills (Burmeister, 2011; Sharp, 2011). The shortage of skills is a major concern, especially in the fields of executive leadership, research professions and professionals in development of talent, such as human resource (HR) practitioners (Sasol Infonet, 2011).

President Jacob Zuma, during his State of the Nation address in June 2014, emphasised the seriousness of skills development and the government's ongoing commitment to invest in education and skills to ensure economic growth and development (Zuma, 2014). This is further emphasised by the development and implementation of the Human Resource Development Strategy of South Africa (HRDSA) 2010-2030. The HRDSA is committed to overcome the shortages in the supply of people with the priority skills. This includes increasing the skills in the country to meet the demands of economic priorities; implement skills to reduce poverty and unemployment; ensuring that young people have access to education and training; to ensure increased employment and economic growth; education of poverty, and improved social unity, mainly on the identification and development of scarce, critical and priority skills acquisition (Ntombela, 2013). The solution to skills shortages is a long-term strategy that requires both the state and the private sectors' collaboration to ensure financial resources to address skills shortages properly (Burmeister, 2011). Skill shortages appear likely to increase as globalisation and competitive pressures take hold across sectors and industries (KPMG, 2014). This demand for skills gives rise to escalated pressure on HR functions (Kemp, 2009).

Research purpose and objectives

The general objective of this research was to evaluate a strengths-based facilitation skills training programme for post graduate students in Human Resource Sciences.

The specific objectives of this research were to:
- Conceptualise facilitation and strengths from literature;
- Evaluate the effects of a strength-based facilitation skills training programme in facilitation skills for HR post-graduate students.
- Make recommendations for future training of HR post-graduate students in strength-based facilitation skills.
- Suggest recommendations for future research in strengths-based facilitation skills training programmes for post graduate students in Human Resource Sciences.

Literature review

Human Resource Science

The science of Human Resources (HR) can be defined as a series of integrated decisions concerning the employment relationships that influence the effectiveness of the organisation and its employees (Milkovich & Boudreau, 1997). According to Louw-Potgieter (2012), the HR functions are categorised as recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, benefit and reward and employee relations. The main purpose of HR management is to achieve organisational goals and strategies by effective utilisation of the human capital/employees (Van Dijk, 2008). Pieterse and Rothmann (2009) stated that the HR function fulfils an important role by contributing to business performance. Line managers expect HR practitioners to develop and align processes, skills and competencies to facilitate the realisation of long-term business strategies (Panayotopoulou & Papalexandris, 2004). HR practitioners strategically align roles and responsibilities through learning and development, where the right employees are identified to do the best job (Van Dijk, 2008). HR functions' positive impact on organisational performance advocates that skills and commitment can be enhanced by effective training, communication and empowerment (Haynes & Fryer, 2000). A recent survey conducted with over 60 000 HR professionals on all continents defined strategic positioner, credible activist, capability builder, change champion, HR innovator and integrator,

and technology proponent as the six competencies necessary for HR practitioners to deliver value in organisations (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank & Ulrich, 2013; Ulrich, 2014). It is the HR manager and practitioner in particular who must drive and ensure behavioural change implementation (Pieterse & Rothmann, 2009). However, specific skills are necessary for the HR practitioner to effectively align and develop the skills of human capital; they should conquer skills dealing both with people and business issues (Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, & Younger, 2007).

McEvoy *et al*. (2005) summarised the skills and knowledge that have a direct relevance to the effectiveness of HR practitioners in key organisational processes as, change management, facilitation, organisation development, interpersonal skills, leadership, coaching, team skills, and HR research and organisational feedback. In addition, currently the South African Board of People Practices (SABPP) in partnership with HR Future is developing the National Standards of Practice for HR in conjunction with the competencies model and national HR management system (Meyer & Abbott, 2014). The purpose of developing the standards, metrics and practices are to ensure good practices and standards in all organisations in order to ensure consistency in how people are managed, and how functions are implemented. One of the core competencies nationalised by the SABPP are interpersonal (facilitation) and communication skills. These skills are particularly important for HR practitioners to assist employees with workplace issues and problems.

Facilitation skills for HR practitioners

Facilitation is increasingly becoming an important skill for all HR practitioners to empower employees and to create change that is lasting and transferable to the workplace (Cilliers, 2000; Gray, 2007; Weaver & Farrell, 1997). Facilitation skills can furthermore assist the HR practitioner to improve teamwork and enhance the learning experience of employees. According to Haas and Sibthorp (2004), the real benefit of facilitation is that employees can apply learned skills from situation to situation.

The skills-set needed by HR practitioners to be effective in working with employees are best described by the process of facilitation. Cilliers (1996) indicates that facilitation refers to the providing of opportunities to learn about the self (Cilliers, 1996), own behaviour and behavioural change (Gordon, 1994). This relates to self-development, interpersonal

relationships, teamwork and workforce empowerment (Cilliers, 2000). The process of facilitation is managed in such a way that participants are able to take responsibility for their own actions in order to face challenges in a constructive manner and to help them achieve goals (Corey, 2009; Rothmann & Van Aardt, 2002).

The facilitation process is in general based on the Person Centred Theory (Rogers, 1983), and System Theory (Keltner, 1989). Literature defines the process of facilitation as the creation of an environment where the individual or group's self-actualising tendency can be released (Carkhuff, 2009; Rogers, 1983). Self-actualisation is when a person functions optimally with desirable intra- and interpersonal characteristics, with a deep sense of intrapersonal-awareness and understanding of whom one is, what one wants to do, can do and enjoy doing (Rogers 1985; Bar-On, 2006). Self-actualisation also depends upon good problem solving and making sound independent decisions regarding what one wants to do, and then being sufficiently assertive to follow through with these personal decisions (Bar-On, 2006). The development of these intrapersonal skills is crucial since they can be seen as the fundamental drivers of the interpersonal skills (Kubica & LaForest, 2014). The level of intra- and interpersonal awareness of the HR practitioner as facilitator has a direct influence on personal growth and change experienced by employees (see Cilliers, 2000). It seems clear that the HR practitioner who improves his own levels of inter- and intrapersonal awareness will thus empower employees towards personal growth and learning in all situations.

Intrapersonal awareness consists of a person's intrapersonal ability to be aware of feelings, to understand own strengths and weaknesses and to express feelings and thoughts non-destructively (Bar-On, 2006). Great emphasis in positive organisations is placed on human capital (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008), and human strengths (Luthans, 2002). However previous research conducted by Hill in 2001 shows that only about one-third of employees can identify their own strengths, emphasising the importance of self-awareness / intrapersonal awareness (Linley & Harrington, 2006). Being intrapersonally aware means that the HR practitioner as facilitator, grows personally, and changes take place on a cognitive and behavioural level (Robitschek, 1999). These changes take place in order to become a fully functioning individual (Patterson & Welfel, 1994), while in a process of constant growth by being constructively interactive with his/her surroundings (Rogers, 1980).

The interpersonal effectiveness of the facilitator greatly relies on the ability to be authentic in core and to form effective relationships (Jenkins & Jenkins, 2006; Ringer, 2002). Interpersonal effectiveness consists of four core dimensions: respect, empathy, genuineness, and concreteness (Cilliers, 2000). The interpersonal awareness experience of the facilitator has a direct impact on the growth experienced by employees or a group (Rothmann, 1996). Facilitators who function low on interpersonal effectiveness could damage the professional relationship, whereas a facilitator having effective interpersonal skills might relate better to the experiences of others (see Carkhuff, 2009). Typical interpersonal skills include utilising micro skills. This entails skills such as; questioning, minimum encouragement, paraphrasing, clarifying, reflecting, summarising and to give information (Ivey, 2013).

Kaufman (1999) identified great gaps that exist between the skills required by organisations and the actual skills HR graduates possess when starting out their career. The skills gap is evident in areas of communication skills, leadership, negotiation skills, knowledge of organisational dynamics, and strategic understanding of HR; typical skills required to be an effective facilitator. In a study done at Stamford University in Birmingham USA, Johnson and King (2002) found facilitation skills not to be included in many tertiary programs training HR students. This is a surprising finding due to the overwhelming evidence emphasising the importance of facilitation skills as a competency for the HR practitioner in the workplace. A strengths-based approach to education is a viewpoint of teaching and learning principles that focus on the positive aspects of student effort and strengths (Lopez & Louis, 2009). Therefore training in facilitation skills should be presented from a strength perspective for students to be aware of their own optimal functioning, displayed through effective skills.

A Strength-based training programme

Positive psychology has proved successful in developing employee skills (Jonker, 2009), by focussing on their unique psychological strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004); an approach that moved away from the traditional deficiencies, or weakness oriented approach of psychology (Linley & Harrington, 2005; Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005). The strength-based approach is abundance-based and solution driven (Linley & Harrington, 2005), that enhances intrapersonal awareness and psychological wellbeing by valuing and utilising one's own strengths (Guse, 2010). Research indicates that people who use their strengths have

displayed higher levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, vitality and well-being and are more effective in their development over time (Govindji & Linley, 2007; Linley *et al.*, 2010; Proctor, Maltby, & Linley, 2011).

The definition of strengths used in Clifton and Harter (2003), is 'the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity 'that is constructed out of talents, knowledge and skills' (p.111). A further definition of strengths, as defined by Linley (2008), entails 'a pre-existing capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is authentic and energising to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development and performance' (p. 9). Talents are a person's naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behaviour (Buckingham & Clifton, 2005; Rath, 2005). Any recurring patterns of behaviour that can be productively applied are talents (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). Talents are enduring and unique; constructed of a person's strongest synaptic connections, resulting in recurring patterns of thought and behaviour, with the emphasis on "recurring." Practical examples of talent would be of a person's ability to remember names rather than just faces, a person's love of crossword puzzles, or appeal with risk, or tendency to impatience. Knowledge, according to Buckingham and Clifton (2001), consists of factual knowledge and experiential knowledge. Factual knowledge is content acquired knowledge through learning. Experiential knowledge consists of knowledge acquired through lessons learned. Skills consist of the steps of a given activity; bringing structure to experiential knowledge.

According to Buckingham and Clifton (2005), the two misleading assumptions that organisations believe about employees are that each person can learn to be competent in almost anything, and that each person's greatest room for growth is in his or her areas of greatest weakness. Research however suggests the contrary, that each person's talents are enduring and unique, and that each person's greatest room for growth is in the area of his or her greatest strength (Buckingham & Clifton, 2005; Passarelli, Hall & Anderson, 2010; Roberts *et al.,* 2005).With organisations that focus mainly on fixing what is wrong with employees, strengths are underutilised and weaknesses magnified (Buckingham, 2011). A Gallop Poll survey indicates that people have numerous times more growth potential when time and energy is invested into developing strengths rather than fixing weaknesses or deficiencies. Buckingham (2006) and Rath (2007) also suggest that employees are six times more likely to engage in their jobs when energy is invested into developing their strengths.

In a study done amongst students, enhanced engagement, subjective well-being, confidence, direction, and hope as a result from a strength-based intervention was reported (Hodges & Clifton, 2004). Clifton and Harter (2003) further found a strong correlation between decreased absenteeism and lateness of students when strengths development is applied.

Guse (2010) utilised strengths identification during a training course for Industrial and Organisational students, and found that students were more self-aware and satisfied with life, with increased subjective well-being. Results indicated that relationships were perceived as more meaningful, and that respect for others and the "self" increased. The research concluded that a strength based approach that focuses on psychological strengths of students should be included in basic training of psychologists. Findings further indicated that a strength approach should be applied to the training of post-graduate psychology students by focussing on their unique psychological strengths in order to develop an awareness of their own strengths while being aware of identifying the strengths of their clients (see Guse, 2010).

Results from a longitudinal study conducted by Passarelli *et al*. (2010) in America who have connected strength based education to outcomes in the outdoor and adventure education, suggested that a focus on developing strengths was associated with greater personal growth. Personal growth significantly correlated with strength awareness, strengths application, and overall strengths. The application of strengths enhanced the overall learning experience by enhancing the student's awareness of new learning opportunities. Students reported that the strengths approach added value by enhancing personal relationships, as well as by focusing their attention on opportunities for personal development.

No previous research is currently available of a facilitation training programme that has been presented from a strength based perspective; where students strengths were identified and utilised in training HR practitioners or HR post graduate students in South Africa. By presenting such a training programme to HR post graduate students they will be made aware of their talents and strengths. This will allow the graduates to apply their strengths in the workplace in order to effectively assist employees.

Research design

A discussion follows below on the research approach and the research method used in this study.

Research approach

An experimental design with a mixed-method approach was applied for this study, drawing interpretations from qualitative and quantitative data in order to explore, examine and understand the contextual world of a strength-based facilitation skills training programme (Doyle, Brady & Byrne, 2009; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Specifically, the concurrent procedure was utilised as a mixed method approach. This merged quantitative and qualitative data which was obtained at the same time. The data was then integrated in the interpretation of the overall results (Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative researchers focus on exploring, examining, and describing people and their natural environments (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). Struwig and Stead (2001) stated that qualitative research is data collected that cannot be converted to numeric terms. The relationship between the researcher and participants is highlighted in qualitative research; the success of a qualitative study depends on the willingness of the participants to share their experiences (Orb *et al*., 2000). Amber and Adler (1995) stated that qualitative research can be seen as a combination of oral words (conversation, monologues or sentences), recording of field notes by observers and visual observations (either live or videotaped, non-verbal messages such as facial expressions, body language and various forms of self-expression). The qualitative research method of the study falls within the social constructivism paradigm. The assumptions social constructivism holds are that:

> 'individuals seek understanding of the world they live and work in, and develop subjective meanings of their experiences. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading to the researcher looking for the complexity of views rather than categories or ideas. The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied. The researcher's intent is to interpret the meanings the participants have about their world' (Creswell, 2009. p. 8).

In this study the participants shared their experiences, views and opinions regarding the importance of strength-related facilitation skills for HR students.

Another principle of the research study involved the phenomenological approach. According to Creswell (2009), a phenomenological strategy involves the understanding and identifying of the lived experiences of participants to develop patterns and relationships of meaning. In order to adhere to the principle of the mixed method approach, the researcher decided to conduct a focus group with the experimental group in order to obtain data concerning the experiences of the phenomenon. The nature of qualitative data relates to feelings, perceptions, and thoughts of participants regarding specific topics. Therefore it could be a difficult process to compare these experiences within groups, such as the experimental versus the control group.

The quantitative research method followed in this study relates to a process that is systematic and objective by using numerical data obtained from the participants (Maree, 2007). The survey method was used to obtain the data in order to address the aim of the study.

Research strategy

The research strategy employed in the study entailed an experimental research design. Experimental research refers to the manipulation and control of an experiment with a view to answer a cause-and-effect question (Maree, 2007). A randomised pre-test-post-test control group design was utilised (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2005). The two groups namely the control group and the experimental group, is unique to this particular research design. In accordance with the design, the two groups received the same pre- and post-test namely the PGIS-II, but the comparison group did not participate in the facilitation skills training programme. The experimental group received the training with the aim of using the results to assess the effect of the independent variable, namely the strength-based facilitation skills programme on the dependent variables during the post-test. The PGIS-II was administered to both the control and experimental group at two different occasions (with a one-week interval). Three focus group sessions were conducted with the experimental group to obtain their qualitative impressions of the phenomenon. The control group received the training after the post-test to ensure fair research practices and provide the comparison group with an equal learning opportunity. It must be noted that all the participants were exposed to a semester

module in facilitation during their post-graduate course, prior to the training programme. By doing so an equal opportunity was presented to both the control and experimental groups to obtain a baseline of similar knowledge and skills on facilitation.

An information session was held with the 36 participants to explain the objectives of the research project and the relevance of the research to them. During the information session, the participants' written consent was obtained in order to ensure that the data was gathered ethically. Next the focus group discussions were held, the group started with an opening question "How important is facilitation skills for HR practitioners?". In conjunction with the open-ended question the researcher used micro skills (such as minimum verbal response, paraphrasing, reflection, clarifying and summarising) to encourage elaboration (Ivey, 2013). Depending on the language preference of the respective participants, the focus groups were conducted in Afrikaans and English.

The content of the training programme is illustrated in Table 1. The programme was presented by means of transferring practical and theoretical knowledge of facilitation skills, strengths identification and strengths utilisation through personal assessment, individual exercises, group discussions, and video material. The same open-ended questions were asked in the post focus groups than during the pre-test in order to record any differences in perceptions, knowledge and ideas after training was received. A post-post focus group was conducted to measure the long term effect of the training programme.

Table 1

The strength-based facilitation training programme

Workshop	Title	Objective	Method
Day 1 Session 1	Pre-Assessment	Both experimental and control group completed the pre-test to determine their level of intentional growth (PGIS-II)	• Pen and Paper
Session 2	Pre-Assessment	Focus Group sessions: Establishing practical knowledge, thought and perception of facilitation skills, intrapersonal awareness, importance of facilitation skills or HR practitioners, and of strength	• Focus group • Facilitation

Day 2 Session 1	Interpersonal skills	Transferring practical and theoretical knowledge of facilitation, managing a basic facilitation process, and interpersonal skills.	• Lectures • Role play • Group work
Session 2	Strengths and talents	Transfer knowledge of importance of intrapersonal awareness, and application of intrapersonal awareness to the workplace for HR graduate. Strength-based training, strengths identification of participant, utilising Buckingham's approach and talent themes as basis of strengths identification	• Video material • Lecture • Group discussion • Reflection
Session 3	Strengths and talents	Manifest a comprehension of strength principles and practices. Application exercises consisted of application of individual strengths in HR field	• Group work • Discussions • Seminars
Day 3 Session 1	Post- seminar Assessment	Both groups completed the post-test to determine the effect of the strength-based training program for post graduate HR students on the PGI of the participants	• Pen and paper
Session 2	Post-assessment	Focus groups: Determine the effect of the intervention (strengths-approach) on the knowledge, perceptions, impression of the post graduate HR student.	• Group discussion • Facilitation

Research method

A complete literature review was done of a strength-based facilitation training programme for HR practitioners/students. The sources that were consulted are mentioned below;

Article databases such as EBSCOHOST, Google Scholar, SABInet Online, SAePublications, Science Direct, Proquest and Jstor were accessed. The following terms were used as search terms: Strengths, strengths development, positive psychology, self-awareness, intrapersonal skills, facilitation, facilitation skills, and human resources. Due to their relevance to the specific topic at hand, the following journals were studied: Academy of Management Journal, Australian Psychologist, Human Resource Management Journal, Industrial and Organisational Psychology: Perspectives on Science, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Business and

Psychology, Journal of Clinical Interventions, Journal of Industrial Psychology, Journal of Management.

Managerial Psychology, Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology, Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, Journal of Organisational Behaviour, Journal of Vocational Behaviour, Modern Psychological Studies, Personnel Psychology, Psychology Online Journal, South African Journal of Industrial Psychology. Cross referencing was done when an important source of information was identified whilst studying a specific article citing a reliable source.

Research setting

The research setting of this study was a tertiary institute in South Africa. Post-graduate students from an HR programme were invited as participants of the study. The setting used for the study included lecture and conference rooms at the training institution. The venues were well suited for the purposes of the study namely, well ventilated, comfortable, with digital media equipment readily available for the training sessions.

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

Entry to the participants was obtained by means of the researcher's supervisor. The participants were invited to an information session where the aim of the study was presented. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the study, where after the participants completed the consent forms. The whole class group indicated their interest to undertake training. The researcher assumed various roles, such as ensuring that the program was structured, with the necessary content and learning to answer the specific questions of the research. The planning also involved choosing the correct sampling method, namely the simple random sampling technique to ensure that the participants were equally distributed in either the control or experimental groups. It was the researcher's role as facilitator to stimulate growth and development during the training programme. In order to achieve desirable outcomes, the researcher took on the role of presenter by presenting material, lectures, and PowerPoint presentations. The researcher also took on the role of a data analyser which entailed analysing the collected quantitative and qualitative data.

Research participants and sampling methods

The participants for this study include a complete class group of from a tertiary institution in South Africa. The population consisted of post graduate Human Resources (HR) students who obtained at least a Bachelor's degree in Human Resource Science. All students had to be fluent in English to take part of the study. The simple random sampling technique was used to select the participants for the experimental and control groups. The simple random sampling for this study entailed that the whole population of (n=36) participants received an equal chance of being selected for either the experimental group or control group (see De Vos *et al*., 2005). The population consisted of a complete working group of 36 Human Resources (HR) post-graduate students from a tertiary institution in South Africa, from which the whole group indicated their willingness to partake in the study. In accordance with the research design, an experimental and control group was selected from the population of 36 HR post-graduate students ($n = 36$).

The characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Characteristics of Participants (*N*=36)

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	15	41.7
	Female	21	58.3
Ethnicity	White	27	75.0
	African	3	8.3
	Coloured	6	16.7
Language	Afrikaans	26	72.2
	English	7	19.4
	Setswana	2	5.6
	isiZulu	1	2.8
Qualification	University degree	32	88.9
	Post-graduate degree	4	11.1
English Ability	Moderate	6	16.7
	Good	19	52.8
	Excellent	11	30.6
Year Group	Honours year	36	100.0

Household	Married, without child	1	2.8
	Single without child	16	44.4
	Single with child	1	2.8
	Living with parents	18	50

Table 2 indicates that the participants were mainly female (58.3%).and that all (100%) of the participants were in their honours year. The majority of the participants were White (74%), while the Africa ethnicity group was least-represented (8.3%). In terms of language, Afrikaans (72.2%) was the most prevalent home language, while English represented 19.4% of the sample, and the isiZulu languages represented only 2.8% of the sample. All of the participants are in the Honours degree group at the University, with 11.1% who have already obtained a post-graduate degree. The majority of the participants speak good English (52.8%), where 30.6% represented excellent English ability. In terms of household, Living with parents (50%) was the most prevalent living status, while Single without child represented the second largest representation (44.4%) of the sample.

Data collection methods

The following measuring instruments were utilised to collect data for the research. The first two instruments namely the biographic instrument and Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGI-II) were utilised to collect the quantitative data. The focus group data collection method was used to collect the qualitative data of this study:

Biographic Questionnaire: The questionnaire was utilised in order to compile a profile of the demographic characteristics of the population. Characteristics such as gender, race, age, language and the individual's qualification level were obtained with this questionnaire.

Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS- II): The PGIS-II is used to measure a person's active and intentional involvement in changing and developing as a person (Robitschek, 1999). The PGIS-II consists of 16 items with four subscales, and was scored on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). The four subscales correspond to four theoretically derived factors of PGI namely; readiness for change (RC; four items), planfulness

(PL; five items), using resources (UR; three items), and intentional behaviour (IB; four items). Scores for each factor are computed as the average of the item scores, with higher scores indicating higher levels of that aspect of PGI (Robitschek *et al.,* 2012). A test–retest reliability of the PGIS–II for intervals of up to six weeks, and the interpretations of the results have demonstrated adequate concurrent and discriminant validity (Robitschek, *et al.,* 2012; Yakunina, *et al.,* 2013). The reliability of PGIS-II in a study done on students of a Pakistan technical training institute aimed to see the predictive role of personal growth initiative and self-esteem for academic achievement. This was 0 .82 and for its subscales it ranged from 0.65 to 0.87 (Malik, Yasin, & Shahzadi, 2013).

Focus groups: The qualitative research data were collected by means of focus groups as a technique to determine the impressions the participants had of facilitation skills training from a strength-based approach. A focus group is effective to determination and understanding of a specific issue from the perspective of the participants of the group (Liamputtong, 2011). Focus groups are structured to encourage a variety of responses from participants, which provides a greater understanding of the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour on a research topic (Hennink, 2007). The aim of focus groups in social science research is to understand the participants' meanings and interpretations (Liamputtong 2011). Focus groups are a qualitative research approach in the health and social sciences that can be utilised to generate complex information on a wide range of people and groups in different settings. Some of the many benefits from utilising focus groups in social sciences research are that it is an economical, fast, and efficient method for obtaining data from multiple participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Focus groups can be defined as an informal discussion (time duration of one to two hours) among a group of selected individuals about a particular topic (Wilkinson, 2004). A focus group ideally consists of a group of six to eight people, from similar social and cultural backgrounds or who have similar experiences or concerns, who participate in a group discussion issue with the help of a moderator in a particular setting (Liamputtong 2011). The moderator aims to facilitate a discussion where participants talk to each other instead of directing questions to the group for answering. Focus groups are group discussions which are designed to examine specific sets of topics that require collective activity from participants (Kitzinger 2005). For the purposes of this study the experimental group was divided into three (pre-, post-, and post-post test) focus group sessions. Since the experimental group consisted of 18 members, the groups were divided into two groups of 9 members each for the pre and

post-test. Since the post-post test was voluntary, only one group was held consisting of 7 members. The control group was not subjected to the focus group sessions, since they did not receive the training and thereby could not provide qualitative impressions. Questions asked during the focus group were the following; 1) How important do you think interpersonal skills / facilitation skills are for the HR practitioner? 2) What specific skills are necessary for an HR practitioner? 3) Working with people with different personalities; will the interpersonal skills help you? 4) What do you think of interpersonal skills training from a strength-based approach? 5) Talking about personal strengths, utilising you skills from a skills based perspective, what do you think of that? 6) How will these skills prepare you for your job?

Recording of data

Permission from participants was necessary before the research could be conducted. To collect data during the focus groups a verbatim audio recorder was required to capture the conversations. The purpose of using the audio recorder was explained to the participant, and permission was granted in order to establish a trusting environment to conduct a study. It was explained to the participants that the data would only be used for the research purposes, and that all data would be kept safe and confidential. It was requested that participants should speak loudly and clearly enough for the voice recorder to record the conversation. Data was transcribed into an Excel sheet after the completion of the focus group sessions. The voice recordings were matched with the transcribing to ensure that all data was intact for interpretation and coding. The researcher assured the participants that the data would be stored safely, and that full confidentially would be kept. Voice recordings were kept safe in storage inaccessible to others, and backup copies were made of all electronic files.

Data analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to conduct the statistical analysis for the study (SPSS Inc., 2014). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data (e.g. means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis). The paired-sample t-test was utilised to analyse data from the experimental group and the control group during the pre-test and post-test of the PGIS-II in order to measure the impact of the intervention (strength-based facilitation training programme). The paired-sample t-test indicated the statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the pre-test and the post-test. In order for the score

differences to be statistically significant the Sig. (2-tailed) should be smaller than $p < .05$ (Pallant, 2007).

For the purpose of analysing the (qualitative) data from the focus groups, the verbatim transcripts were analysed by means of content analysis. According to Creswell (2009), data analysis involves a process of making sense of the data. Furthermore phenomenological research involved the analysis of significant statements to generate meaning. Creswell (2009) suggests the following steps when analysing data. 1) Organise and prepare the data: The data was organised and prepared for analysis, which involve transcribing the data onto an Excel sheet. 2) Read through the data: the researcher read through the data to acquire a good understanding of the meaning of the information. Data was cleared from unnecessary data, and unclear statements. 3) Coding: themes and sub-themes were extracted by means of coding (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). Coding refers to separating the data into significant analytical units and coding them. 4) Description: the themes and sub-themes are analysed and shaped into a general description. 5) Presented: the description is presented in a discussion of the findings. Visuals, figures or tables and be used to present the findings. 6) Interpretation: the final step was to interpret the data findings or lessons learned (Creswell, 2009).

Strategies employed to ensure quality data

The trustworthiness of the qualitative data needed to adhere to the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (De Vos, *et al*., 2005). The researcher ensured that the data was consistent and reliable by documenting procedures and steps of procedures to ensure data and findings were reliable (Creswell, 2009). Transcriptions were checked to ensure that no mistakes were made during transcribing. The researcher ensured that themes and meaning of codes were consistent by comparing data with the coding (Creswell, 2009). A co-coder (qualified industrial psychologist) was utilised to read through the transcribed material with the purpose of identifying themes independently, contributing to the validity and credibility of the data (Hesse- Biber & Leavy, 2004).

Reporting

A quantitative reporting style was utilised to report on the paired-sample *t*-test results between the pre-test and the post-test for the experimental- and control group in order to evaluate the

impact of the intervention on HR post-graduate students' PGIS-II scores. Also, a qualitative data reporting style was used to extract themes and subthemes from the topics deriving from the focus group discussions. For explanatory purposes, interview excerpts were inserted in the findings discussion that entailed the actual words the participant used in a response time during the focus group. Modifications to the excerpts were made to the extent that the excerpts were more easily understood. This however was done without changing the meaning or context of what was said. The words were made dense, with nonsensical noises such as 'uhm' being excluded from quoted text (Lombaard & Mouton, 2005).

Ethical considerations

According to Struwig and Stead (2001), research ethics ensure that researchers conduct research in a morally acceptable manner by providing them with a code of moral guidelines. Unethical activities such as plagiarism, failing to respect participants' confidentiality, forcing the population to participate, deceiving people and falsely reporting results, are sought to be prevented by the ethical code (Neuman, 2000). In addition to the code of ethical behaviour, the American Psychological Association has found it necessary to include the following five principles in the ethics code which was incorporated in this study: a) a researcher must be competent and qualified to undertake research, b) all research must be executed with integrity, including an honest, fair and respectful researcher, c) the specific profession of the researcher must be respected, and the researcher must be willing to be held accountable for his/her actions, d) researchers must at all times respect the participants' rights, privacy, cultural preferences, gender and racial heritage, and ensure that discrimination based on any grounds does not take place during the research, and finally e) the research project must do no harm, and must benefit the participants (American Psychological Association, 2010). Ethical codes are thus designed to protect the participants, fellow researchers as well as research conducted within the social sciences.

To properly conduct the ethical authorisation and permission were obtained from the ethical board from the tertiary institute. An ethical number was assigned to the study from the ethical board thereby providing approval for the study.

Findings

The results section provides an overview of the quantitative and qualitative analyses that were carried out. Firstly, the quantitative analysis that was done with the SPSS program is reported, followed by the qualitative findings of the focus groups. The results and findings are provided in the following order:

- Quantitative results
  - *Table 3* reports on the paired t-test for PGIS, for the experimental group (*n* = 18).
  - *Table 4* reports on the paired t-test for PGIS, for the control group (*n* = 18).
- Qualitative findings
  - *Table 5* reports on pre-test focus group findings regarding the importance of facilitation skills.
  - *Table 6* reports on the pre-test focus group findings on defining strength-based skills for HR post-graduate students.
  - *Table 7* reports on the post-test findings on the importance of strength-based facilitation skills.
  - *Table 8* reports on the post-post-test focus group findings.

Next, the quantitative results are reported.

Quantitative results

Table 3

Paired sample t-test report for the experimental group (*N*=18)

	T-TEST PAIRS	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	PreTest Skills_Test-PostTest_Skills_Test	-0.50	3.62	-0.59	17	.565
Pair 2	Pretest Readiness_For_Change-PostTest Readiness_For_Change	-0.17	2.60	-0.27	17	.789
Pair 3	PreTest_Planfulness-PostTest_Planfulness	0.17	3.68	0.19	17	.850

Pair 4	PreTest_Using_Resources-PostTest_Using_Resources	0.72	2.11	1.45	17	.164
Pair 5	PreTest_Intentional_Behaviour-PostTest_Intentional_Behaviour	0.17	2.00	0.35	17	.729
Pair 6	PreTest_Autonomy-PostTest_Autonomy	-1.20	5.04	-1.03	17	.318
Pair 7	PreTest_Environmental_Mastery-PostTest_Environmental_Mastery	0.50	5.88	0.36	17	.723
Pair 8	PreTest_Positive_Relations-PostTest_Positive_Relations	-0.78	5.05	-0.65	17	.522
Pair 9	PreTest_PurposeInLife-PostTest_PurposeInLife	-0.83	6.35	-0.55	17	.585
Pair 10	PreTest_Self_Acceptance-PostTest_Self_Acceptance	1.59	6.87	0.95	16	.355
Pair 11	PreTest_Personal_Growth-PostTest_Personal_Growth	-0.89	4.39	-0.86	17	.402

Table 3 shows the results of the paired-sample *t*-test that was conducted to evaluate the impact of the program on HR post-graduate students' PGIS-II scores. The results indicated that there were no significant differences for the paired-sample *t*-test between the first test and the second test for the experimental group. Furthermore, there was no statistically significant increase in the scores from the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group's participants. In order for the score to be statistically significant the Sig. (2-tailed) should be $p < .05$.

Table 4

Paired sample t-test report for the control group (*N*=18)

	T-TEST PAIRS	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	PreTest Skills_Test-PostTest_Skills_Test	-0.94	3.57	-1.12	17	.278
Pair 2	Pretest Readiness_For_Change-PostTestReadiness_For_Change	0.39	2.00	0.82	17	.422
Pair 3	PreTest_Planfulness-PostTest_Planfulness	0.78	3.70	0.89	17	.385

Pair 4	PreTest_Using_Resources- PostTest_Using_Resources	-0.28	2.37	-0.49	17	.626
Pair 5	PreTest_Intentional_Behaviour- PostTest_Intentional_Behaviour	0.77	2.90	1.13	17	.271
Pair 6	PreTest_Autonomy- PostTest_Autonomy	-1.16	3.77	-1.31	17	.207
Pair 7	PreTest_Environmental_Mastery - PostTest_Environmental_Master y	-1.66	5.08	-1.39	17	.182
Pair 8	PreTest_Positive_Relations- PostTest_Positive_Relations	-1.94	4.58	-1.80	17	.090
Pair 9	PreTest_PurposeInLife- PostTest_PurposeInLife	-2.38	6.56	-1.54	17	.141
Pair 10	PreTest_Self_Acceptance- PostTest_Self_Acceptance	-4.05	6.49	-2.57	16	.020
Pair 11	PreTest_Personal_Growth- PostTest_Personal_Growth	-1.33	6.48	-0.87	17	.396

Table 4 shows the results for the paired-sample t-test conducted for the control group. The results indicated that there were no significant differences for the paired-sample t-test between the first test and the second test for the control group. There was also no statistically significant increase in the scores from the pre-test and the post-test of the control group's participants. The result is satisfactory due to the control group not being exposed to the training program.

Qualitative findings

Focus groups were held with the experimental group to obtain their qualitative impression on strength based facilitation training. Three groups were held during the study, a pre-, post-, and post-post test.

Next the findings from the pre-test are reported on. The category is indicated and the themes that were extracted, the meaning of the themes are explained followed by a response (direct quote) from the participants. From the pre-test focus group two categories emerged. The first category related to the importance of facilitation skills for HR practitioners, while the second

category entailed an effort by the students to make sense of the term "strength based", namely, defining strength based training.

Next, category one, the importance of facilitation skills is discussed:

Table 5

The importance of facilitation skills

Theme	Meaning	Response
Development	A process of self-development and facilitating development in others	...they also help employees to reach development themselves.(P1A)
		For instance, as an HR, I tend to get the main functions of HR, then develop myself where I am not aligned to those main functions of HR. (P1B)
		It is a matter of self-development. (P1A)
Effective communication	Using effective skills to gain understanding of others' differences and needs	Because of the personality differences that might occur in different levels the message might be understood in different ways, the lower level employees might understand certain messages as being manipulative or as negative but your job as HR, by using your interpersonal skills, can really help to make them understand why those decisions are made and why those messages are sent. (P6B)
		And further, to take into account different personalities and to adapt to that. Treat people differently, or how you communicate with them.(P4A)
Human relations	Interacting with others by using skills effectively thereby gaining others' trust.	I think it is very important to have the ability to interact with teams or individuals; because you are a HR practitioner, it is required to be able to interact with your co-workers. (P2A)
		If there is an interpersonal relationship the person will find it easier to be open to talk and share about issues and will be more open to your opinion because they will feel that you are a person, and I will trust you because you will be able to help me in my situation. (P3A)

		It may better the person's way of working, because there is a better relationship if the person is at ease to come and talk to you when they experience a problem or to discuss an issue. (P1B)
	Inherent part of work	The HR practitioner must have the skills to pick up interpersonal cues. (P1B)
Link between different organisation levels	Acting as the link between different departments and levels	...and also between different departments in the organisation as well. (P1B)
		Being an HR practitioner is basically, it involves conveying the information that is set up by the management and that information needs to reach the lower level employees and having the interaction, being that link, it just makes that information easier to be understood by the lower level employees and that message that comes from management. (P4A)
Identify specific problem	Having the ability to remain within the HR scope of practice, yet having the ability to accurately identify symptoms.	You will be able to identify what is wrong with a person, but your responsibility stops before diagnoses are made; what you will be able to do is to refer outside your boundaries. (P3B)

From the findings presented in Table 5, the participants indicated that the use of facilitation skills is important to facilitate their own as well as others' development. The participants indicated that as an HR practitioner it is important to assist employees in a process of development. Apart from assisting others' in their development, the participants indicated that it is important for the HR practitioner to be focussed on self-development as well.

'It is a matter of self-development'. (P1A)

Another theme which emerged from the finding is *effective communication*. By effectively using their interpersonal skills the participants reported that differences in the workplace can be better understood.

> *'I think that with good interpersonal skills, you will be able to understand others better and know better what their needs are'. (P3B)*

The participants reported that having effective facilitation skills is important, since HR practitioners must have the ability to relate to others *(human relations)*. The participants agreed that having the correct skills to interact with others are important, as well as that the result of these skills is an increased trust from employees.

> *'Also easier to understand the person and their needs, it can foster a better and more comfortable work environment, because here is a sense of trust between you and the person you helping'. (P2A)*

Lastly, one participant reported that having facilitation skills is an inherent part of their work.

The participants reported that the HR practitioner is viewed as *the link between different organisation levels*. Thus the HR practitioner should have the ability to convey messages accurately and with the necessary skills.

> *'You need that little heart to get everyone on the same level, and to understand one another better and also to care. I think HR is the connection between that and the workplace'. (P2A)*

The findings also revealed that the participants felt it is important for HR practitioners to accurately *identify problems* in employees. The participants reported on accurately identifying and referring as an important skill they should have.

> *'I think it is important, very important to look at the underlining signs for issues'. (P1A)*

Next, category 2 is presented. The second category related to defining strength based skills.

Table 6

Defining strength based skills for HR students

Theme	Meaning	Response
Skills	Having specific skills for e.g. communication and leadership to take control of situations	The two skills that will be important would be leadership skills and communication skills; when you are in this position you will have to take on some leadership in situations. (P2A*)
		You need interpersonal skills, for instance listening skills, communication skills. (P2A)

Understanding emotions	Understanding and identifying the persons' emotions.	To add to that, it is important to show empathy. You need to understand where the persona comes from, with an understanding why a person feels that way, and to pick it up. (P3A)
		I think it is important to show emotion; you must be able to see how a person feels in that moment, and identify the cause of the feeling. (P1B)
Boundaries	Understanding and applying the ethical boundaries	I think it is difficult to draw a line; not sure where to stop asking questions about personal issues. There is a professional grey area. (P1A)
		I think when your client talks to you, the moment you begin talking about his children or so and he reaches out then you must realise ok this issue is personal, and that, then you must ask for his consent to talk if he is willing to talk about it...(P2A)
Identify strengths and weaknesses	Knowing and identifying own strengths and weaknesses in order to work on it.	I think it is where you identify your strengths, but also your weaknesses to make it stronger. (P5A)
		Maybe also to know your strengths and to work with that. (P1B)
Remain neutral	Postponing own judgements in order to remain objective.	I think it is very important to listen objectively, and not to make your own assumptions; stay on a neutral ground and keep listening. (P3B)
		You must keep your personal feelings aside; make yourself neutral in the conversation so that you don't make any judgement. (P4B)
Professional knowledge	Have a foundation of professional knowledge such as psychology or a course in counselling	You must have a background based on psychology in order to help another person. (P5A)
		Yes, I agree to that if anyone treats people they need a basic course of facilitation or counselling. (P4B)

* A = Group 1; = Group 2 (i.e. P1A = person 1 from group A)

From Table 6 it is clear that the participants made an effort to define strength based skills in order to make sense of the topic. The first theme that emerged related to having specific *skills*, such as communication and leadership skills in order to assist employees. Secondly, the

participants indicated that identifying and understanding emotions seems to be a skill that the HR practitioner who functions from a strength-based perspective should have.

> *'You must be able to pick up on emotions, even if they don't say something is wrong'.* *(P1B)*

The participants reported that knowing where their *boundaries* are when assisting employees seems to relate to strength based skills.

> *'You must know when you have reached a boundary with a person, and then decide not to go further and rather help the on another level...'. (P3B)*

Next, the participants mentioned that *identifying and knowing their own strengths* is important.

> *'To know your weaknesses and to find a way to work around them, in order to make them strengths'. (P5B)*

The participants reported that remaining *neutral* in a facilitative relationship is part of a strength based approach.

> *'I think it is important to compare any information that you receive from a person to an objective standard what you set out for yourself with experience'. (P6A)*

The participants reported that *professional knowledge* is important to have as a foundation when facilitating from a strength-based approach. From the responses it was also clear that some participants felt confused and lost during the discussion at this stage.

> *'I'm a bit lost. I don't know what we're discussing now? I'm not sure.' (P3B)*
> *'I got lost after the boundaries...'. (P9B)*

Next, the post-test findings are reported. After the training programme was presented, focus groups were repeated with the experimental group to obtain their qualitative impressions on strength based facilitation skills training. The findings of the post-test showed that the participants were less inclined to define the concepts presented to them. As such only one category emerged, which related to the reasons the participants experienced strength-based facilitation skills as important for HR practitioners. The themes that emerged from this category are presented next:

Table 7

The importance of strength-based facilitation skills

Theme	Meaning	Response
Human relations	Strengths helps to relate and accept others	*It is important to have good relationships at work. (P1A)*
		Our perspective of people changes, which will help me to understand not just one type of person but it helps me to relate to many people. (P2B)
		It made me less judging of others. (P4B)
Identify strengths	Ability to identify and develop own and others' strengths	*I have discovered my strengths and can use the talents of the strengths finder to identify others strengths in groups and in tasks. (P2B)*
		The skill help me how I can use my strengths to overcome my weaknesses. (P7B)
	Focus is positive; utilise strengths to develop weakness	*Yes, I want to work on my weakness as well; and use my strengths to do that. (P4B)*
		I used to focus on my weaknesses, and now I have changed in perception about who I am, what I can do and I see others different. This course has definitely changed my perception to being more positive. (P4B)
Self-awareness	Self-acceptance	*...it is a revelation to know what I am good at and to focus on this to make a success. (P6A)*
		The skills will help me be true to myself... (P7B)
	Self-confidence	*I know that I do not have to compare myself to others, because what I have will help me with my work. I feel calmer in my own skin, and what comes next will not shake me, because I know who I am. (P5B)*
		What I have will make a success without trying to be like someone else... (P6B)
	Increased insight in own and others' behaviour	*I used to be selfish, but to have become self-aware made me realize more empathy for other people; I can hear their weaknesses and strengths.(P3B)*
		In training you have to be aware of what you know and how you act; you cannot tell someone to do things you are not willing to do yourself, it is important to know how you act otherwise they will not listen to you. (P3A)

As with the pre-test, the participants indicated that having the ability to relate to others is important for HR practitioners *(human relations)*. However, the participants clearly indicated that utilising their strengths will assist them to relate better to others, while one participant indicated that it will assist him to accept those whom he works with. The participants further agreed that knowing their strengths will assist them to choose their tasks better, perform better in their tasks and adapt to different situations:

> *'the skill will help me to choose which tasks I sign up for...'(P7B)*

A second theme that most participants indicated related to *identifying their strengths*. The participants indicated that they were now able to not only identify and develop their own strengths, but also those of the employees they assist.

> *'To know your strengths is key to work effective with employees and to become successful. It is important to build on your strengths and to practice so that you can help other people with their strengths'. (P1B)*

There was also a strong indication that the participants would be more inclined to use their strengths to address their weaknesses which they are now more aware of.

> *'I can use my strengths to work around my weakness, and to strengthen my weakness that may become strengths'. (P1B)*

A next theme related to being more *self-aware*. The participants indicated that knowing their strengths and weaknesses led to self-acceptance.

> *'I know that I do not have to compare myself to others, because what I have will help me with my work. I feel calmer in my own skin, and what comes next will not shake me, because I know who I am'. (P5B)*

The participants indicated that there was increased self-confidence and a sense of being true to him-/her-self.

> *'I feel that this course was a self-discovery, we should spend more time on practical issues after we discovered our strengths...'. (P3A)*

Another theme that emanated related to the participants showing more insight into their own and others' behaviour. Being aware of showing empathy and understanding for others' behaviour was noted, as well as how to approach employees in the workplace.

Next, the post-post-test experiences are reported. During the post-post test, the majority of the themes were the same as with the post-test focus group. Three new themes were identified from the data, namely, a sense of empowerment, increased locus of control and resilience. The themes are reported in Table 8.

Table 8

Post-post-test focus group findings

Theme	Meaning	Response
Human relations	Strengths helps to relate and accept others	You work with so many people at a company; you must be able to connect them to ensure they can work together. You will make it work if you can identify their strengths. Working with your strengths, and being able to facilitate is already a step in the right direction. (P3*)
		You should be able to know people, and all people are different from one another; so you must come across in such a way for people to understand you. These skills will be important for you to be able to understand others.(P6)
Identify strengths	Ability to identify and develop own and others' strengths	You can learn more about yourself if you know what your strengths are. (P9)
		You can make a lot of things your own because you can use your own strengths in problem areas and then certain task requires strengths. When you see it you know that a piece om me is going into this work, so you are going to be motivated to do it. (P5)
	Focus is positive; utilise strengths to develop weaknesses	Being aware of your strengths, will also make you aware that this is your interpersonal strength. Being genuine, can be used to convince people to do work. Yes, it is very important to know that strengths are a tool of interpersonal skills. You should use these skills, and motivate others in your organization to function well. (P1)

		Back to how you can develop yourself; it will help you to work on your weaknesses. It is not necessary to cover your weaknesses, rather to improve your weaknesses. (P2)
Self-awareness	Empowered/ Self-acceptance	Being aware of your strengths and weaknesses makes you feel more empowered and this come down to personal development. Why would you not want people in your company want to feel the same?(P7)
		It is important to know yourself, to strengthen yourself in order to help others; by identifying their strengths and weaknesses in order to help them. To strengthen yourself you can work on you weaknesses, not cover them, but to work around them to improve. (P9)
	Self-confidence	You can make a lot of things your own because you can use your own strengths in problem areas and then certain task requires strengths. When you see it you know that a piece of me is going into this work. (P7)
		I am not just going to make an impact I am going to make a difference because I know what difference I can make. (P2)
	Increased insight in own and others' behaviour	Many people who do not know their interpersonal strengths might be insecure; they do not trust themselves, because they are not self-aware. (P2)
		To identify strengths and to learn more about people. Like to be aware of other people. (P4)
	Locus of control/ Responsibility	It is important to know how you impact other people. (P3)
		It all starts with you (yourself). If your foundations are right, and you know who you are and what you stand for. If you not know and understand yourself, situations will affect you negatively. (P4)
		It's very important to a sense like you said you need to learn yourself and do your job with geniuses it start with yourself, it's a personal thing. (P1)
	Resilience	It also enhances resilience, because you use your strengths to bounce back from any setback. You will always be able to make new plans and think of new ways to come back and solve problems. Circumstances will still affect you, but to know yourself will enable you to handle the situation. (P6)

* Only one focus group was held during the post-post test (since membership was voluntarily)

From Table 8 as with the pre-and post-test, the participants indicated that using their strengths to assist them with the ability to relate to others is important for HR practitioners *(human relations)*.

> *'Yes, it is like a car; your employees are the car and you are the engine. You must ensure that everything runs smooth, and that the car is driven forward. It is important for them to know how important they are, they are your driving force'. (P8)*

Participants clearly indicated increased knowledge on the ability to *identify* their *own and others' strengths and weaknesses*:

> *'It is important to know yourself, to develop yourself in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses in order to help others. (P5)*

The participants indicated that their focus on strengths related to utilising their strengths to develop their own, and others weaknesses. The second theme related to *self-awareness*. As in the pre-test, the participants reported on increased self-awareness, however in the post-post-test there was a sense of empowerment:

> *'I got the knowledge now to apply my strengths while previously I was unsure'. (P9)*

A part of being more aware of themselves resulted in increased self-confidence:

> *'I am more confident because I am a lot more comfortable with my strengths Previously I knew I had them but I never really knew they carried me. Now I can see how much they carry me and that makes me a lot more comfortable and a lot more confident that I use to because I know I am going in the right direction'. (P6)*

Another theme related to the participants showing more insight into their own and others' behaviour. The participants managed to connect their strengths with the facilitation skills:

> *'Yes, you can use facilitation skills to communicate to a person and actually to help them to get to know themselves. If you want to facilitate someone you must sit and listen to that person, what is their problem, what do you want them to develop. You must make them feel that there are the important one and you are there to help them'. (P2)*

A new theme in the post-post test related to their responsibility as practitioners working with people as well as an awareness of their locus of control:

'Strengths are sometimes used to negatively affect someone else. It may be when strength is to dominantly applied without taking the situation in consideration…' (P9)

Lastly, the participants reported in the post-post-test that they felt more resilient, having the ability to recover from setbacks by using their strengths. This was a new theme that was not noted in the pre/post-test.

Discussion

Outline of the findings

The general objective of this study was to evaluate a strength-based facilitation skills training programme for post graduate students in Human Resource Sciences. The results mainly indicated that utilising strengths assisted the participants to; relate better to others, choose and perform better in tasks, adapt to different situations, and assist in identifying and develop their own and others' strengths. There was also a strong indication that the participants would be more inclined to use their strengths to address their weaknesses after the training was received. Finally the findings indicated that awareness of strengths led to self-acceptance, increased self-confidence, increased resilience and locus of control, with a sense of being more authentic.

The results are discussed next by referring to the specific objectives as set for this study.

The *first objective* was to conceptualise facilitation and strengths from literature. Literature indicated that facilitation is an important skill for all HR practitioners to empower employees and to create change that is lasting and transferable to the workplace (Cilliers, 2000; Weaver & Farrell, 1997). A working definition was obtained from literature of facilitation for this study. This refers to the providing of opportunities to acquire learning, and learning about the self, own behaviour and behavioural change in order to develop the self. Participants learned to enhance interpersonal relationships and teamwork in such a matter that they take responsibility for their own actions in order to face challenges in a constructive manner, and to help them achieve goals (Cilliers, 1996, 2000; Corey, 2009; Gordon, 1994; Rothmann & Van Aardt, 2002).

An effective facilitator shows competency in intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal effectiveness (Cilliers, 2000). Intrapersonal awareness consists of a person's intrapersonal ability to be aware of feelings, to understand own strengths and weaknesses and to express feelings and thoughts non-destructively (Bar-On, 2006). The development of intrapersonal skills is imperative and seen as the fundamental drivers of interpersonal skills (Kubica & LaForest, 2014). When people become aware of their talents and strengths, they are in the position to know what their potential is and will be able to integrate skills and knowledge with their talents in order to develop their strengths (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Each person's talents are enduring and unique, and each person's greatest room for growth is in the area of his or her greatest strength (Buckingham & Clifton, 2005; Passarelli, *et al*., 2010; Roberts, *et al.,* 2005).

The strength-based approach is abundance-based and solution driven that enhances intrapersonal awareness and psychological wellbeing by valuing and utilising one's own strengths (Guse, 2010; Linley & Harrington, 2005). A working definition of strength for this study is viewed as a consistent, pre-existing capacity to perform in an authentic manner leading to optimal functioning, ultimately creating energy and enhanced intrapersonal awareness and well-being in a person.

The *second objective* of the study was to determine the effects of a strength-based facilitation skills training programme for HR post-graduate students of a tertiary institution. Two sets of results were used to address this objective. Firstly the results from the PGIS-II showed that there was no statistical significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test for both the

experimental and control group. The results for the control group were satisfactory due to the control group not being exposed to the training program. The result for the experimental group was however disappointing for not yielding statistical significance. One of the reasons could be that the post-test was conducted only one week after the survey was completed. Students might have remembered the questions, or could not differentiate between differences in opinion, perception or thoughts between the pre-test and the time the intervention was completed. Another reason may be that the PGIS-II was not the best measure to utilise to indicate the growth in the participants. The PGIS measures the individual's active and intentional involvement in changing and developing as a person (Robitschek, 1999). It could be that the students focussed on identifying their own strengths which was not so much a change-process taking place, which could intentionally start at this point forward.

Secondly, findings were obtained by facilitating three focus group sessions, the pre-test, post-test and post-post-test with the experimental group.

Pre-test findings

It was interesting to notice that during the pre-test the participants made an effort to define strength based skills in order to make sense of the topic (this was not so in the post or post-post-test). The first theme that emerged during the pre-test related to having specific skills, such as communication and leadership skills in order to assist employees. This finding is in accordance with literature highlighting communication skills, leadership, negotiation skills and facilitation skills as important for graduating HR students from tertiary institutes who enter the workplace (Hansen, 2002; Kaufman, 1999). Secondly, the participants indicated that identifying and understanding emotions seems to be a skill that the HR practitioner who functions from a strength-based perspective should have. This finding is in accordance to Bar-on (2006), who stipulated that self-awareness or intrapersonal awareness consists of a person's intrapersonal ability to be aware of feelings, to understand own strengths and weaknesses and to express feelings and thoughts non-destructively. The participants reported that knowing where their boundaries are when assisting employees seems to relate to strength based skills. The participants referred to ethical behaviour for HR practitioners, by knowing when and how to refer clients. This behaviour is highlighted by the South African Board of People Practices (SABPP), which aims to enhance ethical values, integrity, and competence of HR professional

in South Africa. The integrity of board members is guided by honesty, consistency of action, fairness in judgement, and objectivity, with respect of human dignity and rights (Nel *et al*., 2011). Next, the participants mentioned that identifying and knowing their own strengths is important. The students however found it difficult to elaborate on the topic of strengths, the effects of utilising a strengths-approach, and the value of intrapersonal awareness to the effectiveness of an HR practitioner or facilitating process. An effort was therefore made to define the topic so as to create structure during the discussion. Since the population group of the study is students, one would expect them to make sense of an unrelated topic in an academic manner. The participants reported that remaining neutral in a facilitative relationship is part of a strength based approach, and that professional knowledge is important to have as a foundation. This finding relates to the content of the first semester module on facilitation clearly indicating that the students were cognisant of the academic definition for facilitation.

Post-test findings

During the post-test it was evident that apart from being less inclined to seek structure and define the topic at hand, the participants felt energised, being motivated to use their strengths for development. The first theme that emerged during the post-test focus group is the ability to relate to others *(human relations)*. The finding is congruent with literature stating that the interpersonal effectiveness of the facilitator greatly relies on the ability to be authentic and to form effective relationships (Jenkins & Jenkins, 2006; Ringer, 2002). The participants indicated that they were now able to not only identify and develop their own strengths, but also those of the employees they assist. This finding is in accordance with studies from Hodges and Clifton (2004) and Passarelli. *et al.* (2010) who indicated that focus on developing strengths is associated with greater personal growth, and increased focus on opportunities for personal development. The finding further correlates with the suggestion of Guse (2010), that a strengths approach should be applied to the training of post-graduate psychology students by focussing on their unique psychological strengths in order to develop an awareness of their own strengths while being aware of identifying the strengths of their clients.

The students further reported that they were more inclined to use their strengths to address their weaknesses, of which they were now more aware. The finding is in line with the principles of

strength based development which states that each person's greatest room for growth is in the area of his or her greatest strength, rather to build a life around strengths, and manage around weaknesses (Buckingham & Clifton, 2005; Clifton & Harter, 2003, Passarelli *et al*., 2010; Roberts *et al.,* 2005).

The findings further showed that the participants indicated that knowing their strengths and weaknesses led to self-acceptance, increased self-confidence and a sense of being true or authentic. This is in accordance with literature which states that by focussing on strengths an increased sense of authenticity and enthusiasm for taking action can be expected (Elston & Boniwell, 2011). Peterson and Seligman (2004) indicate that by utilising strengths individuals experience a sense of self, identity and authenticity, which could also clearly be seen in this theme of the post-test.

The participants lastly showed more insight into their own and others' behaviour. By being self-aware, participants showed increased empathy and understanding for others' behaviour. The finding is in accordance with the study of Passarelli. *et al.* (2010) who reported that the strengths approach added value by enhancing personal relationships at work, with enhanced levels of self-respect and respect of others (Guse, 2010). Increased self-awareness means that a person grows personally towards becoming a fully functioning individual), while in a process of constant growth by being constructively interactive with his/her surroundings (Robitschek, 1999; Patterson & Welfel, 1994; Rogers, 1985).

Since the quantitative data did not yield significant results, the researcher decided to facilitate a post-post test focus group session in order to determine the long term effect of the training programme.

Post-post-test findings

The themes obtained from the post-post test focus group discussion mostly correlated with those of the post-test focus group. To summarise, the similarity between the two groups indicated the following themes: (1) identify and develop own strengths, (2) identify and develop the strengths of others, (3) utilise strengths to develop weaknesses, (4) self-awareness (increased self-acceptance, increased confidence & sense of being authentic), (5) strengths

assist with being more focussed at work, (6) increased insight in own and others' behaviour (intrapersonal awareness). However three new themes were identified; empowerment increased locus of control and resilience.

A theme that seemed to link with being more self-aware is an increased sense of self-acceptance, confidence and empowerment. This finding is in accordance with previous research that indicates enhanced reported confidence in college students who participated in a strength-based intervention (Hodges & Clifton, 2004). Linley and Harrington (2006) found similar results, indicating that people feel good about themselves and are better able to achieve goals and work harder toward fulfilling their potential, when they use their strengths. Further research indicated that people who use their strengths have displayed higher levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, vitality, and being more effective in their development over time (Govindji & Linley, 2007; Linley, *et al.*, 2010; Proctor, *et al.*, 2011).

Lastly, the participants reported in the post-post group that they felt more resilient, having the ability to recover from setbacks by using their strengths. This was a new theme that was not noted in the pre or the post-test. The finding is congruent with literature, stating that the strengths and the use of strengths are related to subjective well-being and satisfaction with life, with strength acting as a buffer against negative outcomes in life (Proctor, *et al.*, 2010).

From the findings it seems from a qualitative perspective that the strength-based facilitations skills programme yielded positive results.

Practical implications

The practical implications of this study relate to the advantage the HR practitioner would have by being aware of his/her strengths. By focussing on strengths the human capital in the workplace will be more empowered, with the advantage of increased productivity and performance in organisations. By being intrapersonally aware, the HR practitioner as facilitator personally grows and changes cognitively, affectively and behaviourally. The HR practitioner therefore shows the ability to be aware of feelings, to understand their own and others' strengths and weaknesses and to express feelings and thoughts non-destructively. The practical implication is to contribute to the effectiveness and performance of the HR practitioner who has a direct impact on the performance of employees in the organisation.

Secondly, the findings in this study contributed toward shaping the training and development of HR post-graduate training programmes by focussing on strength-based development. It is important to focus on the growth and development of HR practitioners from an early onset, since it is their tasks inherently to relate and work with employees and directly so to their training and development.

Limitations and recommendations

Regardless of the positive results of the study, there were various limitations. Firstly, a clear limitation of this study was the quantitative measure PGIS-II that did not yield the expected results. A measuring instrument that is better suited for a pre-test-post-test comparison study could be the Strength spotting Scale (Linley, *et al*., 2010). The Strength spotting Scale is a self-assessment tool that measures the ability, reaction, motivation, application, and frequency of a coach (facilitator) on identifying strengths (Linley, *et al*., 2010). Another option would have been to have presented the training programme over a longer period of time (such as 7 days) with more practical sessions and then to use the PGIS-II in order to determine whether the students' showed active and intentional involvement in changing and developing as a person. A second limitation was the population group of only one tertiary institute that mostly consisted of Caucasian, Afrikaans speaking participants. The population group consisted of a small sample group, and results can therefore not be generalised to a larger population group.

The *third objective* of this study was to make recommendations for future training of HR post graduate students in strengths-based facilitation skills (also viewed as practical implications). The findings from this study imply that it could be of value for HR practitioners to receive training in a strength-based facilitation skills programme. A strengths-based approach to education is a viewpoint of teaching and learning principles which focus on the positive aspects of student effort and strengths (Lopez & Louis, 2009). It is clear from the available literature that the workplace could benefit from HR practitioners who resultantly would perform their tasks from a strength-based approach. The end-result is a workforce that is more engaged (Buckingham, 2006), less absent, that shows increased well-being, self-awareness, and satisfaction with life (Guse, 2010). Literature shows that gaps exist between skills (such as: facilitation, communication, leadership, negotiation), knowledge of organisational dynamics, and strategic understanding of HR between what the workforce require and the actual skills

tertiary programmes deliver (Johnson & King, 2002; Kaufman, 1999). It was found that the skills of HR post-graduate student's practitioners increased during the facilitation training programme by focussing on strengths. The approach to training will result in HR post-graduates being better prepared for the actual demand of the workplace. Therefore training in facilitation skills should be presented from a strength perspective for students to be aware of their own optimal functioning, displayed through effective skills.

The *fourth objective* was to make recommendations for future research in a strength-based facilitation skills training programme for human resource sciences. Although this study measured the findings of three focus groups (pre-, post-test and post-post-test) with a time interval of one month, the first recommendation would be to conduct a similar study with a longitudinal design. This enables a researcher to examine changes in variables (participants' strengths) over an extended period; therefore the causal link is strong (Botma, Greeff, Mulaudzi, & Wright, 2010). Since the SABPP indicates facilitation skills as a core competency for HR science, it is thus recommended that a similar study be conducted amongst HR managers and practitioners, using a longitudinal design (Meyer, 2012). Similarly it is also recommended that a similar study be conducted among other tertiary institute's' HR students, to determine whether these skills are beneficial to them as well, also including a more diverse sample group.

Conclusion

Therefore it can be concluded that by increasing priority skills in the HR function in such a way as suggested in this study, HR science is more prepared to address the seriousness of skills development in the country (Zuma, 2014). Stimulating specialist skills (such as strength-based facilitation skills) within the HR function ultimately results in an effort to address the outcomes of the Human Resource Development Strategy of South Africa (HRDSA).

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CHAPTER 3

Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

Chapter 3 consists of conclusions from the research article. These conclusions are drawn from the literature review and the empirical study in accordance to the study's research objectives. The limitations of the research are discussed, followed by recommendations for future research.

3.1 Conclusions

The general objective of this study was to evaluate a strengths-based facilitation skills training programme for post graduate students in Human Resource Sciences. It can be concluded that a strength-based facilitation training programme resulted in the participants being made aware of their strengths and how to utilise these, for example: a clearer focus on how to relate to others and to adapt in different situations. The programme further resulted in the participants being able to identify and develop their own as well as others strengths and by doing so addressing weaknesses as well. The training programme resulted in participants showing enhanced self-acceptance, self-confidence, resilience and locus of control.

Specific objective 1: To conceptualise facilitation and strengths from literature

Next facilitation and strengths are conceptualised from literature.

Facilitation

Facilitation can be viewed as an important skill for HR practitioners to have in order to assist and develop human capital (see Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, & Younger, 2007). The South African Board of People Practices (SABPP) listed facilitation skills (interpersonal and communication skills) as one of the core competencies for the HR science (Meyer, 2012). Facilitation can be viewed as a process where self-actualisation tendency is stimulated (Rothmann, 1996). Self-actualisation entails an understanding of intra-and interpersonal characteristics. During a facilitation process the intra-and interpersonal awareness of an HR practitioner has a direct influence of the growth and development of employees (see Cilliers, 2000). According to Bar-on (2006), intrapersonal awareness consists of a person's

intrapersonal awareness of feelings, as well as an understanding of strengths and weaknesses. Interpersonal effectiveness relates to the core dimensions of respect, empathy, genuineness, and concreteness which are applied when utilising micro-skills (listening, reflecting, etc.) (see Cilliers, 2000; Ivey, 2013). Finally effective facilitation skills refer to the ability to improve teamwork and enhance the learning experience of the employees.

Strengths

A working definition of strength for this study is viewed as a consistent, pre-existing capacity to perform in an authentic manner leading to optimal functioning, ultimately creating energy and enhanced intrapersonal awareness and well-being in a person. The strength-based approach falls within the positive psychology domain, aiming at developing employees (see Jonker, 2009). An ultimate result of developing employees through strength usage is higher levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and well-being (see Govindji & Linley, 2007). There is a strong indication in literature that a strength-based approach in the workplace leads to a higher engaged, confident, and more productive human capital.

Specific objective 2: Evaluate the effects of a strength-based facilitation skills training programme in facilitation skills for HR post-graduate students.

The following figure provides an overview of the main themes obtained from the findings which were obtained to address the second objective of the study:
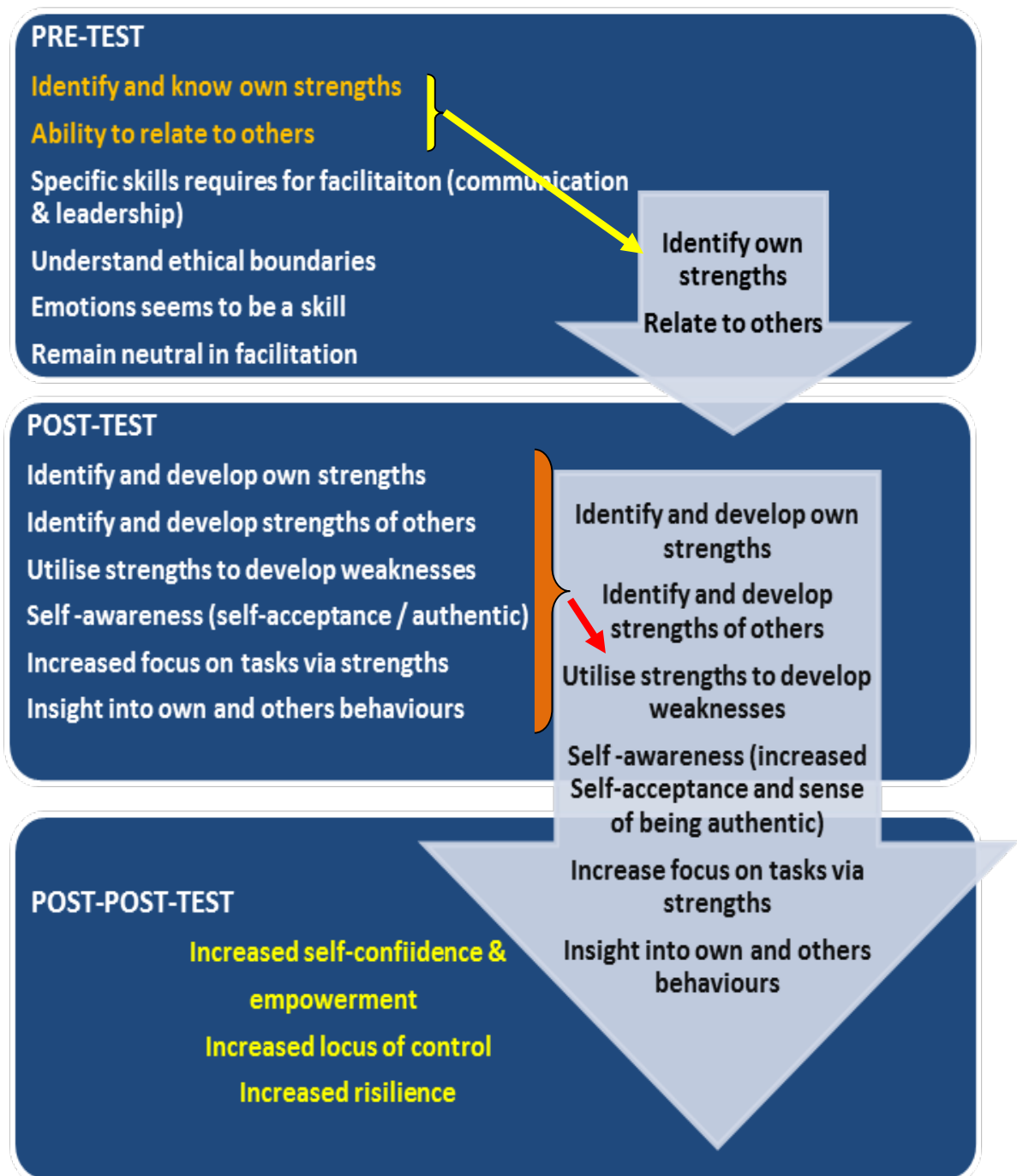
Figure 1: An illustration of the qualitative impressions of the study.

The three groups' findings are linked with the arrows, thereby indicating shared themes. From the figure it is clear that identifying and to know one's strength is a theme that was reported during all the focus groups. The two themes that emerged in the post-test were, to relate to others (in context of being more aware of others) and being more self-aware through the knowledge of strengths. This already indicates that the perceptions and thoughts have

developed from the pre-test to the post-test. The importance of being self-aware was not only mentioned, but the participants also elaborated and personalised strengths and strength identification in order to utilise their own strength and the strengths of those they assist. From the pre-test to the post-test the following new themes were further reported, using of strengths to develop weaknesses, self-awareness (increased self-acceptance, increased confidence, and a sense of being authentic), the fact that using strengths assist with being more focussed at work, and increased insight in own and others' behaviour.

Lastly, the post-post test showed three new themes, namely increased self-confidence and empowerment, increased locus of control, and increased resilience. It can be concluded that the strength-based facilitation training programme was successful in its endeavour to improve the facilitation skills of the HR post-graduate students by focussing on a strengths-based approach. The programme assisted in identifying, developing and utilising the unique strengths of the participants during the training programme. The acquired intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal effectiveness will enable the HR post-graduate student to enter the workforce better skilled and prepared that before the training programme. The skills gap has narrowed in terms of newly acquired intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal skills. Thereby, hopefully, the HR post-graduate students will be able to add greater value to their organisations.

The third objective will be discussed in the recommendations section 3.3.

3.2 Limitations

This study was not without limitations; a first limitation clearly is that the PGIS-II was not the best measure for this type of study. Firstly, it should be considered to either increase the length of the training programme in order to ensure that growth take place, or another measuring instrument could be considered. The Strengthspotting Scale of Linley would a better option for developing the strengths in the participants (Linley. et al., 2010). The second limitation is that the population of only one tertiary institute was included; measuring and analysis data on a specific group, and as result the findings cannot be generalised across the rest of South Africa. The sample consisted of 36 participants that consisted of 75% Caucasian, Afrikaans-speaking participants, with only three Africans, and six Coloured participants. This implies that the results of the study could not be generalised to other cultural or ethnic groups. A language

barrier could have acted as a limitation during the interviews due to the fact not all of the interviews were conducted in participant's first language.

Qualitative data collection depends on the participant's willingness to participate in the study; it may be that participants did not feel comfortable to answer truthfully or not to participate on certain topics of strengths or weakness, and facilitation due to feeling uncomfortable. A verbatim tape recorder was used during focus groups with permission from the participants; this may however have had an effect on the willingness of participation of the group session.

3.3 Recommendations

3.3.1. Recommendations for practice

The *third objective* was to make recommendations for future training of HR post-graduate students in strength-based facilitation skills. The first recommendation for future training of HR post-graduate students is to include strengths in their curriculum. The identification and development of strengths during the short period resulted in findings that confirm literature regarding the personal development of students to be better skilled and prepared to enter the workforce than before the training programme was presented. The feedback from the participants was that being aware of their strengths and utilising their strengths resulted in them to relate and accept others, identify and develop own strengths, identify and develop strengths of others, utilise strengths to develop weaknesses, increase their self-awareness, and enable them to be more focused on tasks by tapping into strengths. The students reported higher self-acceptance, higher self-confidence and locus of control. The above outcomes of the strength-based approach enhanced the skill-set required for an HR practitioner to be effective at facilitation.

The strength- approach established greater personal development and direction to the participant's behaviour. The participants also reported that they are more adaptable to change which would enhance credibility when the HR post-graduate fulfils the role of a change champion in an organisation (Ulrich, 2014). The participants reported that having effective facilitation skills is important since HR practitioners have to have the ability to relate to others

(human relations); being authentic enhance relationships and consequently the effectiveness of teams in an organisation.

Students will benefit from training in written and communication skills (such as presenting), leadership skills, communication skills, negotiation skills, knowledge of organisational dynamics, and strategic understanding of HR, and decision making (Hansen, 2002; Kaufman, 1999). The students specifically reported the importance of communication skills, listening, and relation to others as a gateway to gain understanding of others differences and needs. This entails that interpersonal skills (respect, empathy, genuineness, and concreteness) (Cilliers, 2000), and micro-skills (such as questioning, minimum encouragement, paraphrasing, clarifying, reflecting, summarising, and to give information) (Ivey, 2013) should be included in the training of HR post-graduate students. This will help them to relate to others, identify problems by picking up clues from what people say and how they say it, and as one person reported; to identify the issue the person doesn't say. The students further noted that having a foundation of professional knowledge such as psychology or a course in counselling is important during their education.

Participants mostly reported that the curriculum should be more practical in application in order for them to be better prepared to enter the workplace. The participants reported that the curriculum should be more balanced, moving away from the majority theoretical knowledge.
It is therefore important that students are equipped with both adequate theoretical knowledge and practical skills that act as supplements to the knowledge and skills necessary to be competent professionals (Corey, 2009). A practical application of exposure to the implementation of facilitation should also form part of future training. Organisations who implement facilitation effectively can expect positive results in areas such as organisational transformation, leadership, team building, empowerment, solving issues that were deemed impossible, evoking democracy, conflict resolution, and personal effectiveness (Morgen, 2009).

3.3.2. Recommendations for future research

The *fourth objective* was to make recommendations for future research in strengths-based facilitation skills training programmes for post graduate students in Human Resource Sciences. The first recommendation would be to conduct a similar study for HR post-graduate students

over a longer period in order to establish the long term value and development. A longitudinal study should enhance the learning and make available more practical opportunities to establish the new learned skills into learned behaviour that is transparent from situation to situation. A further study could also facilitate focus groups with the control group as well in order to explore the findings in comparison with the experimental groups' impressions.

The next recommendation will be to enlarge the population sizes to include a wider representation of the HR field. A sample size that included HR practitioners and managers may add to the value of the study and application to the workplace.

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