



Exploring the experiences of a character strengths training programme on group work among post-graduate Industrial Psychology students

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Mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Masters of Commerce in Industrial Psychology* at the North West University

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COMMENTS

The reader is reminded of the following:

- The American Psychological Association (APA) reference and editorial format, which is prescribed by the publication manual (6th edition), was use in this dissertation. This practice is in line with the policy of the Industrial Psychology programme of the North-West University (Potchefstroom) to use the APA guidelines and writing style in all scientific documents as from January 1999.
- The mini-dissertation is submitted in the form of a research article (chapter 2), with chapters 1 and 3 being the introduction and conclusion of the study. The editorial style specified by the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology (which agrees largely with the APA style) is used, but the APA guidelines were followed in constructing tables.

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DECLARATION

I, Hanri Landers, hereby declare that this mini-dissertation entitled “Exploring the experiences of a character strengths training programme on group work amongst post-graduate industrial psychology students”, is my own work and that the views and opinions expressed in this work are those of the author and relevant literature references as shown in the references.

I further declare that the content of this research will not be handed in for any other qualification at any other tertiary institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hanri Landers', written in a cursive style.

Hanri Landers

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I hereby confirm that the MCOM mini-dissertation (exploring the experiences of a character-strength training programme on group work amongst post-graduate Industrial-organisational Psychology students) by Ms H Landers (student no: 22 702 547) was edited and groomed to the best of my ability, excluding the list of references. This, however, included recommendations to improve the language and logical structure, guide the line of argument as well as to enhance the presentation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	ix
Summary	x
Opsomming	xi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1. Introduction	2
1.1. Problem statement	2
1.2. Expected contribution of the study	7
1.3. Research objectives	7
1.3.1. General objectives	8
1.3.2. Specific objectives	8
1.4. Research design	8
1.4.1. Research approach	8
1.4.2. Research strategy	9
1.4.3. Research method	10
1.4.3.1. Literature review	10
1.4.3.2. Research Setting	10
1.4.3.3. Entrée and establishing researcher roles	11
1.4.3.4. Sampling	12
1.4.3.5. Data collection methods	12
1.4.3.6. Data recording	13
1.4.3.7. Data analysis	14
1.4.3.8. Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity	14
1.4.3.9. Reporting style	16
1.4.3.10. Ethical considerations	16
1.5. Chapter division	18
1.6. Chapter summary	18
References	19

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH ARTICLE	23
CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	81
3.1 Conclusions	81
3.2 Limitations	93
3.3 Recommendations	94
References	97

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Description	Page
Table 1	Characteristics of the participants	36
Table 2	Character strengths defined	42
Table 3	Character-strength training programme	44
Table 4	Group dynamics	47
Table 5	Self-awareness	54
Table 6	Benefits and limitations of a character-strength training	58
Table 7	Recommendations	62

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Description	Page
Figure 1	Overview of categories	41
Figure 2	Overview of the categories and main themes	80
Figure 3	The conceptualisation of character strengths	82
Figure 4	Illustration the content and methodology of training programme	84
Figure 5	Illustration the content and methodology of adapted programme	85
Figure 6	Illustration of the group dynamic themes and subthemes	87
Figure 7	Illustration of the self-awareness themes and subthemes	89
Figure 8	Illustration of the benefits and limitations	90
Figure 9	Illustration of the recommendations and suggestions	93

SUMMARY

Title: Exploring the experiences of a character strengths training programme on group work amongst post-graduate Industrial Psychology students.

Key words: Character strengths, group dynamics, group work, Industrial-organisational Psychology, intrapersonal, interpersonal relationships and self-awareness.

To compete in the global market, organisations need employees who are current, creative, flexible, adaptable and resilient. Industrial Psychologists are responsible to keep these employees motivated, focused and healthy throughout situational challenges they encounter daily within the world of work. Due to the nature of employee's demands, team-based work entities are encouraged to ensure an organisation's success within the global markets. Therefore, tertiary educational facilities also are encouraged to implement group work within their syllabus to prepare students with the needed 'soft' skills to cope effectively in a competitive work environment. During group work, students not only gain theory-based education; they also learn from each other and develop the mentioned soft skills. These include sound interpersonal relations, conflict management and registering immediate feedback, which encourages individual development. However, group members are often faced with various challenges, which cause students to be unmotivated, frustrated and concerned about their educational success.

Industrial-organisational psychologists (IOP's) focus on optimising potential and facilitate groups, individuals and ultimately, organisations. These psychologists utilise interventions to develop and train individuals such as students to be competent within the world of work. More importantly, positive-psychological interventions are utilised more in organisational environments. In this regard character strengths imply individual potential as grounded by positive psychology. A character-strength initiative is typically applied to ensure employees' development and wellness.

In the present study, the effects of a character-strength training programme were explored in the context of group work amongst post-graduate IOP's. A qualitative research design was followed during the present research study based on an epistemological assumption. The research employed a case study strategy, more specifically an instrumental case study was used explicitly to help

explain participants experiences. The target population were IOP-post graduate students (N=25). The results indicated that the participants supported the character-strength training programme within group work. They recommended that such a programme should be implemented at the beginning of their academic year as a team-building activity.

The participants further confirmed that utilising character strengths within groups made them aware of their individual strengths as well as those of others. As a result, the participants formed a more meaningful understanding of themselves as well as their group members. This understanding enabled them to communicate effectively, increase self-esteem, develop individually and encourage others to grow within their character strengths. The awareness of character strengths (their own, and that of others) helped them relate more to each other, which created a positive climate within group work. Furthermore, the participants in the project attested that they gained a skill-set which could assist them in various aspects of their academic development as well as their future professional career.

The IOP post-graduate honours students thus found practical and valued significance in a character-strength training programme and recommended that such a programme should be presented during the norming phase of group work. For organisations this implies the induction period of their ‘onboarding’, as teams begin to take shape. Finally, this training programme within group work helped develop individuals and the group by enhancing group members’ individual skill-set. This ultimately will empower these future IOP’s to flourish within the world of work.

OPSOMMING

Onderwerp: Verkenning van nagraadse bedryfsielkundestudente se ervarings van ’n karaktersterkte-opleidingsprogram binne groepwerk

Slutelwoorde: Karaktersterktes, groepdinamika, groepwerk, Bedryfsielkunde, intrapersoonlik, interpersoonlike verhoudings, en selfbewussyn

Organisasies wat in die wêreldmark wil meeding, benodig werknemers wat aktueel, kreatief, toeskietlik en buigbaar is. Bedryfsielkundiges is verantwoordelik daarvoor om hierdie werknemers

gemotiveer, gefokus en gesond te hou te midde van die uitdagings waarvoor hulle daaglik binne die werkomgewing te staan kom. Weens die eise wat aan werknemers gestel word, moedig bestuur spangebbaseerde werk-entiteite aan om die organisasie se sukses binne die globale mark te verseker. Gevolglik word tersiêre opvoedingsinrigtings ook aangemoedig om groepwerk by hulle leerplanne in te sluit. Die doel is om studente voor te berei met die nodige “sagte” vaardighede om doeltreffend binne ’n mededingende werkomgewing te handel. Tydens groepwerk bekom studente nie slegs teoretiesbegronde opvoeding nie; hulle leer ook van mekaar en ontwikkel die genoemde sagte vaardighede. Dit sluit in: gesonde tussenpersoonlike verhoudings; konflikthantering en om dadelik terugvoer te kan opvang, wat individuele ontwikkeling stimuleer. Tog het groeplede dikwels te kampe met verskeie uitdagings wat maak dat studente ongemotiveerd, gefrustreerd en bekommerd oor die sukses van hulle opvoeding raak.

Bedryfsielkundiges is daarop gerig om mense se potensiaal te optimaliseer asook groepe, individue, en uiteindelik organisasies, te fasiliteer. Hierdie sielkundiges benut ingrypings om individue soos studente te leer dat hulle in die werkomgewing bedrewe kan wees. Belangriker, word positiewe-sielkundige-ingrypings binne die organisasie konteks ingespan. In dié verband geld karaktersterktes as individuele potensiaal wat deur positiewe sielkunde begroot is. Gewoonlik word ’n karaktersterkte-inisiatief toegepas om werknemers te help ontwikkel en hulle welsyn te verseker.

Die huidige studie het die uitwerking van ’n karaktersterkte-opleidingsprogram verken binne die konteks van groepwerk onder nagraadse bedryfsielkundestudente. ’n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp is tydens hierdie studie gevolg, wat op ’n epistemologiese veronderstelling gegrond is. Die navorsing het die strategie van gevallestudie gebruik, in besonder ’n instrumentele gevallestudie, om deelnemers se ervarings noukeurig en duidelik te maak. Die teikenpopulasie was nagraadse studente in bedryfs-operasionele sielkunde (N=25). Die resultate het getoon dat deelnemers die karaktersterkte-program binne groepwerk ondersteun. Hulle het voorgestel dat so ’n program aan die begin van hulle akademiese jaar ingestel moet word, as ’n spanbou-aktiwiteit.

Die deelnemers het voorts bevestig dat die gebruik van karaktersterktes binne groepe hulle bewus gemaak het van hulle eie sterkpunte asook dié van ander. Gevolglik kon hulle meer betekenisvolle begrip van hulleself asook hulle groeplede vorm. Hierdie begrip het hulle gehelp om doeltreffend te kommunikeer, hulle selfrespek verhoog, hulle as individue laat groei en hulle kon ander help

om ook kragtens hulle karaktersterktes te groei. Aangesien groeplede van karaktersterktes (hulle eie en ander s'n) bewus geraak het, kon hulle makliker by ander aanklank vind, wat 'n positiewe klimaat binne die groepwerk geskep het. Daarby het die deelnemers aan die projek getuig dat hulle 'n vaardigheidstel bekom het wat hulle handig te pas kan kom in verskillende aspekte van hulle akademiese ontwikkeling en hulle toekomstige professionele loopbaan.

Die studente in Bedryfsielkunde het gevolglik praktiese en waardevolle nut gevind in die opleidingsprogram oor karaktersterktes. Hulle het aanbeveel dat so 'n program gedurende die “normering”-fase van groepwerk ingestel word. Wat organisasies betref, dui dit op die induksietydperk gedurende die inneemfase (assimilasie), wanneer spanne begin vorm aanneem. Ten slotte het hierdie opleidingsprogram gehelp om individue en die groep te ontwikkel deur groeplede se vaardigheidstel te verbeter. Uiteindelik sal dit hierdie toekomstige bedryfsielkundiges bemagtig om binne die werkomgewing te floreer.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

The present research study contributes to behavioural sciences and in particular to the field of Industrial-organisational Psychology. Rooted in positive psychology, this research focused on post-graduate honours students in Industrial-organisational Psychology (IOP). The purpose was to ascertain how these post-grad students experience the impact a character strengths training programme has on group work. This chapter elaborates on the problem statement postulated in the research study and describes the general and specific research objectives. Furthermore, an overview is provided of the research method, design and the division of chapters that follow. Chapter 2 is presented in an article format while chapter 3 draws the conclusions, makes recommendations and discusses limitations of the study.

1.1. Problem statement

Numerous organisations utilise group work to develop and exercise team skills (Volet & Mansfield, 2006). According to McHarg, Kay and Coombes (2012) students who work in small groups increase their ability to learn and retain the information they gather. Consequently, universities implement compulsory group work assignments that create opportunities for learners to develop more than merely theoretical knowledge, but also promote interpersonal and team skills (Volet & Mansfield, 2006). Group work supports cognitive and motivational benefits which is key to academic learning (Kimmel & Volet, 2010).

However, group work may lead to difficulties, which may include: unmotivated peers, communication problems, being incapable of managing a workload, and experiencing group frustration with assignments (Kimmel & Volet, 2010). Such difficulties do not only influence the group's success, but also define the underlying processes or influences of academic achievement (Kouros & Abrami, 2006). However, once individuals are made aware of their talents through interventions, feedback reports, or measuring instruments, they are able to understand and perceive their value or potential (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Once people are aware of their talents, they can utilise their knowledge and skills to develop these strengths (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

Post-graduate Industrial-organisational Psychology students

Post-graduate honours students first complete their bachelor's degree in industrial psychology. Thereafter, they continue to study (Postgraduate, 2017) for an in-depth understanding and application of industrial psychology. The discipline of IOP refers to the study of human behaviour in a work-place or organisational setting (Barkhuizen, Jorgensen & Brink, 2014). In such an environment, psychological principals, skills and knowledge are applied to resolve problems at work (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). According to the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2005), the guidelines for a professional Industrial Psychologist are to plan, apply and develop principles of psychology at work in order to comprehend, alter and improve individual, group and organisational behaviour efficiently. Professional Industrial-organisational psychologists (IOP) take on the role of both practitioner and scientist as they apply the knowledge they acquired through scientific investigation to solve specific work-related problems (Van Zyl, Nel, Stander, & Rothmann, 2016).

Kozlowski and Ilgenour (2006) prove that global markets have flourished since the first decade of the 21st century. Thus, organisations were forced to restructure their working environments into group work or team-based entities (Kozlowski & Ilgenour, 2006). This makes them effective in the sense of being more competitive, flexible and adaptive to unexpected circumstances (Kozlowski & Ilgenour, 2006). More importantly, the design of work has changed from individual 'silos' to an interconnected group-based scheme (Kozlowski & Ilgenour, 2006). As a result, group work has become a focal point for tertiary educational facilities (Payne, Monk-Turner, Smith & Sumter, 2006a). The reason is that tertiary students who engage in group work tend to attain lifelong skills, self-directed learning, communication and teamwork abilities (Kimmel & Volet, 2010).

Thus, it is evident that group-based learning is valued for promoting cognitive and social development as well as encouraging students to contribute their individual skills and abilities to learn from each other, not only from themselves (Kouros & Abrami, 2006).

Group work

The concept of group work refers to two or more members who are united with a shared goal and must interact with one another (Chimiel, Fraccaroli & Sverke, 2017). This helps them complete individual tasks to reach objectives as set out by the group assignment (Chimiel et al., 2017). Group members' perceptions, attitudes and inclination to work within a group-based setting, not only affects the group's dynamic but also determined the success or failure of the group work as such (Li & Campbell, 2008). Empirical studies reveal that group work faces socio-emotional challenges and interpersonal difficulties, in which students perceive the benefits of small-group learning to be unclear (Violet & Mansfield, 2006).

A major challenge faced during group work is interpersonal problems (Heider, 2013). This term describes how group members relate on an inter- and intrapersonal level (Heider, 2013). Interpersonal relationships can be defined as interactions between several, or at least two, people where perspectives are exchanged, experiences shared and expectations formed (Heider, 2013). On the other hand, intrapersonal factors relate to thoughts, conclusions and feelings within the person's mind or self (Intrapersonal, 2017). Accordingly, both inter- and intrapersonal factors entail group dynamics and form a distinctive part of small group processes (Barlow, 2008).

Group dynamics are complex and may negatively impact on productivity, when individuals evolve into 'groupthink' and 'social loafing' (Payne, Youngcourt & Watrous, 2006b). Group dynamics can be described as the universal influential actions, procedures and changes that take place within and between group members (Forsyth, 2014). Once individual group members' strengths are not considered anymore, there is increased cohesiveness, which suppresses individual creativity, innovation, and different viewpoints, thereby ignoring all available sources of information (Payne et al., 2006b). Similarly, social loafing decelerates productivity in the sense that group members believe their individual contributions will not be of value (Payne et al., 2006b). However, self-awareness may increase the group's effectiveness. The reason is that each team member can contribute to the positive individual impact as well as resolve their own personal goals by refocusing it into group-work aims (Druskat, Mount & Sala, 2006).

Chapman, Meuter, Toy, & Wright, (2006) point out that as the students become better acquainted, their group dynamics improve since their communication is more effective. The individuals also maintain a positive attitude towards group work and they project a sense of proudness and ownership about their work (Chapman et al., 2006). As a result, students appear to prefer working in groups, particularly those students who will be faced with future working conditions consisting of teams (McHarg et al., 2012). Character strengths can facilitate group work: “Learning occurs not just within people but among them, and character strengths can facilitate the process” (Park and Peterson, 2009, p. 4).

Training programme

In collaboration with positive psychology, a training programme was implemented to build character strengths. This programme focuses on the identification of positive personal and interpersonal traits (Clifton & Harter, 2003). When these traits are identified it enables individuals to grow emotionally and increase their positive individual experiences (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Once group members begin practicing individual character strengths, it can be perceived that these individuals develop towards their optimal potential (Clifton & Harter, 2003). A strength-based approach is versatile to include any age, at any level of any ability (Park & Peterson, 2009). In this regard, using character strengths to build confidence or enhance self-esteem is essential to ensure individual growth and development (Park & Peterson, 2009). A character-strength needs to be practiced and integrated within an individual’s daily work and personal life, for it to have a significant influence (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Peterson and Park (2006) suggests that there is a need to investigate character strengths’ influence on the connection between productivity and satisfaction at work, to achieve optimal work performance.

Character strengths

Character strengths are conceptualised as the components of good character as a measure to raise awareness of individual differences, which enhance human functioning (Harzer & Ruch, 2012). Good character is of main concern for students, teachers and work colleagues (Park & Peterson, 2009). In this regard, positive psychology emphasises the importance of character strengths as playing a key role in personal and professional development (Park and Peterson, 2009). Park and Peterson (2009) recommend that teachers should give students the opportunity to strengthen their

self-esteem by becoming aware of their individual character strengths. According to prior research, character strengths can influence academic achievement among university students (Park & Peterson 2009). Park and Peterson (2009) found during investigations that students who focus on their individual character strengths were more likely to attain success during their studies. According to Voerman, Korthagen, Meijer and Simons (2014) encouraging the awareness of character strengths enhances continuous growth, even though this introduction occurs in incremental interventions.

Hodges and Clifton (2013) assert that character strengths which are rooted in positive psychology increasingly raise awareness of the matters regarding personal and professional development. This suggestion offers more to professional psychologists, managers and students who share a stance in positive psychology (Hodges & Clifton, 2013). Industrial psychology does not only collaborate with positive psychology, but also contains various academic themes, which can be approached both theoretically and empirically (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010). Therefore, within the field of IOP, new and innovative solutions are necessary to address the difficult challenges and situations presented within an organisation (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010). In this regard, the specific contribution to literature will be the impact of character strengths on group work, a topic, to date which has not been researched thoroughly.

The problem statement mentioned above leads to the following specific research questions:

- How are character strengths conceptualised within the literature?
- What is the content and methodology of a character-strength training programme for post-graduate IOP students.
- How did the population experience group dynamics during group work after the character-strength training programme?
- How did the population experience self-awareness during group work after the character-strength training programme?
- What are the implications for future training of I-O psychology students when planning a character-strengths training programme together with group work?
- Which recommendations can be made for future research and practice?

1.2. EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

1.2.1 Contribution to Industrial-organisational Psychology literature

The notion of character strengths introduces a new element to increase the efficiency of group work. The specific contribution of this research study to literature, was exploring the impact that a character-strength training programme has on group work as a teaching strategy. As mentioned above, to date, there has been a gap in the literature on this topic.

1.2.2 Contribution to the Industrial Psychologist

Employees in the field of industrial psychology are faced daily with team dynamics. In this light, the present research investigated a positive psychology approach, through utilising character strengths in group work. The aim was to assist groups within their own dynamics and provide them tools to help other groups work to their fullest potential. Utilising character strengths does not only provide effective talent management; it also supports individual interest and innovation while working on group activities (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Group work produces increased and continuous learning, which is essential for post-graduate honours students when entering the world of work (Kimmel & Volet, 2010).

1.2.3 Contribution to the individual

This present research highlighted the importance of being aware of individual character strengths. Literature confirms that such strengths improve students' learning and help them cope with group dynamics they may encounter in the work life of a professional Industrial Psychologist (Park & Peterson 2009).

1.3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives can be divided into a general objective and specific objectives

1.3.1 General objective

The general objective of the present study was to explore the impact of a character-strength training programme on group work, as experienced by post-graduate IOP students – who are working on group assignments to prepare them for team dynamics in the workplace.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

The general objective flows into the following specific objectives:

- Conceptualise character strengths as a teaching experience within literature.
- Provide the content and methodology of a character-strength training programme for post-graduate IOP students.
- Report on the experience of the population after the character strengths training programme in accordance to group dynamics during group work.
- Report on the experience of the population after the character strengths training programme in accordance to self-awareness during group work.
- Provide the implications for future training of IOP post-graduate honours students with regards to a character strengths training programme in collaboration with group work.
- Make recommendations for future research and practice.

1.4. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design comprises the research approach, strategy and method of the selected research.

1.4.1. Research approach

The study employed a qualitative research methodology. Such an approach elicits descriptive data that are gathered through written or spoken words as well as documented observed behaviour (Taylor, Bogdan & Marjorie, 2015). Qualitative researchers are concerned with understanding people through various points of view (Taylor et al., 2015). This research requires interpretive approaches and naturalistic observations where the researcher focuses more on understanding, than on explaining (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2011).

The present study was based on an epistemological assumption according to which the participants construct knowledge through a process of self-conscious action (De Vos et al., 2011). This approach is informed by the constructivism paradigm, seeing that the researcher seeks to understand the experiences through the participants' point of view and how each construct his/her own reality (De Vos et al., 2011). Thus, for the present study, participants were involved throughout the process. This helped create awareness among themselves and their reality of the world of work, allowing them to understand and develop their educational field (De Vos et al., 2011). This approach was considered ideal for the present study where the researcher explored the experiences among the postgraduate students – how a training programme aim at raising awareness of character strengths can impact group work.

1.4.2. Research strategy

For the purpose of the present research, a case study strategy was used, primarily to explain the phenomena under investigation. This approach was effective since the researcher was interested in the meaning the participants (post-graduate honours students) attributed to their experiences. Case studies help researchers focus on what can be learnt from a single case (De Vos et al., 2011). A case study research method is described as the multiplicity of perspectives in a specific context (Ritchie & Lewis 2003). This implies exploring individuals' life experiences. Such an approach enables researchers to immerse themselves in the activities of a small group of people (De Vos et al., 2011). When gaining access, the researchers are able to explore patterns, words, and actions that explain the research phenomenon (De Vos et al., 2011).

The present study used an instrumental case study to help explain the mentioned phenomena. The aim of such a case study is to build a theory and generate new knowledge. The instrumental case study can also be used in assessments, which may lead to the development of a new policy (De Vos et al., 2011). Thus, this method implies a detailed investigation of a complex entity or process, which could generate theoretical insight based on an individual's real experience (De Vos et al., 2011). Additionally, an instrumental case study helps the researcher gain knowledge about a specific social problem (De Vos et al., 2011). In the case of the present study, this entailed the experiences of post-grad IOP students.

1.4.3. Research method

The research method consists of the literature review, entrée and establishing of researcher roles. Furthermore, the focus is on sampling, methods to collect and record the data as well as strategies to ensure data quality and integrity. This is followed by discussing ethical considerations, explaining the data analysis and highlighting the reporting style.

1.4.3.1. Literature review

A complete literature review was conducted on the various elements of character strengths and group work. Articles published between 2003 and 2017 that are applicable to the study were accessed through the following databases: APA; PsycArticles; EbscoHost; Emerald; Metacrawler; Proquest; SACat; SAePublications; Science Direct; ProQuest and Nexus.

The following journals were studied that are relevant to the research topic: *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, *Journal of Organization Science*, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*, *Higher education research and development journal* and *the journal of Positive psychology*. Various online books were consulted such as: *American Heritage Dictionary*, *Google Books* and *Research at grass roots*. Keywords used during searches were: character strengths, group dynamics, group work, industrial psychology, intrapersonal, interpersonal relationships, and self-awareness.

1.4.3.2. Research setting

The setting for the present research was a tertiary educational institution. The entire group of post-graduate honours students in Industrial-organisational Psychology (IOP) was invited to partake in the study. A character-strengths training programme was introduced to educate each participant on his/her individual character strengths. The VIA Character Strengths online questionnaire was made available before the training programme began. With permission from the developer of the training programme, positive psychological interventions for the character-strengths were used. This was employed as a reference and guideline to develop the character-strength training programme that is reported in the present research study. The mentioned programme comprises a detailed explanation of each character strength to raise awareness. This is followed by a practical

application of the individuals' character strengths within a group setting. The programme was presented in a conference room, over a two-day period. The conference room is located at the university, which provides excellent lighting, ventilation, safety and eliminates distractions. The facility provided a comfortable, familiar, and interactive environment with the appropriate office furniture and equipment, which helped the participants function optimally.

1.4.3.3. Entrée and establishing researcher roles

The research proposal was firstly submitted and thereafter presented to the faculty of the tertiary institution's Ethics Committee, which approved and gave feedback for the research study to continue. After receiving approval, the researcher gained access to the participants after applying for permission by the Department of Postgraduate Studies. Thereafter, the researcher invited candidates to discuss the probability of character strengths exposure and selected the participants accordingly. The participants were contacted by the appropriate lecturer, after which a scheduled two-day training programme on character strengths was presented by the researcher with guidance from lecturers in the subject field. The data collection commenced on the second day after the training programme during the focus group session. The post-graduate honours students are familiar with the setting on Campus and gained access through their student cards.

The researcher's role within a qualitative design, entails an interpretive approach towards research. Thus, typically the researcher is involved in a continued and concentrated experience with the participants (Creswell, 2014). According to such a qualitative approach, the role of the researcher is primary that of *data-collection instrument*. This means the personal values, biases and expectations should be identified and 'declared' at the beginning of the study (Creswell, 2014). The researcher also took on the role of *investigator* since it was useful and positive to the research setting (Creswell, 2014). During the research procedure, the researcher's role was to make observations, conduct interviews, and gather information that strengthens and supports the research study (Barrett, 2007). In this regard, the researcher acted as *facilitator*, where knowledge, perspective and subjectivity in data acquisition are paramount (Barrett, 2007). After the information was collected and captured, the researcher resumed the role of *data-analyst* and, thereafter acted as *report writer*, compiling a report on the findings.

1.4.3.4. Sampling

The population of the present research was a diverse group of post-graduate honours students in the study field of Industrial Psychology. The specific group of participants were selected based on the active involvement in group activities during this part of their studies, and whether they have received training in character strengths yet. The selection criteria entailed: IOP post-graduate honours students, no exposure to character strengths training, group work experience; and a three-day commitment to the study.

As method to select the participants the study utilised purposive sampling. This form of sampling is commonly used in qualitative research since it is the best suited for identifying and sorting information on the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). This method was chosen since it helped the researcher attain the objectives of the present study, namely targeting a specific group to obtain selective information. Purposive sampling was done by contacting the university and requesting a specific group of students to participate in the focus group discussions.

1.4.3.5. Data collection methods

The method to collect data for the present study was focus groups. This approach can be simplified as group interviews in which participants express their understanding on a given topic by discussing their thoughts and feelings in a group set up (De Vos et al., 2011).

The participants were divided into five focus groups, consisting of five participants each. Participants were asked to discuss the formulated questions and apply the knowledge they acquired during the character-strength training programme. Focus groups were chosen since these are carefully planned discussions with a specific group of participants. This setting helps the researcher obtain particular information on a defined area of interest within a non-threatening and permissive environment (De Vos et al., 2011). In terms of this research strategy, data are collected through group interactions on the topic that a researcher presents. The researcher thus, applies group-facilitation skills to direct the discussions, with the assistant facilitator acting as observer, recorder, consultant and analyst (De Vos et al., 2011). This procedure is the best to collect the optimum data, therefore, it was chosen for the present study.

Prior to the training programme, the participants were asked to turn off electronic devices in order to focus primarily on the programme and, thereafter, the focus group sessions. This limited possible distractions and helped the researcher extract as much data as possible. After the training programme, the participants engaged in group activities implementing character strengths dividing the participants in five focus groups of five participants each. Thereafter, the experiences of the participants were explored through two individual group discussions based on the questions supplied by the researcher. The researcher employed this collection technique to ensure the data were recovered for analysis.

The following questions formed part of the research procedure:

1. How do you define Character Strengths?
2. What influence does a character strength training programme have on group dynamics during group work?
3. How does a character strength training programme affect self-awareness during group work?
4. How will the awareness of individual Character Strengths benefit or discourage group work?
5. Suggest future recommendations for a character strengths training programme focused on group-work amongst IOP post graduate students?

1.4.3.6. Data recording

Notes, recordings, and written information were collected by the researcher and her assistants (De Vos et al., 2011). To conduct a focus group, the researcher and the assistants were prepared mentally to function objective when collecting data (De Vos et al., 2011). Therefore, it was crucial to use recording equipment to ensure no information got influenced or lost during the sessions (De Vos et al., 2011). Throughout the process, the assistants took field notes. This entails as a written account of information the assistants hear, see, experience and think during the collecting of data or reflecting on the recordings (De Vos et al., 2011). The information was transcribed into an Excel sheet for further analysis. Themes, sub themes, and the provided conclusions were subtracted from these Excel sheets. The gathered information was password protected and electronic back-up copies were made to ensure no data were lost.

1.4.3.7. Data analyses

After the information from the focus groups was transcribed and compiled on an Excel spreadsheet, the data were processed through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can be described as the technique to classify, analyse and report themes within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It entails recognising patterns within the data, where the themes evolve to form groups that can be analysed (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). A theme captures an aspect in the data set that is deemed significant. Such a theme also reveals patterns and connections in the data set. Using thematic analysis as a tool is valuable due to its flexibility that helps provide a full and detailed insight of the participant's experience. This method also offers a more convenient form of analysis within various theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

De Vos et al., (2011), provides a guide that outlines seven phases of qualitative data analysis, which was employed in the present study. Firstly, researchers plan the recording of the data. Secondly, the data collection and preliminary analysis follows, which involves two steps: data analysis done in the field, and thereafter away from the field (office approach). Thirdly, the researchers manage the data away from the field by familiarising themselves with the gathered information. This leads to the fourth phase of reading and writing memo's. The fifth phase entails sorting the data into categories and coding the data. In the sixth phase, the emergent understandings are tested and alternative explanations searched. Finally, the researchers interpret and develop typologies. An important aspect of qualitative research is to develop typologies, or systems of categorising, or even using concepts to make sense of the data elicited from the participants (De Vos et al., 2011).

The above-mentioned method was found highly applicable to investigate a character- strengths training programme and explore its impact on group work – features necessary for the present study. This method also helped the researchers remain objective during the process and not let bias opinions cloud their judgment – which was found to be crucial for this study.

1.4.3.8. Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity

De Vos (2011), explains that an efficient researcher has the huge responsibility to deliver quality data. The researcher must take special care when analysing the data and applying the phases of the above-mentioned process (De Vos et al., 2011). According to Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki,

Utriainen, and Kyngäs (2014), the way to quality within a qualitative approach is ensuring trustworthiness. To ensure trustworthiness of data, researchers incorporate the following five criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity (Elo et al., 2014).

Firstly, *credibility* in qualitative research implies the degree to which a subject has been identified and described correctly (Elo et al., 2014). Thus, to assure a credible research study, the researcher desisted personal bias or subjectivity, which means she remained objective throughout the research process (Shenton, 2004).

Secondly, *transferability* entails the extent to which the researchers transfer their current findings between cases (Shenton, 2004). Transferability can be understood as potential extrapolation, which means the findings can be generalised or transferred to other groups or settings (Elo et al., 2014).

Thirdly, the *dependability* refers to the accuracy of the qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). This is assessed by examining how the study is logically completed, designed and reviewed (Shenton, 2004). Thus, dependability entails whether the research study fully explains the theoretical stance, the research method and processes, and whether the fundamental logical structure makes the results dependable (Shenton, 2004). Dependability also refers to the constancy of data across time and various conditions (Elo et al., 2014).

Fourthly, *confirmability* in qualitative research concerns the notion of objectivity (Shenton, 2004). The capability of the findings was confirmed by another researcher who help co-coded the data, ensuring the quality of the data (Shenton, 2004). In the present study the researchers enhanced confirmability by firstly using self-reflection and self-knowledge to ensure they remain impartial and objective throughout the study (Shenton, 2004). Secondly participants' responses were documented accurately by involving a co-coder to interpret the results (Shenton, 2004). According to Elo et al., (2014), confirmability means congruence between various individuals on the relevance, meaning and accuracy of the data.

Finally, *authenticity* entails the extent to which researchers display a range of realities fairly and faithfully (Elo et al., 2014).

1.4.3.9. Reporting

This present research utilised thematic analysis, which entailed recognising patterns in the collected data (Patton, 2002). Pattern recognition can be defined as the ability to observe patterns within seemingly random units of information (Patton, 2002, p. 452). For the present study, this was accomplished by a qualitative reporting style involving themes and subthemes. These themes and subthemes were extracted from the responses recorded during the focus group sessions, which were transcribed into usable information (De Vos et al., 2011). The processed themes and subthemes are presented in the form of tables and results in this research report. The tabulated data are substantiated by excerpts of direct quotations from the information extracted during the focus groups sessions, to make it more understandable. Thereafter, the report used detailed descriptions where clarity and simplicity are depicted, which help the readers relate the results to their own experiences (De Vos et al., 2011).

1.4.3.10. Ethical considerations

(Ethics number: NWU-00084-10-S4-)

A qualitative research study must be conducted on ethical grounds and follow specific considerations due to the nature of the method's investigation (De Vos et al., 2011). Prior to any research, researchers must adhere to the code of ethics. For the present research, the research proposal was submitted to the professional association of the respective field (Creswell, 2014). Thereafter, the research proposal was reviewed by the (IRB) Institutional Review Board. Once permission was acquired, the researcher disclosed the purpose of the study to the participants without coercing them to take part (Creswell, 2014). The participants within a qualitative study environment may have been exposed to several operational issues, which cause ethical problems for the researcher (Creswell, 2014). Thus, the researchers must adhere to certain ethical considerations, namely: voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, consent and being informed about the research objective (De Vos et al., 2011).

Research participants: The selected participants were not deceived or exploited. The researcher respected their right to know all the aspects of the current research proceedings (Creswell, 2014).

No information was collected that could harm the participants in any way, and individuals' cultural orientation was respected throughout the research (Creswell, 2014).

Informed consent: According to Creswell, (2014) this entails a letter containing fundamentals that recognise protection of human rights. The letter may include the following information: identification of the researcher, institution, purpose of the study, as well as level and type of participant involvement. Furthermore, it outlines the risks involved, the confidentiality agreement, assurance of withdrawal at any point or stage of the research (voluntary participation), and finally, the contact information of the researcher for any further information or possible questions (Creswell, 2014).

Applied to the present study: a letter of informed consent was distributed prior to the character-strengths training programme, requesting participants' informed and voluntary consent to partake in the study. The consent form also helped the participants understand why their character strengths were to be made known to the researcher, supervisors and fellow participants. Specific consent was also asked for the use of a tape recorder during the sessions (Creswell, 2014).

Confidentiality: This was also the case in the present study where the researcher maintained this quality throughout the research study. In other words, following Creswell (2014), the researcher did not disclose the names of the participants during the coding and recoding process. Within qualitative research, researchers use aliases for individuals and places to maintain anonymity and protect the participant's identities (Creswell, 2014).

Other ethical considerations: the collected data were utilised for research purposes only. The data were stored safely to ensure confidentiality and respect for each participant's privacy. All questions relating to the study were discussed thoroughly with the participants before the procedure commenced (De Vos et al., 2011).

1.5 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.

1.6. CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 introduced the present study. This included the problem statement, research questions, expected contribution of the study, and research objectives. The research design employed in this research was explained thoroughly, followed by a brief overview of the chapters.

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CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the experiences of a character strengths training programme on group work amongst post-graduate Industrial Psychology students

Orientation: Industrial Psychologists focus on optimising the potential within groups, individuals and organisations. Therefore, they must learn to be self-aware, understand groups and function effectively within group-based entities.

Research purpose: The aim of the present research study was to explore the impact a character-strength training programme has on group work amongst post-graduate honours students in Industrial-organisational Psychology (IOP).

Motivation for the study: The study was undertaken to improve group-based-learning since students are inclined to perceive group work negatively during their post-graduate year in the field of Industrial Psychology.

Research design, approach and method: A qualitative research design together with purposive sampling was utilised for 25 participants. Participants consisted of the post-graduate Industrial Psychology students who participated in the character-strength training programme in the North-West Province. Focus groups and an instrumental case study approach were employed as methods to collect data, which were later transcribed verbatim and processed through thematic analysis.

Main Findings: After the training programme, the results indicated that after the training the students indicated they felt more self-aware, which contributes towards their personal and professional development. Furthermore, the training programme altered their perception of group work and they felt more open towards other's experiences, skills and abilities, they began to understand the reason for group-based-learning and could comprehend its importance within the field of Industrial Psychology. In conclusion, the students suggested that such a training programme should be implemented at the beginning of the year, in the form of a team-building activity, or during the induction period in an organisation.

Practical implications: Industrial Psychologists focus on optimising the potential within groups, individuals and organisations. In these contexts, people's individual character strengths can assist them and others to reach their fullest potential. However, individual character strengths require

continuous practise to ensure increased productivity, as well as effective functioning of the team and organisation.

Contribution/value add: The present research study helped raised individual self-awareness amongst IOP students. In the process, they gained confidence, a different perspective, and a mutual understanding, which fosters a positive attitude towards group work. The research illuminated the importance of group-based learning within the field of IOP, which enables students to implement their required skills within the world of work.

Key words: Character strengths, group dynamics, group work, Industrial-organisational Psychology, intrapersonal, interpersonal relationships, self-awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Rooted in positive psychology, the purpose of the present research study was to explore the experiences of post-graduate honours students in Industrial-organisational Psychology (IOP) concerning the impact of a character-strength training programme on group work. Industrial psychology focuses on optimising potential within groups, individuals, and organisations by applying scientific-based interventions which develop individual and organisational performance (Van Zyl, Nel, Stander & Rothmann, 2016). In this regard, IOP practitioners can be perceived as ‘behavioural specialists’ who investigate the behaviour of individuals, groups and teams within organisational contexts (Van Zyl et al., 2016). Positive psychology explores within the field of human sciences on those strengths which enables individuals to confront challenges, appreciate others and regard daily experiences as meaningful which assists people on a psychological and physical level (Dunn, 2017). Positive psychology is mainly concerned with focusing on an individual’s optimal experience without dismissing the problems they encounter (Park and Peterson, 2008). This relates to positive traits and states identified within the VIA character strengths module introduced by Peterson and Seligman in 2004 (Dunn, 2017). Research regarding positive psychology recommends that there are behavioural steps people can take to change their cognitive and emotional outlooks regarding ongoing experiences (Dunn, 2017).

Tertiary institutions such as universities have implemented various professional programmes that introduce compulsory group assignments providing opportunities for students to develop and exercise team skills (Volet & Mansfield, 2006). Shimazoe and Aldrich (2010) explains co-operative learning as the method of teaching ranging from lecturing groups to group assignments. In these contact sessions, students are encouraged to learn from their own activities and, most importantly, from each other’s experiences and knowledge (Volet & Mansfield, 2006).

According to Peterson and Park (2006) the connection between productivity and satisfaction at work can be complex. Thus, there is a definite need to investigate how individual character strengths can optimise work performance (Peterson & Park, 2006). DeChurch and Mesmer-Magnus (2010) point out that organisations have to operate within teams to solve complex problems efficiently. Team learning is crucial since individuals must learn to work effectively

within teams if organisations were to compete in a continuously changing environment (Decuyper, et al., 2010). Group work presents the opportunity for students to sustain productive interactions and be exposed to collaborative reasoning, which are effective learning methods to enhance their cognitive abilities (Kimmel & Volet, 2010). Furthermore, group work provides the platform for group learning, which enables students to enhance their communication, raise self-awareness and be exposed to self-directed learning (Kimmel & Volet, 2010).

Volet and Mansfield (2006) indicate that students experience interpersonal, socio-emotional and motivational difficulties during group work. This is since group assignments often entail high social demands but deliver limited benefits for effective learning (Volet & Mansfield, 2006). However, Volet and Mansfield (2006) found that students are less motivated to participate in group assignments outside the classroom. The reasons are the lack of direct supervision from an authoritative figure, and that groups are more inclined to divide the work into sub-tasks, which are reassembled and submitted (Volet & Mansfield, 2006). Furthermore, co-operative tasks present motivational and socio-emotional challenges, which hamper students from working effectively within a group, thereby creating uncertainty about their preparedness to work within teams (Volet & Mansfield, 2006). Referring to Guse (2010) positive-psychological research indicates that ‘group well-being’ is key to ensure ‘individual well-being’. Therefore, students need to be exposed to a ‘positive-group experience’ during their professional training, seeing that it benefits their individual well-being (Guse, 2010).

A literature review was done to conceptualise a character-strength training programme as part of group work amongst post-graduate honours students in IOP. Based on this conceptualisation a case study was conducted to investigate the impact of such a programme on group work within the field of Industrial Psychology and establish the relevance of group work within an IOP’s professional work context. Thereafter, the methodology used in the present research are discussed, the findings reported, conclusions drawn, and recommendations made.

Post-graduate honours students of Industrial Psychology

Industrial Psychology refers to the application of scientific-based researched methods and principles of psychology within the workplace to help resolve industry-related problems (Van Zyl

et al., 2016). The profession Industrial psychology within an African context can be referred to as ‘psychological acts’ which are any activity related to an evaluation of mental or behavioural processes or psychological characteristics through the use of psychological methods and measures (De Kock, 2017). An Industrial Psychologists’ role within the South African context can be referred to as “applying the principles of psychology to issues related to the work situation of relatively well-adjusted adults in order to optimise individual, group and organisational well-being and effectiveness” (HPCSA, 2005, Form 244).

I-O Psychology focuses on the studies of human behaviours within workplace settings which include basic personnel functions, psychological processes which underline work behaviour and group processes in the workplace (Riggo, 2018). Van Zyl et al. (2016) explains that Industrial-organisational psychologists (IOP’s) perform required psychometric or other assessments which facilitate individual and group processes to ensure competent and resourceful organisational functioning. Additionally, IOP’s are required to develop and assess intervention programmes to train university students and other professional IOP’s (Van Zyl et al., 2016). IOP’s are inclined to follow an approach of positive-psychological performance, in which the main focus is a strength-based perspective (Van Zyl et al., 2016).

For IOP students to reach a level of professionalism, they must be considered competent within their field of practice (Kauffeld, 2006). In this field, professional competence is viewed as “the sum of organizational-, process-, task- and workplace-specific professional skills and knowledge of a team” (Kauffeld 2006, p. 4). Guse (2010) reports that the focus on positive-psychological principles within any professional practice has increased within organisations. As a result, positive-psychological interventions are key during IOP students’ professional training (Guse, 2010). Individual character strengths are recognised as positive-psychological interventions (Guse, 2010). This makes it crucial to identify and apply these individual strengths within a psychological domain. This practice should be recommended for the professional training of IOP students (Guse, 2010).

Rossin and Hyland (2003) emphasise that new learning techniques such as “group work-based learning” should be implemented between the universities and organisations. Group work entails

a wide variety of benefits as students learn team-work skills, which can guide them from an academic perspective to the business environment (Payne, Monk-Turner, Smith & Sumter, 2006a). Group work also helps students develop critical thinking skills and sharpens their perspective on the specific academic topic (Payne et al., 2006a).

Group work

According to Payne et al. (2006a) group work is the primary focus within facilities of tertiary education. Furthermore, character strengths have been utilised to enhance collaborative learning, although group-related problems are limiting the use of group projects (Payne et al., 2006a). Li and Campbell (2008) point out that group members' attitudes, perceptions and eagerness to co-operative in group work, can affect the dynamic of the group, which mainly determines their success. Barlow (2008), indicates that inter- and intra-personal factors play a vital role in the dynamics of group work. It was found that various inter- and intra-personal factors discourage group learning (Li & Campbell, 2008). These factors are: the composition of the group; the group members' attitudes and perceptions towards group work; the level of interpersonal skills amongst group members; time management and diverse interests; as well as the experiences and expectations of individual group members (Li & Campbell, 2008).

According to Li and Campbell (2008) during their research study the participants indicated that group work seems to impede the hard-working individuals and reward the 'social loafers', which encourages carelessness and laxity within the group. Payne, Youngcourt and Watrous (2006b) elucidate that the term 'social loafing' indicates a decrease in performance as certain group members perceive their individual contribution towards group work as insignificant. Social loafing usually causes inequality and a lack of effort amongst the group members (Li & Campbell, 2008). Thus, most students perceive group work as unfair and unreasonable (Li & Campbell, 2008). The result is that social loafing causes conflict amongst group members, which damages the group cohesion and ultimately discourages group participation and impedes its performance (Li & Campbell, 2008).

Furthermore, Payne et al. (2006b) propose 'groupthink' as a term to describe high levels of group cohesion in the sense that individual contributions are not recognised. This leads to poor decision-

making since not all relevant factors or information are considered (Payne et al., 2006b). Similarly, Parker (2009) explains groupthink as a term to describe group members' unwillingness to express their individual opinions, wary that the other group members may disagree with them. This attitude does not only affect the group's learning, but also their decision making (Parker, 2009).

According to Druskat, Mount and Sala (2006) self-awareness is key to the functions and effectiveness of group-work, seeing that such an awareness enable the group members to solve differences between the group's and individual goals. Clifton and Harter (2003) stress that once individuals become aware of their unique talents, they can utilise these to develop their individual strengths. Thus, understanding individual strengths, not only outlines each group member's potential (Clifton & Harter, 2003). This insight also provides the group with an organising framework according to which they can understand and embrace each individual group member's unique contribution towards group work (Clifton & Harter, 2003). According to Rossin and Hyland (2003) "the development of vocational knowledge and skill" is of the utmost importance in this regard and must be learnt through a series of social and cultural contexts, which can only be found in group learning. When tertiary institutions such as universities include group work as training method, students can learn interpersonal skills as their communication skills increases, seeing that they receive immediate formal and informal feedback within their group (Payne et al., 2006b).

Training programme

Practicing individual character strengths helps support adults in their daily personal and work life (Proctor, Tsukayama, Wood, Maltby, Eades & Linley, 2011). Gander, Proyer, Ruch and Wyss (2012) explain that 'intentional activities' such as positive-psychological interventions enable individuals to experience positive cognitions, which has a corresponding impact on an individual's feelings and behaviour. Once people experience positive emotions, they are inherently more open towards diverse forms of perception, thoughts, and behaviour (Gander et al., 2012).

According to Park and Peterson (2009) a strength-based intervention can be implemented at any level of ability and age. At such a level, character strengths can be utilised to build self-esteem and confidence, thus increasing individual growth and development (Park & Peterson, 2009). A

character-strength intervention on an individual level focuses on the awareness of individuals' character strengths, integrating those strengths within the perception of the self and altering the self's behaviour accordingly (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Once character strengths are exercised, individuals are provided with life-long development, which help them thrive and provide a buffer against unhealthy conditions such as stress (Park & Peterson, 2009).

Park and Peterson (2009) point out that individual character strengths can be learnt and developed through practice. A character-strength training programme would entail: identify positive personal and interpersonal traits that enables individuals to develop and thereafter, increase the positive individual experiences (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Practicing character strengths can be perceived as individuals who develop to their optimal potential (Clifton & Harter, 2003). The more a strength is practiced and integrated within people's daily work and personal lives, this strength increases (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

Character strengths

Peterson and Park (2006) view character as the qualities which represent all that is good within an individual and which can lead to productive and profitable behaviour. According to Proctor, et al. (2011) character strengths are positive traits which reflects people's inner thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Character strengths can be conceptualised as the components of good character functioning as a measure to raise awareness of individual differences, which makes people function better (Harzer & Ruch, 2012). Good character is the main concern for students, teachers and work colleagues. In this regard, positive psychology emphasises the importance of character strengths playing a key role in personal and professional development (Park & Peterson, 2009).

The VIA-Character Strengths are a classification and measurement system that outlines 24 character strengths (Proctor et al., 2011). An individual's 'signature or top-five' character strengths can be conceptualised as personal characteristics, which reflect current behaviours (Proctor et al., 2011). Proctor et al. (2011) suggests that these 'top five' are the strengths that individuals utilise as distinctive to the self, individuality and genuineness. Gander et al. (2012) indicate that these signature strengths are used for intrinsic motivation. They highlight three to seven such signature strengths (Gander et al., 2012). According to Park and Peterson (2009) character strengths form

an imperative part of individual and social well-being since different strengths unlock various possibilities. Hodges and Clifton (2013) point out that character strengths are derived from positive psychology, and are used to raise awareness on personal and professional development. Thus, this outline of the ‘top five’ offers more to professional psychologists, managers, and students alike who share a positive-psychological stance (Hodges & Clifton, 2013).

Peterson and Park (2006) argue that individual character strengths are widely overlooked and is an important resource to help develop an organisation. Employees who focus on their character strengths experience high levels of engagement (Peterson & Park, 2006). The reason is that they are more satisfied with their lives (Peterson & Park, 2006). This enables them to be content, resilient and healthier, which help them increase productivity (Peterson & Park, 2006). Similarly, organisations have more potential once their employees become aware of their individual talents, understand these qualities and integrate it within their work and personal life (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

The researcher resided within the IOP’s scope of practice and wished to contribute towards the field of Industrial Psychology, in which the specific tertiary institution was the inspiration of the present research study. This choice was supported by the contribution towards literature, seeing that, to date no specific intervention focused on introducing a character-strength training programme within group work amongst post-graduate honours students in IOP. The research study aimed specifically at the IOP post-graduate honours students due to their extensive experience of group work towards the end of their honour’s year and the relevance that group work holds for their planned professional career. Tertiary institutions such as universities apply group-based learning, enabling their students to learn from one another and acquire skills which exceeds mere context-based theoretical learning. As most students experience negative perceptions towards group work, the researcher took the initiative and applied a positive-psychological intervention. The aim was to explore whether a character-strength training programme will impact group work amongst these IOP post-graduate honours students.

From the discussion above, research objectives were identified, which are expounded below.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general objective of present research study was to explore post-graduate IOP students experiences of a character strength training programme and how it impacts group work. These students are working on group assignments, which prepare them for group dynamics in the workplace.

Specific objectives

From the general objective, the following specific objectives were derived:

- Conceptualise character strengths as teaching experience within literature.
- Provide the content and methodology of a character-strength training programme for post-graduate IOP students.
- Report on the experience of the population after the character strengths training programme in accordance to group dynamics during group work.
- Report on the experience of the population after the character strengths training programme in accordance to self-awareness during group work.
- Provide the implications for future training of IOP post-graduate honours students with regards to a character strengths training programme in collaboration with group work.
- Make recommendations for future research and practice.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Approach

Due to the explorative nature of the present study, a qualitative research methodology was followed. Qualitative research entails descriptive data in which information is collected, either through verbal methods such as spoken or written words, or non-verbally by documenting observed behaviour (Taylor, Bogdan & Marjorie, 2015). The present research focused on interpretive approaches since the researcher was more concerned with understanding the students' views, rather than explaining it (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2011). Therefore, the researcher utilised the constructivism approach which focuses on understanding the experiences of the participants through their point of view (De Vos et al., 2011). The constructivism approach,

was used which helped students gain knowledge through self-directed activities (De Vos et al., 2011).

Research strategy

A case study strategy was employed due to the present research's explanatory nature. A case study method can be used if the phenomenon is studied in context (Creswell, 2009). The aim of a case study is to investigate and understand the meaning that participants attribute to their experiences within a single case (De Vos et al., 2011). Following De Vos et al. (2011) by investigating individual experiences through the case study, the researcher could immerse herself in the activities of the group-based learning. This helped her explore various actions, words and patterns that expressed the participants' experience of their reality. More specifically, an instrumental case study was utilised to gain knowledge about a specific social problem. Such a specific case study is based on the investigation of multifaceted processes, leading to theoretical insight based on an actual experience (De Vos et al., 2011).

Research method

Research setting

The research study was conducted at a tertiary educational institution where all the IOP-post graduate students attended. The VIA online questionnaire of character strengths was completed before the training programme commenced. This two-day training programme was presented in the conference room located at the university. This venue was equipped fully with excellent lighting and ventilation, the participants were safe and distractions were minimised. Furthermore, the appropriate furniture and electronic equipment were made available which enabled the participants to take part in the training programme to their fullest potential. The participants had no prior experience of character strengths thus, during the first day, the participants were made aware of their individual character strengths and taught how to utilise these strengths within group work by means of a workshop. This helped them understand the relevance and importance of a positive-psychological intervention in such a context. The following (second) day the workshop was concluded after which the participants were divided into two focus groups to reflect on their

experience of the training programme. The focus groups were guided by the research questions outlined in the present study.

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

The research study was approved, and the researcher gained access to the participants. Thereafter, the participants' exposure to a character-strength training programme was discussed and the relevant arrangements for the training programme were explained thoroughly. The lecturer scheduled a two-day training programme for which the online link of the VIA questionnaire on character strengths were distributed to the participants. The procedure of the online questionnaire was explained, and the participants were reminded to complete this questionnaire before the training programme commenced. The participants were familiar with the setting at the faculty and gained access by means of their individual student cards.

The *researcher's roles* were based on an interpretive approach for the present research study. The researcher, assisted by an Industrial Psychologist who specialises in character strengths, created the training programme. The focus was on the awareness of individual character strengths and the application of these strengths in the context of group work. The researcher fulfilled the role of *trainer* for the mentioned programme, which she started off by providing a thorough explanation of character strengths. After raising awareness of individual character strengths, the trainer focused on group work and its importance within the field of Industrial Psychology and tertiary education. In this regard, the trainer helped the post-graduate honours students to utilise their 'signature strengths', namely the top-five-character strengths within group-work. Thereafter, the trainer facilitated a process where the participants applied their character strengths within group work through various forms of activities and simulations. The intervention enabled the participants to become aware of their group members' character strengths and all members could apply their own strengths to complete the group work.

During the second day of the training programme the researcher took on the role of *data collector* in which the participants were asked the questions outlined in the present study. Assisted by an observer the researcher could objectively acquire the data necessary for a qualitative research

study. Once the relevant information was collected and captured, the researcher resumed the role of *data-analyst* and, thereafter, took on the role of *report writer*, reporting on the findings.

Sampling

For the present research study, the pre-requested criteria to select participants were, namely: no previous experience or exposure to a character-strength training programme; active involvement in group work; committed to a two-day training programme and being part of the post-graduate industrial psychology class group. According to Creswell (2009) researchers must take care during the selection of research participants to safeguard a range of credible scientific data, without showing signs of bias, therefore, they must remain objective. The research study utilised purposeful sampling since this was deemed the best method to help identify and capture information during the research process (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). Purposeful sampling implies choosing specific research participants who fit the previously mentioned criteria and help attain the research objectives (Tracy, 2013).

Ethical considerations

All qualitative research conducted needs to be based on ethical grounds and specific considerations (De Vos et al., 2011) such as an ethics number (NWU-00084-10-S4-) assigned to this research study by the tertiary educational institution needs to be included. After the research proposal was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) the researcher disclosed the purpose of the study with the participants. The researcher was mindful of all ethical considerations by adhering to the ethical principles and guidelines specific to this study.

The researcher did not deceive or exploit the participants as the details of the research study were explained thoroughly (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, no personal information was disclosed during the course of the current research study and the anonymity of the post-graduate honours students was respected throughout the research study (Creswell, 2014). Consequently, an informed consent letter was completed by all participants which explained the details of the current research study and the use of a recording device. The post-graduate honours students completed the informed consent letter prior to the training programme which included the researcher's information should any participant have questions after the research study (Creswell, 2014). Questions with regards to the storage of data and anonymity of information were explained fully. The data was only used

for research purposes and no information was shared as it was stored safely after the completion of the research study to ensure confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process (De Vos et al., 2011).

The population from the IOP-post graduate students consisted of 25 participants ($n=25$), who all qualified to participate in this research study. The participants varied according to gender and age. Individual participants were listed with a capital letter together with their age to differentiate between them. Table 1 below provides an overview of the characteristics of the research participants:

Table 1

Characteristics of research participants (n=25)

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	17	68%
	Male	8	32%
Age	20 - 25 years	25	100%
Language	Afrikaans	24	96%
	English	1	4%
Race	Black	1	4%
	White	24	96%

Table 1 above indicates the sample were divided into 68% female and 32% male. The participants were all attending their honour's year of post-graduate studies within the field of Industrial Psychology, therefore their ages ranges within 20-25 years. Table 1 above indicates that most participants were Afrikaans-speaking (96%); with one who was identified as English-speaking (4%). Finally, the population group were represented by 96% white and 4% black participants.

Data collection methods

Focus groups were utilised during this study as research collection methods. De Vos et al. (2011) refers to focus groups as simplified group interviews in which the participants explain their

understanding on the subject-theme by discussing their opinions and feelings. If the intervention is expected or initiate change its best to utilise focus groups or in-depth interviews after a short interval to capture the participants' thoughts during the reflection following the first research intervention (Ritchie & Lewis 2003). Focus groups were selected for the present study since these are carefully planned discussions involving a specific group of participants to obtain detailed information on a distinct area of interest within a non-threatening and accommodating environment (De Vos et al., 2011). The researcher involved an assistant facilitator as an observer to help record and analyse the information provided by the participants.

Before the training programme commenced, the participants were instructed to switch off electronic devices, which avoided unnecessary distractions and ensured optimal participation as well as effective learning. Following the guidelines of De Vos et al. (2011) during the second day of the training programme, the participants were divided into two focus groups in which the researcher and assistant facilitator utilised group facilitation skills to direct the discussion according to the research questions listed below:

1. How do you define Character Strengths?
2. What influence did the character strength training programme have on group dynamics during group work?
3. How did your experience the effect of the character strength training programme on self-awareness during group work?
4. How did the awareness of individual Character Strengths benefit or discourage group work?
5. Suggest future recommendations for a character strengths training programme focused on group-work amongst IOP post graduate students?

Recording of data

During the second day of the training programme, the researcher provided quality recording equipment with various follow-up methods to ensure the information was captured and stored effectively. The data were then stored safely and only the researcher and supervising Industrial Psychologist had access to the direct information. The recordings were saved electronically

through various methods, namely on disks as well as internet-based platforms, which are password protected. This was done in case from the recordings were lost or faulty. Biographical information was stored in a safe and secure area to which only the researcher had access.

With reference to De Vos et al. (2011) all information collected by the observer and the researcher in the form of field notes, recordings, and written information, were documented accordingly. The participants were informed beforehand through an ‘informed-consent letter’ that the gathered information would be used for further research purposes. More importantly, the researcher explained that the data collected from the participants would be transcribed verbatim after the training programme, ensuring their identity remain confidential. All the collected information was considered once the researcher transcribed and compiled it onto an Excel sheet for further analysis.

Data analysis

After the information from the focus groups was transcribed the data were processed through thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) defines thematic analysis as the technique for classifying, reporting and analysing themes within a data-set. This implies recognising patterns within the data, where the evolving themes are grouped for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). A theme captures an aspect that is considered as significant in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006); it also reveals patterns and connections in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using thematic analysis as a tool is valuable for its flexibility to provide a full and detailed insight of the participant’s experience (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method can also offer a more convenient form of analysis within diverse theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

De Vos et al. (2011) provide a guide that outlines seven phases for qualitative data analysis. Firstly, the researcher plans the recording of the data. Secondly, the data collection and preliminary analysis have a twofold function: data analysis *in* the field and thereafter, *away* from the field (i.e. office approach). Thirdly, the researchers manage the data away from the field by familiarising themselves with the collected information. This leads to the fourth phase of reading and writing memo’s. The fifth phase focuses on arranging the data into categories, and coding the data. Thereafter, the emergent understandings are testing and alternative explanations sought. Finally,

the researcher interprets and develops typologies. It is essential for qualitative research to develop typologies or categorising systems, or even using concepts to interpret the qualitative materials.

The method discussed above was valuable to help explore the character strengths during the training programme and to ascertain its impact on group work – as the participants experienced it. These features were necessary for the present research study. The researcher added alphabetic symbols to each participant's response to differentiate between them as the population group had similar ages. Throughout the process, the researcher remained objective and ensured no bias opinions clouded her judgment.

Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity

De Vos (2011) points out that the responsibility of efficient researchers is the quality of their data. Therefore, the researcher focused carefully on analysing the data and applying the phases of the process as proposed above (De Vos et al., 2011). According to Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, and Kyngäs (2014) the criteria to ensure quality in a qualitative approach centres on trustworthiness. Elo et al. (2014) explain trustworthiness as accurate processing and content analysis according to five criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity.

Credibility

Firstly, *credibility* in qualitative research measures the degree to which a subject has been identified and described correctly (Elo et al., 2014). For a credible research study, the researcher must refrain from personal bias or subjectivity and remain objective throughout the research process (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability

Secondly, *transferability* refers to the extent to which researchers can transfer their current findings between different cases (Shenton, 2004). Transferability can entail potential extrapolation, which relies on the findings to be generalised or transferred to other groups or settings (Elo et al., 2014).

Dependability

Thirdly, *dependability* designates the accuracy of the qualitative research, by examining how the study is logically completed, designed and reviewed (Elo et al., 2014). This ensures the research study will fully explain the theoretical stance, research method, and processes, as well as the fundamental logic of the argument throughout the study (Elo et al., 2014). Dependability also refers to the constancy of data across time and various conditions (Elo et al., 2014). These aspects also determined the dependability of the present research (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability

Fourthly, *confirmability* in qualitative research concerns the notion of objectivity. The findings' capability must be confirmed by another researcher who usually co-codes the data to ensure confirmability of the study (Shenton, 2004). In the present study, the researcher enhanced confirmability by firstly using self-reflection and self-knowledge to stay impartial and objective throughout the study (Shenton, 2004). Secondly, the researcher ensured the participants' responses were documented accurately by involving a co-coder to interpret results (Shenton, 2004). Elo et al. (2014) explain confirmability as maintaining congruence between various individuals regarding the relevance, meaning, and accuracy of the data.

Authenticity

Finally, *authenticity* measures the extent to which researchers display a range of realities, fairly and faithfully (Elo et al., 2014).

Reporting

This research study utilised thematic analysis which recognises patterns in the data groups (Patton, 2002). According to (Patton, 2002) pattern recognition is the ability to see patterns within seemingly random information. Consequently, this was accomplished by a qualitative reporting style of themes and subthemes. These units were extracted from the collected data from the focus groups, which were transcribed into usable information (De Vos et al., 2011).

With reference to De Vos et al. (2011) the themes and sub-themes extracted from the data were presented in the form of tables. To support the themes and sub-themes the results were extracted in the form of direct quotations from the participants responses during the focus groups. These

extracts help the reader understand the information more clearly. Finally, the report adopted an approach in which clarity and simplicity is depicted, with detailed descriptions that help the readers to relate it to their own experiences.

FINDINGS

The research findings were divided into a conglomerate of categories, themes, sub-themes coupled with direct quotations to explain the results comprehensively. Furthermore, no translation of the data was needed since all the participants communicated in English. The extracted categories, themes and sub-themes are depicted in Figure 1 presented below:

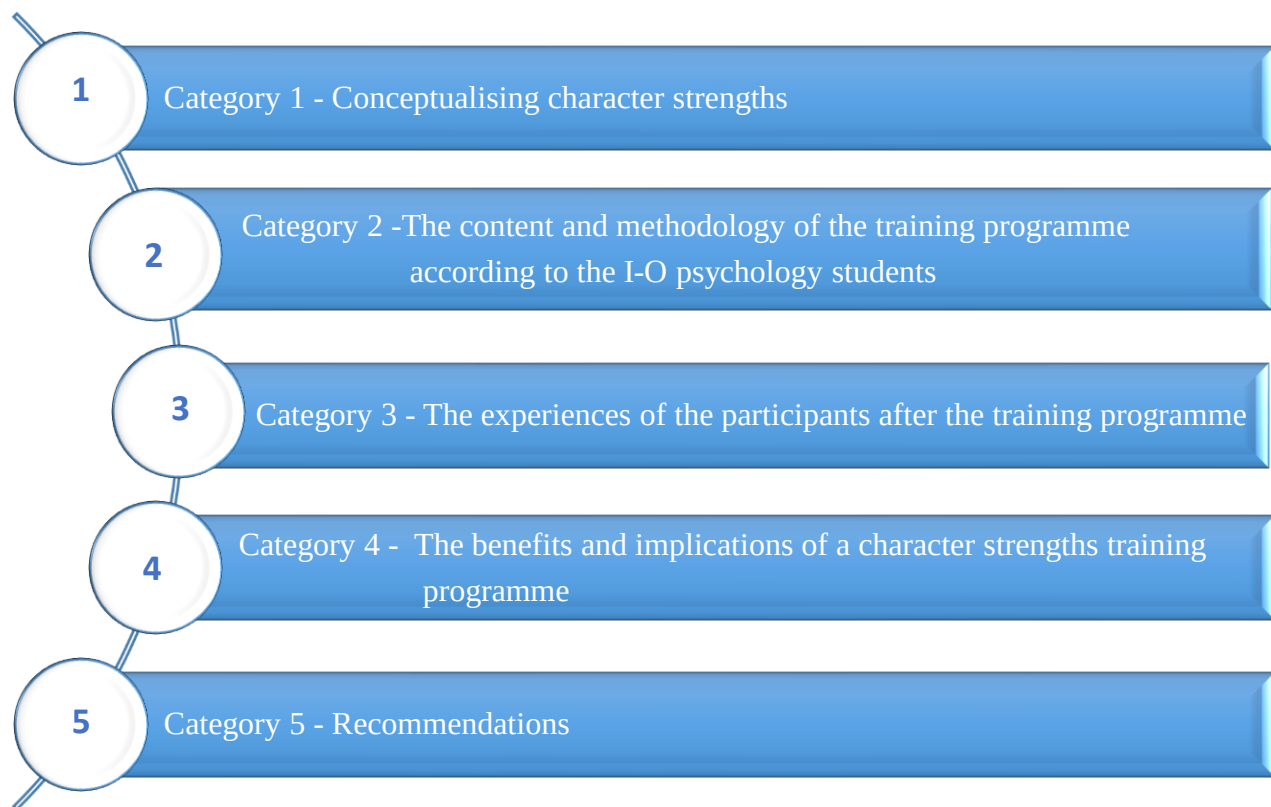


Figure 1: Overview of the categories

Category 1 – conceptualising character strengths

The first category explored the understanding of the subject theme after the training programme was presented. Themes and sub-themes were extracted from the participants' responses and categorised accordingly. The collected data are presented in the structured Table 2 below.

Table 2

Character strengths defined

Theme	Sub-theme	Response
Identity	Individualistic	“... strengths are what makes you, it makes you who you are as an individual, that is your character strengths ... in a sense it is who you are.” (Male: A: 23 yrs) “It is those things that distinguish yourself from other people.” (Female: B: 22 yrs)
	Innate	“I think most of these things are things that you already have and that you have to build on further in life ... things that you are born with, it is something that you can learn, but it is something that was established in your first five years.” (Female: J: 22 yrs)
Potential	Multiple strengths	“But I think these traits are not limited and you can have more than one.” (Female: M: 21 yrs) “... do not contradict each other, they work together and complement each other. It doesn’t limit you as a person.” (Male: E: 21 yrs)
	To be developed	“Character is like a rough a diamond. You need to cut it or polish it or make it shiny so that it can be of value.” (Male: E: 21 yrs)
	Predictors	“... in your workplace one day, they can know what you are able to do, and they know what your performance can be by using your strengths.” (Male: C: 21 yrs)
	Optimal functioning	“... to enhance you to be the best of what you can be.” (Female: A: 22 yrs) “make you the best version of yourself, and if obviously if everyone is the best version of themselves in the group.” (Female: C: 23 yrs)
	Flourish	“I think it is like the Powerpuff Girls’ chemical X, it is strength or that something that if you are aware of it and you know what it is and you can actually apply it, you can be like a super hero.” (Female: L: 21 yrs) “...characteristics that make you flourish in what you are good at.” (Female: B: 22 yrs)

	Talent enhancer	“You can actually use your strengths to develop your talents, because if you know what strengths you have then you can know how to focus on your talents and where you can use those strengths to develop your talents.” (Female: B: 22 yrs) “... I develop the talent; the strengths are going to be better and better and it is going to enhance each other the whole time continuously.” (Female: A: 24 yrs)
Resources	Coping mechanism	“... what to use to cope with that specific demand...” (Female A: 22 yrs) “... strengths that help to overcome obstacles in your life.” (Female: B: 22 yrs)
	Skill set	“But I see character strengths as my tool box. If I need something I open my toolbox and I can use it to the situation.” (Male: D: 22 yrs) “If you were to open your toolbox you would have specific tools that you would usually use, instead of the other ones you are not sure how to use.”(Female: K: 21 yrs)

Table 2 above indicates that for the first category, three main themes were extracted from the data, which consists of the following: Identity, Potential, and Resources.

The purpose for this specific research question was to help the researcher gain insight into the participants’ understanding of the subject-theme after the training programme. The participants indicated their view of character strengths through various responses. Some reported that their individual character strengths are a quality with which they could identify, it makes them who they are as individuals and distinguish them from their peers. One of the participants pointed out that character strengths are traits that people are born with, which they develop throughout their lives.

In addition, the participants asserted that their individual character strengths help them reach their fullest potential. This means that they could have multiple strengths, which do not

contradict each other in a group, nor limit them as individuals. Furthermore, a participant indicated that individual character strengths are akin to rough diamonds that must be moulded to perfection in order to have a sense of value. Therefore, each individual must be aware, develop and practice his/her character strengths to be of value in the group setup. Another participant indicated that character strengths can function as individual performance indicators within the workplace since these qualities can indicate a person's abilities and performance. Additionally, other participants indicated that their character strengths lead to their optimal functioning because it enables them to be the 'best version' of themselves.

Furthermore, participants remarked that their individual character strengths enable them to flourish. The reason is that once they are aware of those strengths, they can develop them, which serves as an individual's 'super power'. Other participants attested that their character strengths enhance their individual talents. The participants expressed that their awareness of character strengths and the utilisation of those strengths, develop their talents and help them develop as individuals. Participants also reported that they use their character strengths as a resource to cope with work demands. Others perceived character strengths as one's individual skill set, which can be applied as a set of tools to assist one with work and life demands.

Category 2 – The content and methodology of a character-strength training programme according to the IOP students.

The following findings report on the training programme displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Character-strength training programme

No	Topic	Objective	Method of presentation	Duration
1	What are my character strengths?	To raise awareness about individual character strengths.	Online questionnaire	1 hour

2	What is character strengths?	To have a comprehensive understanding of each individual character strength.	Trainer	2 hours
3	What is group work and when do I have to use it?	Perception of group work and the applicability of such work within the field of Industrial Psychology.	Trainer	1 hour
4	How do I apply my character strengths within group work?	Enable the students to apply their individual character strengths in group work. (Supply each learner with a workbook in which they must identify their top and bottom five-character strengths and implement activities accordingly to ensure active and effective learning takes place.)	Trainer	2 hours
5	How can I identify character strengths during group work?	Equip the learner through a series of activities to identify the character strengths of each group member.	Trainer	1 hour
6	How can I assist others with their individual character strengths during group work?	Equip the learner through a series of activities and simulations to assist group members with the awareness of character strengths and the benefits of implementing it within group work.	Trainer	2 hours
7	Reflecting on the character-strength training programme.	Allow the learners to discuss the effects of a character-strength training programme and how it will influence their potential future careers.	Researcher and Assistant	3 hours

The training entailed a two-day programme, which enabled the participants to apply their individual character strengths actively within group-based entities. It was required of the participants to complete the VIA online assessment of character strengths, before the training programme commenced. This helped make them aware of their individual character strengths. Thereafter, the trainer helped them gain a comprehensive understanding of each character strength through a PowerPoint presentation and a handout of basic information.

The trainer equipped the participants on their perspective of group work as well as the importance they attach to such work in the working environment of an Industrial Psychologist. Once a mutual understanding was reached on the importance of group work within the field of Industrial Psychology, each participant received a character-strength workbook in which they had to document their top- and bottom-five-character strengths from the VIA profile of 24-character strengths. Afterwards the participants were given the opportunity to apply their individual character strengths in group work through several group-based activities.

During the above-mentioned activities, the trainer facilitated a process where the participants identified character strengths amongst their group members as well. In this way, they could help make each other aware of the specific character strengths. Throughout, the trainer enlightened the participants on the benefits of character strengths and how to encourage others to become more self-aware and assist with group work. On the second day of the training programme, the researcher asked the participants a series of questions to test their knowledge of character strengths and its effect on group work within the field of Industrial Psychology. During this exercise the trainer was able to answer questions which were unclear during the training and assist with follow-up questions to ensure active and effective learning.

Category 3 - The experience of the participants after the character-strength training programme

This category explored the influence of the subject-theme on group dynamics and self-awareness. From the participants' responses, various themes and sub-themes were extracted and categorised accordingly. The data are displayed in the Table 4 below:

Table 4

Group dynamics

Theme	Sub-theme	Response
Group cohesion	Appreciate roles	“If you know what your strengths are, you will have energy in those strengths, whereas if you work outside of your preferences it might drain you ... you know what your strengths are, and you know what roles in the group not to take.” (Female: M: 21 yrs) “... but now we can compare our character strengths with this perspective; we can stand back and see which roles we would play best in the group now that we are aware ... now that we know each other’s character strengths we will also get along better now.” (Female: D: 22 yrs)
	Effective communication	“Let’s listen to each other now and just get comfortable so that they can talk civil to each other and have mutual ground.” (Female: A: 22 yrs) “... don’t think you have to wait for a problem to arise ... a new group have to communicate start off the ice- breaker and learn each other’s strengths and in that way, you stimulate each other.” (Female: B: 22 yrs)
	Support	“So, I think if your group support each other than you can easily accommodate each other. That is what makes it so important to know what strength each person have.” (Female: L: 21 yrs) “If you know the other person it would be much easier to relate to people and cope because you know that person will support you ...” (Female A: 22 yrs)

	Engagement	“Everyone brings some sort of intelligence, where others will bring bravery ... all feel included and everyone will actually participate ... acknowledging character strengths within a group actually encourage the group members to engage more within the learning experience.” (Female: B: 22 yrs) “... you get people engaged then.” (Female: C: 23 yrs)
	Time efficiency	“Time management increase once you know your strengths.” (Female: I: 22 yrs) “... time management in an organisation if you do not meet your deadline then you will get a warning which increases your stress ... not a bad idea to have an ice breaker to say OK, what is each person’s strong points and someone in the group records” (Male: A: 23 yrs)
	Productivity	“If a group can perform better and more effective, having less ‘uncertainty’ and more surety on job tasks” (Male: C: 21 yrs) “You can assist others by helping them get more exposure in that specific subject. So, once you do get exposed to it, you might recognise that you are able to do it, or you are able to develop it” (Male: D: 22 yrs)
Interpersonal Relationships	Mutual understanding	“I mean understanding each other is an important bond of gaining a good learning experience ... aware of each other strengths and having sensitivity toward each other when it comes to strengths; make it much easier to understand each other” (Male: B: 23 yrs) “... focus on your strengths; you have a better understanding of each other or why they are doing certain things in a certain way or else you will get irritated and start judging or see the bigger picture of that person ... Instead focus on their strengths and how they can benefit your group and you will see how people flourish the moment you focus on what is right”(Female: B: 22 yrs)

	Acceptance	“From the start, we started pinpointing who has different types of strengths. As we finalised who has certain types of strengths, from there we started respecting each other: as he said, we started accepting, understanding, then we got along ... we understand, accept each other’s experiences” (Male: A: 23 yrs) “Once you accept and understand you are not competing on who has the most strengths or who’s strengths makes the biggest impact then you see it as a puzzle and everyone fits in together and then you focus your energy on your own strength and you let the other person be.” (Male: B: 23 yrs)
	Application of Strengths	“... learning experience for you how to deal with someone, because not everyone is going to have the same top five strengths ... good learning experience and you the would actually seek out those who share the same strengths you have ... challenge to meet new people and help you to develop your own strengths.” (Female: B: 22 yrs) “They can keep developing the individuals in the group and getting more strengths and exploring your strengths and actually help building the group.” (Male: C: 21 yrs)
Group efficiency	Flourish	“... flourish, because everyone is different and that is why we do so good.” (Male: A: 23 yrs) “You would build each other up to bring the best out of each other and you can flourish and learn from each other.” (Female: C: 23 yrs)
	Awareness of strengths	“To know each other’s strengths in that way you can, maybe where I lack something, somebody else can help me ... we know each other’s strengths, I think you learn faster when you are in a group. It goes fast, it is just different than sitting on your own.” (Female: D: 22yrs)

	“We did not do anything with our strengths. The whole group was deteriorating the whole time like you had to beg everyone to participate. At the end of the day, it was only a few people who actually finished the project, whereas the rest of the people were just like, they just ride along.” (Female: B: 22 yrs)
Conflict management	“... helps people to overcome disputes within a group.” (Female: B: 22 yrs) “Conflict is decreased and group effectivity is increased ... better product and you feel better after group work; your attitude changes just about knowing each other; it increases every aspect of groupwork.” (Female: K: 21 yrs)
Perspective	“... can help you to look at different ways to get along and enhance team work” (Female: B: 22 yrs) “You gain a lot of perspective and different views and you become more collaborative” (Male: E: 21 yrs)
Delegation	“Give each person something that they are naturally good at.” (Female: N: 21 yrs) “You can use your strengths in order to trigger someone else’s strengths by using your strengths. For instance, you can see that this person is actually good at something and you can actually delegate something to that person, if you are a good leader.” (Female: K: 21 yrs)
Role division	“... role division, according to character strengths, feel better because you know that this is what the person is good at doing and you know he/she will do a good job ... character strengths, you can say, ‘Okay, this is the type of assignment we have, and who is going to put it together?’ and this is the specific points which you can discuss and divide the roles.” (Female: L: 21 yrs)

		“Like you accomplish more if you know which person do what.” (Female: A: 22 yrs)
	Role clarity	“... where role clarity plays the biggest importance, to be clear of what you have and what your strengths are and to make your group members aware of your strengths and what you can do. Then they know you are perfect for that role.” (Male: C: 21 yrs) “We know who fits well in which role and the responsibility; so, there is no conflict.” (Male: E: 21 yrs)
Encourages learning	Motivation	“... we learn from each other ... motivate and also encourage me to work harder ... effects that a strong character strength in team work has on a team, is maybe something I also want I feel like I can develop and go to her and ask her, ‘What can I do to develop this?’” (Male: B: 23 yrs) “Acknowledging character strengths within a group actually encourage the group members to engage more within the learning experience ...” (Female: B: 22 yrs)
	Enhance learning experience	“... enhances the whole learning experience if you don’t get along, and you don’t know someone’s character strengths. I am someone that would isolate myself from others and from the experience.” (Female: B: 22 yrs) “I think you will learn much more because then you can focus on what you do good and the others can focus on what they do well and in that case ... the work gets done and you learn from each other and you build each other.” (Male: B: 23 yrs)

As presented in Table 4 above, focusing on group dynamics, the main themes extracted from the data are: Group cohesion, Interpersonal relations, Group efficiency and Encouraged learning.

By posing the specific research question above, the researcher explored whether the participants could utilise the subject-theme in group work and how it impacted their individual learning

experience after the training programme. Various responses were obtained from the participants. Some reported that they could appreciate their roles within group work since they experienced increased energy to pursue these roles. Furthermore, by gaining a different perspective of others' character strengths, it influenced the group cohesion positively. A number of participants reported that their communication was more effective because they felt comfortable with one another, could listen and reach a common ground more effectively.

Additionally, the participants remarked that awareness of character strengths enable them to act proactive. They could prevent unnecessary conflict and rather inspire each other. Participants also pointed out that utilising their individual character strengths help them support each other. When group members become closer acquainted, they can easily relate to each other, which enables the members to support each other. Thus, maintaining the effective support system increases group cohesion.

Furthermore, a number of participants affirmed that individual character strengths assisted group cohesion by making the group members more engaged. Once group members became aware of their unique contribution towards group, the members could encourage one another to become involved in the learning experience. The participants also reported that their time management improved. The reason is that once they were aware of each other's strengths, they became acquainted faster and established more structure and direction within their group work. The participants indicated that their individual character strengths assist in their interpersonal relations by letting them understand each other better. Due to this mutual understanding, the participants felt that they could respect each other more, understand each other's views, and accept each other's experiences.

The participants experienced that they were more sensitive towards each other and could focus on matters that benefit the group as a whole. Thus, they could assist one another to flourish within their individual character strengths during group work. In addition, the participants reported that their productivity increased as they understood their individual work tasks clearer within the group setup. Thus, they could assist each other, seeing that in the group dynamics a positive individual focus was placed on each group member.

Furthermore, the participants reported that once they were made aware of each other's character strengths, they understood and accepted the other's experiences. With this acceptance the participants revealed that they were not competing and considered each group member's unique contribution as a "piece of the puzzle that all fits into one picture". Furthermore, the participants stated that they could apply their character strengths within group work. As a result, they could learn from each other and mutually help develop their individual character strengths. These actions within the group allowed the members to develop their interpersonal relationships.

A number of participants reported that the awareness of their character strengths contributed to the group's efficiency. This is because each individual brings a different asset to the table through which members can help each other 'build' on his/her unique character strength, thus enabling them to flourish within the group. The participants further explained that once they were made aware of each other's character strengths, they could help one another to learn more efficiently and motivate each other to participate and complete the group work together.

Furthermore, certain participants pointed out that character strengths can decrease conflict in the sense that the group members can overcome disputes more effectively. Thus, individual members feel more positive inclined towards group work, which increases their efficiency as a group. Throughout the programme, the participants indicated that their group efficiency increased due to a changed perspective. Individual character strengths made the group members more open to other's perspectives since they could understand and accept their fellow group members.

Also, participants indicated that they were able to see the broader view of group work and where each member fits in the specific assignment. This insight helped them follow a more collaborative approach towards group work. In this regard, other participants reported that individual character strengths helped the group function more efficiently by applying these strengths when delegating tasks. The participants reported that character strengths can be utilised when work-related tasks are delegated according to each member's individual qualities. Furthermore, the participants reported that they experience the work more positive and could accomplish more. The reason was that they could trust each person to be capable of working within a specified role, due to the

strength-related allocation of tasks. In this regard, participants attested that their character strengths help them fulfil their role in the group, providing them and their group members more clarity on each role's responsibilities.

Finally, the participants emphasised that character strengths encourage learning by heightened motivation. The participants stated that once they acknowledged their character strengths within the group, they became more involved in the learning experience. In the same vein, participants remarked that once they had become closer acquainted, they were able to learn more and encourage each other to work harder. Other participants indicated that when individuals learn to get along with group members it enhances the learning experience for all. Character strengths assists with this aspect of group work. Certain participants suggested that the group members learn more from each other since each person can focus on what he/she does well, and the work gets done.

Table 5 below indicates how each individual's self-awareness was affected during the character-strength training programme.

Table 5

Self-awareness

Theme	Sub-theme	Response
Other-focussed	Contribution	"I would say the moment you know your strengths, then you can know what you can contribute to the group." (Female: B: 22 yrs) "If you want to be able to learn something from someone else, you need to know what they are able to offer." (Female: M: 21 yrs)

	Assistance	“Once you are self-aware of your strengths you are more focused on other people’s strengths, and then you can help them by enforcing their strengths and make them aware of themselves ... help them to become more self-aware.” (Female: N: 21 yrs) “Help others to see their strengths and be aware of their strengths.” (Female: F: 21 yrs)
	Encouragement	“You and a friend have the same strengths; you cannot team up, but you can motivate each other to stand your ground and you can say what you want to say.” (Female: C: 23 yrs) “Encourage group work even though they share the same strength and they will also be working together.” (Female: B: 22 yrs)
Self-realisation	Introspection	“I definitely questioned myself, like: Do I know myself, do I really know what I am good at? When you focus on someone else and you start to focus on yourself again you can do more objectively, I think.” (Female: B: 22 yrs) “... self-concept, I think it changes the way you look at yourself.” (Female: D: 22 yrs)
	Personal development	“I think it is beneficial for yourself to focus on that strength, or maybe read up more about this kind of strength, or observe others who display this strength ...” (Male: A: 23 yrs) “We want to develop people and we want to develop ourselves; we want to influence and impact people.” (Male: B: 23 yrs)

Self-esteem

Self-confidence

“If you are self-aware of your strengths, it is most likely that you have better self-confidence.” (Female: A: 22 yrs)

“... assist with self-confidence ... can benefit me and motivate me to work harder and better.” (Female: C: 23 yrs)

Increased
meaning

“... sense of purpose and that motivation and value ... appreciate something we have, we actually want to develop it ... you actually have more self-value because you admire this person; and once they inform you that you also may have good aspects of it – it creates more self-value.” (Male: E: 21 yrs)

“... affect your happiness ... are put in a position because you had a strength in leadership and they give you the position of being a leader, then you will be happy to do it, because you are made self-aware of that strength and you will feel more comfortable in being a leader.” (Male: C: 21 yrs)

Self-efficacy

“If you know you are good at something and you have confidence within yourself ... I don’t know how to do this exactly, but I can do this good so, perhaps I can figure this out as well; whereas you are not self-aware you will not be so open to try.” (Female: N: 21 yrs)

“Actually, believing that I can do this. It links well with self-efficacy and we see obstacles as challenges and new things I can learn.” (Male: E: 21 yrs)

Encourage leadership	“I am in charge of a certain topic and my strength is quite dominant in that specific topic, I will take the lead ... it makes them a leader in their field because if you give it over to them and they make a success of it; they were actually a leader with that strength.” (Female: N: 21 yrs) “I know what my current strengths are my ideal strengths and weaknesses and I know how to apply them when I am in a leadership position.” (Male: C: 21 yrs)
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As indicated by Table 5 above: Focusing on self-awareness, the researcher extracted three main themes from the data, namely: Other-focused, Self-realisation and Self-esteem.

During this section of the third category, the participants indicated that after the training programme they felt encouraged to explore the effects of the subject-theme on themselves within a group-based work setting. The following responses were obtained: Certain participants remarked that once they became aware of their character strengths, they experienced increased focus on the other group members’ strengths. During this discovery they became aware of their unique contribution to the group as well as those of others and, in return, how they could learn from each other. Other participants explained that once being aware of their character strengths, they could help others discover their strengths, thereby contributing towards group work. A number of participants pointed out that being aware of their own and other group members’ character strengths, helped them encourage each other and work together. Even if certain group members were found to have similar character strengths, they could still assist one another and motivate each other to work together effectively.

In addition, participants reported that being more self-aware of individual character strengths provides more in-depth self-realisation. Thus, the participants attested that the awareness of individual character strengths helped them perceive themselves more objectively and do introspection on their current abilities. The participants stated further that being aware of

individual character strengths can enhance personal development. The reason is that individuals observe their character strength in one of the group members, which enables one to learn and develop oneself and others.

Several participants reported that being more self-aware of their character strengths, raises their self-esteem since their confidence within groupwork increases, which motivates them to work harder. Furthermore, the participants attested that they were more satisfied and content within the group after undergoing the character-strength training programme. The reason is that they experienced increased meaning within group work. A number of participants explained that being more self-aware made them more self-efficient (i.e. self-efficacy), seeing that as they felt resilient during possible controversies that they may face during group work. Finally, the participants affirmed that once individuals are aware of their character strengths, they are prone to take the lead within that particular field.

Category 4 - The benefits and limitations of a character-strength training programme

Regarding the fourth category, participants were encouraged to explore the effect of the training programme intrapersonally, as IOP students. From the participants' responses, certain themes and sub-themes were extracted and categorised accordingly. The data are displayed in Table 6 below.

Table 6

Benefits and limitations of a character-strength training programme regarding group work

Theme	Sub-theme	Response
Benefits	Input	“How can you enhance group work if you do not know what you are good at? ... once you know what someone else is good at, you can actually allocate whatever needs to be done to them and you know where you can make a contribution ... it will definitely enhance group work because people know what they can bring to the table.” (Female: B: 22 yrs) “Individual characters are there to benefit the group; there are certain strengths that a group must have to accomplish certain

		tasks. I think it is important if you highlight certain strengths.” (Male: A: 23 yrs)
Motivation		“It motivates you, but now you have the ability to motivate someone else ... you can enhance other employees as well and not only yourself.” (Female: D: 22 yrs) “... encourage people to come to the group and it’s not going to happen overnight, but after a few groups projects you actually start to experience it like something positive and not so draining.” (Female: E: 21 yrs)
Perception		“I think the individual perceptions will also play a significant role ... perception because ... in order to enhance group work, the person introducing it must also give the correct context and open up the perceptions of people, so that they do not understand it as: ‘This is not a box and I cannot get out of that box.’” (Male: B: 23 yrs) “... can definitely change my perception to approach group work with a new mind set. Instead of thinking of it to be another obstacle, I can perceive it as this is going to be quick and I can enjoy it.” (Female: E: 21 yrs)
Involved		“... more positive and not negative ... flow better, you want to do better; you can do the work because you are positive and you have more energy to do the work.” (Female: A: 22 yrs) “... more dedication from your group members.” (Female: D: 22 yrs)
Relating to each other		“We worked together the best with the people we knew the best.” (Male: D: 22 yrs) “... understand each other better and know each other. When we started, we were a bit contained and we did not know each other. Groupwork was a challenge, especially at the beginning.” (Male: E: 21 yrs)

	Self-actualising		“... motivate yourself and those around you and become a better person.” (Female: C: 23 yrs) “It will make group work more than just group work. It will make it a growing experience ... I understand myself better and understanding other people better. I grew in the process where I challenge myself, they challenge me ... learned more about yourself, and that awareness of individual character strengths lead to massive growth spurts within the group work as well.” (Male: B: 23 yrs)
	Character-strengths awareness		“Before this work shop I could see what people are good at, but now, after the workshop, I can do it so much more effectively ... observe who has what type of strengths each person has.” (Male: A: 23yrs) “Now we know the effects it can have; we know about it and we are aware of strengths that we were not aware of; and I think, from now, on we will definitely try to identify these in our groups and just being more self-aware of my own strengths.” (Male: B: 23 yrs)
Limits	Lack of strengths present	of	“If someone does not have the specific character strength that we need, or there is an overflow, it might disadvantage the group. Some that do show those strengths needed, now we have to always take that role. It can then create a lack of input ...” (Female: L: 21 yrs) “I think you need to create an environment of flexibility, because you won’t always be busy with all your top strengths. You need to establish with your group members that, even though we are working with strengths, it’s not always going to be easy. You need to create an environment that is flexible and be open to do other aspects also.” (Female: N: 21 yrs)

Table 6 above indicates the categorising of the participants' responses which lead to two themes, benefits and limits of the character-strength training programme within group work.

The responses obtained from the participants, focused mainly on the *benefits* of a character-strengths training programme within group work. Participants reported that their character strengths made them aware of unique contributions their group members can make towards groupwork. By being aware of each individual's contribution towards group work, the members can motivate each other, which helps develop the individuals as well as the group. Furthermore, some participants affirmed that one's character strengths can improve one's perception of group work. Character strengths can provide the group members with a positive outlook on group work and not only perceive it as being 'trapped', but rather embrace the opportunity to work in a group setup.

Furthermore, participants explained that once they were self-aware of their character strengths, they were much more positive about their contribution to the group. As a result, they felt more dedicated with heightened motivation and energy, allowing them to work to their fullest potential. Throughout the process, the participants reported that their character strengths helped them relate better to one another since they felt that they knew each other more closely. Participants also explained that once they became self-aware of their individual character strengths, they experienced internal motivation and were determined to develop themselves. Thus, the participants experienced self-actualisation which helped them work effectively within their group, seeing that they understood themselves thoroughly, as well as the people around them. Additionally, the participants stated that the training programme raised their awareness of character strengths. After observing the impact of such a training programme on group work, they felt more inclined to use these insights in future group work.

The following responses from the participants focus mainly on the *limits* of a character-strength training programme with regard to group work. A number of participants pointed out that similar strengths can overflow, or strengths may lack that are necessary to complete the specific group work. Considering this factor, individual character strengths may disadvantage group work. This may cause a lack of input from certain group members, thus forcing participants to do more than others. In this regard, a number of participants emphasised that the group must create a flexible

environment. In other words, once character strengths are introduced within group work, the members must be open to the fact that not all the top character strengths will be utilised. Therefore, they should consider all aspects during group work and not only utilise character strengths for the division of work roles and responsibilities.

Category 5 - Recommendations

For the final category, the participants were encouraged to make recommendations for the future training of students in a character-strength training programme. From the participants' responses, themes and sub-themes were extracted and categorised accordingly. The data, as excerpts from these responses, are displayed in the Table 7 below:

Table 7

Recommendations for future training

Themes	Sub-themes	Responses
Suggestions	Timing of training programme	“We know groups go through that five stages, norming, storming, etc. I think in the norming phase where the group know how they are going to function ... That is maybe the best opportunity to introduce the character- strengths programme.” (Male: B: 23 yrs) “I think, if I would need to approach any group work, I would introduce or inducted any group with this training programme.” (Female: B: 22 yrs)
	Not only for delegating	“On boarding, it can become part of the group dynamic or responsibility to develop them and not only be utilised for delegation.” (Female: O: 22 yrs) “We can approach the work differently instead of just delegating and leaving the group.” (Male: E: 21 yrs)

Early introduction	“Start at the onboarding stage to implement the character strengths and expose them to the culture and see if they actually fit into the organisation or not ... if you start up a group and you share their strengths, this can set up a new atmosphere where everyone shares their strengths ... we establish group norms and a group culture of how we function as a group.” (Male: E: 21 yrs) “... context, because we are students, will be tough to introduce this thing in our group context ... We are all in the same level, so, that the chances of someone else or another student is going to listen to me for half an hour talking about strengths ... I think that would also be a challenge ... but I definitely think it is something that can be introduced earlier, yes.” (Male: B: 23 yrs)
Method of training programme	“The way or manner in which you introduce the programme is very important ... definitely something to speak of, in such a way that they get interested.” (Male: B: 23 yrs) “I think next year, they should start the year off with group-building activity like the strengths or tall-trees workshop, so that the students can enjoy group work and do it much better than we did. Because we were thrown in the deep end.” (Male: E: 21 yrs)

Regarding the final category, the researcher encouraged the participants to make recommendations for the implementation of a character-strength training programme during group work. A variety of responses were obtained from the participants. Some emphasised that the timing of the programme is of the utmost importance and suggested that such a training programme should be introduced in the norming phase of group work, which is usually during induction.

Furthermore, certain participants stressed that this training programme should not only be used to delegate work. The programme should rather introduce the character strengths as part of the

dynamic of the group utilised for individual and group development. Finally, the participants commented on the method of implementation. They recommended that character-strength training would be most effective if introduced in a manner that keeps the participants interested. An example mentioned: Introduce the character-strength training in the form of a team-building activity and during an early stage of group forming.

DISCUSSION

The general objective of the present research was to explore IOP postgraduate students' experiences of a character-strength training programme during group work. The study considered these students since they currently are involved in group work and seek the required skills to work effectively within organisations. The results indicated that the IOP postgraduate students' found practical and valued significance in such a programme. Thus, they recommend that the programme should be implemented in the onboarding phase within an organisation as well as in the beginning of their post-graduate year at university, to assist them during group work.

The *first objective* of this research study was to conceptualise character strengths as a teaching experience, according to literature. Martinez-Marti and Ruch (2017) define character strengths as positive and ethically respected traits of one's personality. Furthermore, research indicate that an individual's social wellbeing may relate to personal character strengths, although each strength could predict a different outcome (Park & Peterson, 2009). Recently, more emphasis was placed on the field of positive psychology as researchers began studying the role of character strengths during challenging situations (Martinez-Marti & Ruch, 2017).

According to recent literature, group work plays a vital role within an organisation's success (Chimiel, Fraccaroli & Sverke, 2017). The reason is that employees are faced with taxing problems that require collaborative solutions (Chimiel et al., 2017). These are strategies which they must adapt continually and manage effectively (Chimiel et al., 2017). The participants indicated that character strengths can mainly be defined as individual identity, potential, or resources characteristics (Martinez-Marti & Ruch, 2017). These statements correspond with recent literature according to which character strengths are identified as a 'trait-like' characteristics (Martinez-Marti & Ruch, 2017). In other words, individual differences maintain a degree of consistency and generalisation, although these traits are not fixed based on genetic characteristics (Martinez-Marti

& Ruch, 2017). Niemiec, Rashid and Spinella (2012), further point out that one's character strengths do not function in seclusion; they correlate with and influence those of others, and vice versa.

Park and Peterson (2009) emphasise that good character does not have a singular, but rather a plural value, which belongs to a family of positive traits that reflect in a person's thoughts, behaviours and feelings. Furthermore, literature indicates that employees are encouraged to use their character strengths at work. These strengths imply each individual's strong points, talents, and natural skills that enhances their personal resources (Bakker, 2017). Thompson (2013) confirms that individuals' character strengths can be utilised as a resource since it influences how people cope with adversity, which they recognise through their thought processes, words, and actions.

The *second* objective of the research study was to describe the content and methodology of a character-strength training programme for IOP post-graduate honours students. According to Proctor et al. (2011) practicing one's character strengths can have inherent benefits for adults, which help support them in their daily lives. Gander et al. (2012) explain that interventions from positive psychology are considered as 'intentional activities'. These activities provide positive cognitions that affect an individual's feelings and enable them to change their behaviour. Positive emotions help individuals to be more open towards different forms of thought, perception, and behaviour (Gander et al., 2012)

Proctor et al. (2011) presented a training programme focused on positive psychology. The programme's aim was motivating students to recognise their individual strengths, develop their current strengths, and learn new strengths. The workshop entailed two activities termed "Strength Builders" and "Strengths Challenges". In each topic the students focused on the definition of a character strength followed by two activities inculcating the "Strength Builders" and "Strength Challenges" respectively (Proctor et al., 2011, p. 382). During this character-strength workshop the participants received booklets in which they could note any five-character strengths from the 24-character strengths which described them the best (Proctor et al., 2011, p. 383).

Similarly, the character-strength training programme as part of the present research study aimed to raise awareness of individual character strengths within group work, as experienced by IOP

post-graduate honours students. Correspondingly, the training programme also incorporated the 24-character strengths profile of which the participants identified their top- and bottom five-character strengths. Furthermore, the training programme in the present study correlated with that of Procter et al. (2011) by explaining each character strengths in detail and then implementing activities to apply and practice individual strengths. The only difference was the focus on group-based entities.

According to Proyer et al. (2012), most positive-psychological interventions are only implemented once, without alternatives or follow-up interventions. Thus, clearly, multiple interventions would increase the effectiveness of the initial one. To accommodate multiple interventions, the character-strengths training of the present research study was presented as a two-day programme. During the second day the participants were given the opportunity to reflect on what they have learnt. This provided an alternative intervention to ensure active and effective learning.

The *third objective* of the research study was to report on the experience of the population after undergoing the character-strength training programme, when focusing on the *group dynamics* during group work. The results showed that the training programme impacted group dynamics. After the training programme, the participants noticed increased group cohesion and improved interpersonal relations. Furthermore, the group setup encouraged individual learning and the group functioned more efficiently. These findings are supported by Boscia and Turner (2008) who point out that individuals have a dire need to belong to groups where they can experience a positive social environment. Accordingly, group cohesion can be improved by a warm and friendly atmosphere (Boscia & Turner, 2008). Conversely, a hostile environment can cause the participants to withdraw from the group, where individuals actually must understand group norms and its related values, in order to operate effectively within a group environment (Boscia & Turner, 2008).

Studies indicated that once members understand the group norms, they develop a sense of belonging in which their group cohesion will be strengthened (Boscia & Turner, 2008). In line with this finding, the IOP post-graduate honours students indicated that the training programme improved interpersonal relations, which created a positive and collaborative environment. This approach helped the participants create an open and accepting environment, which encourages positive group norms and validates each member's unique contribution towards group work.

According to Volet and Mansfield (2006), group dynamics are improved once ideas are shared, a level of commitment is reached, and specific goals are achieved amongst the group members. These scholars found that after the initiative of training individual strengths, the participants experienced equal distribution of work, comparable goals, as well as motivational and cognitive outcomes, which improved their group dynamics significantly. Correspondingly, the IOP post-graduate honours students reached a mutual understanding with group members by accepting each other's experiences and applying their individual character strengths according to the role division of group work. These students reported that after delegating the group work according to their preferred character strengths, they could learn more from each other. They also experienced their specific role more clearly, which helped them create comparable goals, motivate each other, and attain positive cognitive outcomes.

A study by Steen, Kachorek and Peterson (2003) amongst students, indicated that the participants felt comfortable to express themselves. They were also open about their experiences after the character strengths initiative were introduced in their focus groups. Similarly, the IOP post-graduate honours students in the present study reported that their perception changed after the training programme by being more open to each other's perspectives. This helped them manage conflict within the group setup and made the group function efficiently. This finding is in accordance with Guse (2010) who found that during his positive-psychology workshop the awareness of character strengths and positive individual attributes helped strengthen group cohesion.

In the study by Steen et al. (2003), being aware of character strengths helped the students create a positive environment in which they respected one another's opinions and utilised each other's strengths to overcome challenging situations. This finding is corroborated in the present study, where the IOP post-graduate honours students reported that once they were aware of one other's character strengths, their learning increased. The reason is that they accepted each other's experiences. This made them more motivated towards group work, by creating the opportunity to learn more from each other (Steen et al., 2003).

In addition, Steen et al. (2003), emphasise that the group dynamics depend on the composition of the group as well as the facilitator, thus the peer influence is crucial in this regard. Normally, peer influence is deemed negative, although during the character-strength focus groups found the peer influence positive by promoting specific character strengths. More importantly, once peers value certain character strengths of their group members, those members will be more positive about their individual strengths. This positive inclination influences their cognitive processes, environment and, ultimately their participation in the group setup. On the other hand, once peers have given no thought to, do not value, or are not aware of character strengths, these peers' opinions may alter the group member's perception and approach towards such strengths (Steen et al., 2003).

Similarly, in the present study, the IOP post-graduate honours students explained that once they were aware of each other's character strengths, they understood and accepted one another's experiences. They mentioned that before their exposure to the training programme they felt their "group were deteriorating". With this acceptance the participants clearly showed that they were not competing, but rather saw each group member's unique contribution as a "piece of the puzzle that all fits into one picture". This finding seems in line with that of Shoshani and Slone (2013), namely support by specific interpersonal character strengths such as love, gratitude and kindness, helps individuals establish and maintain interpersonal relationships.

The *fourth* objective of the research was to report on the experience of the population after undergoing the character strengths training programme, by focusing on *self-awareness* during group work.

Niemiec et al. (2012), assert that character strengths increase one's self-awareness and potential for possible change. In this regard, Clifton and Harter (2003) confirm that students who are made aware of their individual character strengths, experience high levels of self-confidence and seek to learn more about their own strengths. As a result, they develop their individual strengths as well as those of others. In accordance, the IOP post-graduate honours students in the present study indicated that after the training programme, they noticed being more attuned to the character strengths of others. They were better able to encourage their group members since they were aware of their potential and could help them develop those strengths and thus contribute towards group work.

According to Steen et al. (2003), character-strength intervention can help participants develop their self-esteem, to the extent that they feel they can “stand up for themselves”. The reason is that the group members become more ‘open-minded’, which makes the group members feel comfortable and that they have room for growth. (Steen et al., 2003) Similarly, in the present study, the students felt: once they were more aware of their individual character strengths, they were more self-confident, which enhanced their self-esteem. In the study of Steen et al. (2003), the participants were more inclined towards developing sound leadership skills. This finding is also corroborated by the present study. Students reported that once they were aware of their character strengths, they knew the fields in which they could excel. Thus, they naturally took the lead within the area of those identified character strengths. Specifically, Peterson and Park (2006), affirm that the character strength of love can forecast achievements as a leader.

Peterson and Park (2006) point out that a character-strength workshop may make members aware of individual character strengths. However, to implement such character strengths within an organisation would require continuous practice. The IOP post-graduate honours students emphasised that once they were made aware of their individual character strengths, they felt the urge to develop themselves and others. In this regard, several participants suggested that when individuals are aware of their unique character strengths, they must research these strengths, observe it and practise it. In this way, they will be able to model that unique character strengths and inspire others.

The *fifth* objective of the research study was to point out the benefits and discuss implications for future training of IOP post-graduate honours students through a character-strength training programme in the context of group work.

As mentioned previously, one of the benefits the students mentioned about the training programme, was that it consisted of two interventions, which encouraged active and effective learning. This finding confirms the one by Gander et al. (2012), that multiple interventions would be more efficient to keep the participants interested and engaged, than merely presenting them with a single intervention. Littmann-Ovadia and Steger (2010) explain that their study focused on all the identified character strengths, not on their top five. They found that this wider range have assisted their development of individual strengths within work-related contexts and helped enhance individual wellbeing (Littmann-Ovadia & Steger, 2010).

As was pointed out previously, the present study's training programme focused on the participants' top- and bottom-five character strengths, which made the participants aware of their unique qualities. Thereafter, the training programme presented several activities where the participants became attuned to one another's character strengths. This helped them change their perception to be more open and accepting of other's experience and viewpoints. As a result, participants became more involved in the group work. Once they were aware of one another's character strengths, they could relate to each other, which created a positive climate within the group.

The *final* objective of the research study was to make recommendations for future research and practice, which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Limitations and recommendations

During the character-strength training programme, the researcher explored the impact which awareness of the top-five and bottom-five-character strengths may have on group work (as part of the *final objective* of the study). According to Niemiec et al. (2012), an individual's highest character strengths require confirmation on whether these are the most innate, true, and enriching individual qualities. Therefore, these scholars recommend that it should be explored how these top character strengths are utilised and in which other ways they can be applied within a group setting.

Steen et al. (2003) emphasise that the method in which such a programme is introduced or examined, will determine the outcomes of the interventions. Correspondingly, it is evident from the recommendation by the students that the method of the training programme is crucial for the outcomes. Therefore, the presentation must be interesting and effective, for instance, as a team-building activity at the beginning of the year. It is thus recommended that lecturers for post-graduate students in IOP, consider adding group intervention as an introductory contact session. This will help familiarise the students with a programme where character strengths can be learnt, explored and applied through group-based activities. This could set the stage for the year ahead to encourage optimal group-work functioning.

A further limitation to a character strengths intervention, according to Littmann-Ovadia and Steger (2010), is the manner in which the intervention is presented. The reason is that it takes time to develop a level of familiarity and being certain how to utilise one's character strengths effectively within a specific domain. The IOP post-graduate honours students suggested that awareness of

individual character strengths could also impact group work negatively. In other words, in the case of limited character strengths for a specific group task, certain participants would put in more effort than the rest. In this regard, a number of participants stressed that the presenter should attempt to create a flexible environment in which other aspects (i.e. experience, skills and knowledge) must also be considered.

Peterson and Park (2006) stress that individuals would need to practice their character strengths constantly if these should impact within their working environment. Therefore, a possible limitation of this specific intervention is the limited follow-up procedures available. The reason was that this specific research study aimed at exploring the awareness of individual character strengths within group work based on a once-off experience in a fixed time-frame of two days. It is thus recommended that follow up procedures such as mentoring sessions be implemented throughout their post-graduate year, exploring the application and effect of character strengths.

Limitations relating to the methodology of the study include that the findings of the study cannot be generalized, also a more diverse sample would have been preferred.

Practical implications

The present research study contributes to the field of IOP by exploring the impact of a training programme to teach and enhance character strengths during group work. This programme focused on the post-graduate IOP students who are faced with high volumes of group-based assignments. The research study investigated how positive-psychology interventions can enable participants (i.e. students or learners) to increase their motivation and change their perception of group-based learning. Positive-psychological interventions were utilised, encouraging participants to apply introspection, which creates the opportunity for self- development.

The training programme helped the students understand the rationale for group-based learning and its relevance for their planned professional career. The motivation for the present research study was that IOP students must learn to apply character strengths within their professional careers during group work. They should realise the effect such strengths have on group work and be empowered to implement these skills in the various domains of IOP. To ensure an effective intervention, the participants could make recommendations to improve the initiative for themselves and suggestions to include it in the university's curriculum at the beginning of the year.

The value of the training programme is found in the fact that the students learn to apply this positive-psychological initiative in preparation for their profession as IOP practitioners.

Conclusion

Group work is essential within the field of IOP since professional Industrial Psychologists focus on optimising potential within groups, individuals and organisations. This is done by applying scientific-based interventions, which help develop individuals' and organisations' performances (Van Zyl, Nel, Stander & Rothmann 2016). Group work is implemented mostly in tertiary programmes since it enables university students to raise self-awareness, increase their communication skills, and be exposed to self-directed learning (Kimmel & Volet, 2010). However, co-operative tasks often prevent students from working effectively. In such instances, group work presents motivational and socio-emotional challenges (Volet & Mansfield, 2006).

Regarding the present study: The programme raised the awareness of individual character strengths and implemented a positive-psychological intervention. This strategy, helping students use their character strengths within group work, proved successful in achieving the present research's objectives. According to the IOP post-graduate honours students, they experienced a deeper and more meaningful understanding of themselves and of group members. The reason was that after the training programme, they were able to identify their particular and other character strengths in group members. This enabled the students to communicate more effectively, increase self-esteem, and develop individually. They could also encourage others to grow in their character strengths.

To conclude, the IOP post-graduate honours students recommended that this initiative should be implemented during the onboarding phase of an organisation. In this regard, it should be introduced as a team-building activity at the onset of their post-graduate year.

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CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions, limitations, and recommendations

Chapter 3 presents the conclusions of the present research study based on the specific objectives outlined previously. Furthermore, the limitations experienced during this study and the recommendations and suggestions made for future research are presented below.

3.1. Conclusions

The general objective of the present study was to explore the impact a character-strength training programme has on group work amongst post-graduate honours students in Industrial-organisational Psychology (IOP). These students work on group assignments to prepare them for group dynamics in the workplace. Figure 2 below summarises the categories grouped into the main themes that were extracted from the data.

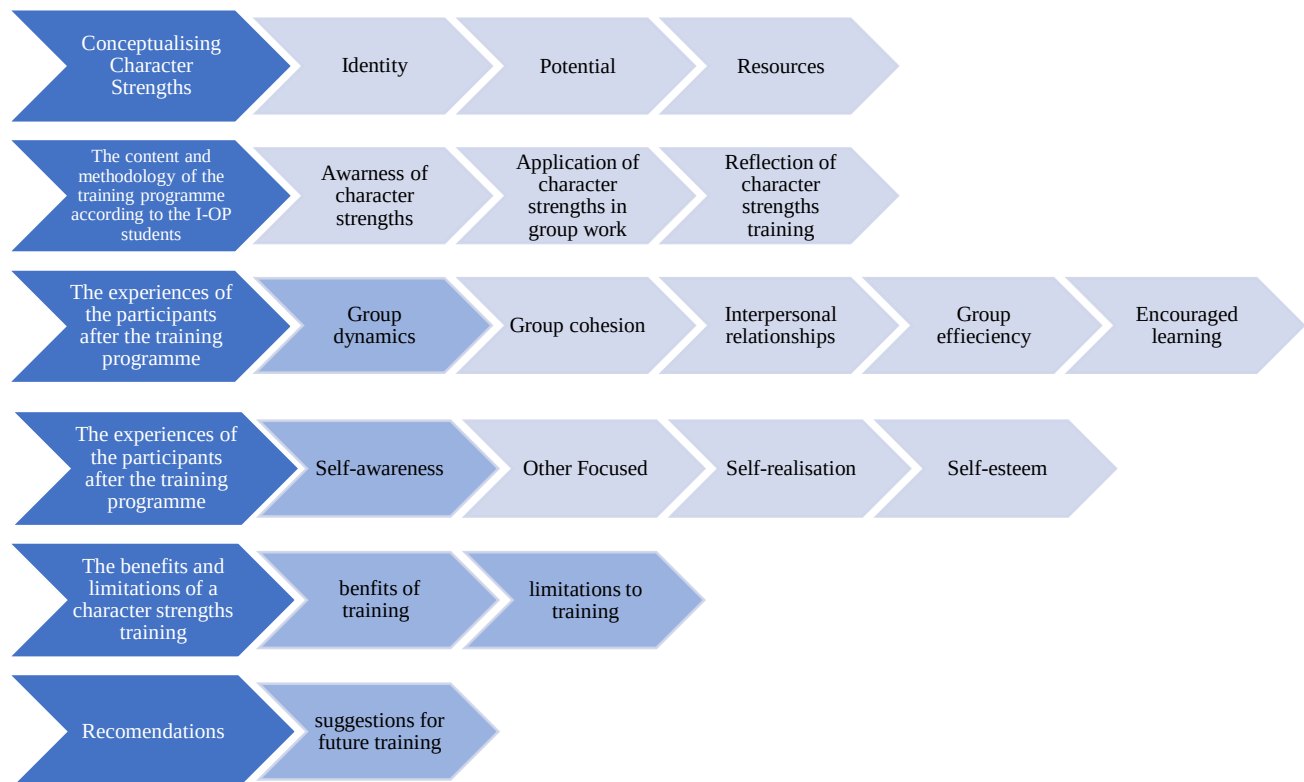


Figure 2: Overview of the categories and main themes

Subsequently, the findings are highlighted based on the specific objectives of the study mentioned above.

Referring to the general objective of this study, positive psychology focuses on individual character strengths to understand ‘psychological good life’ (Park & Peterson, 2008, p. 86). Thus, positive psychology provides a framework that help individuals explain and comprehend a good life style in work and personal terms (Park & Peterson, 2008). Similarly, Zwart, Korthagen and Noordewier (2015) reports that positive psychology is concerned with character strengths and positive emotions. These qualities are utilised by scholars as well as employees to thrive, flourish, and maintain positive experiences during their work life. Furthermore, an institution and a group with a positive outlook encourages development, which results in positive relationships and characteristics that influences individual behaviour accordingly (Park & Peterson, 2008).

In the current developing economy, more emphasis is placed on ‘knowledge-based’ economies than on ‘resource-based’ ones. The reason is that employees need to stay current and grow continuously while maintaining a level of creativity to compete in global challenges (Bogomaz, Kozlova & Atamanova, 2015). Therefore, most tertiary institutions encourage students to be aware of their personal and professional development, which help them cope with demands for organisations to compete in global markets.

The research objectives of the present research study included a thorough literature review. This review was done on a range of reliable sources, which include psychological, educational and business publications.

Specific objective 1: Conceptualise character strengths as teaching experience within literature:

This objective aimed to explore the concept of character strengths as a teaching experience, presented by recent and relevant literature. *According to the participants, character strengths can be depicted in terms of the illustration in Figure 3 below.*

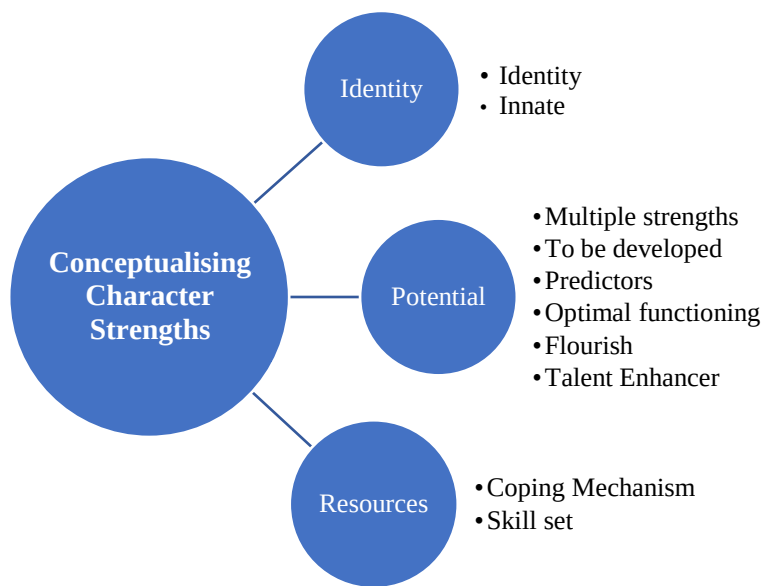


Figure 3: The conceptualisation of character strengths according to the participants after the training programme

Individual character strengths are the basis of continuous development. Therefore, if students utilise and practise individual character strengths, it creates opportunities for lifelong relationships and prevent social problems (Park & Peterson, 2008). The participants indicated that individual character strengths form part of individuals' identity as qualities with which they can identify and which distinguish them from others, seeing that each person is born with these strengths. Furthermore, certain participants explained that their individual character strengths enable them to reach their potential. In a group setting, multiple strengths are represented by the group members, which do not contradict each other as each person within the group utilises his/her character strengths in a different way.

Other participants mentioned that character strengths must be practiced daily to experience its value. Moreover, the participants pointed out that character strengths can function as individual performance predictors, which enable individuals to function optimally, seeing that they understand and perceive their potential from an objective perspective. As a result, the participants can flourish within their position since they are able to practice their potential. In this regard, a

number of participants affirmed that individual character strengths help people enhance their talents, which assist in their personal and professional development.

The participants further reported that individual character strengths also function as coping mechanisms. Some perceived these strengths as an individual's skill set which provides tools to deal with work demands. Park and Peterson (2008) emphasise that specific character strengths such as fairness, perseverance, hope and perspective, can predict academic achievement. Thus, positive psychology, of which character strengths form part, are increasingly raising awareness about personal and professional development amongst students and practitioners of Industrial-organisational Psychology (Hodges & Clifton, 2013).

Hereafter, the second objective of the study are discussed.

Specific objective 2: *Provide the content and methodology of a character-strength training programme for post-graduate IOP students:*

According to this objective, the present study aimed to explore the content and methodology of a positive-psychological initiative to develop a character-strength training programme in the context of group work amongst IOP post-graduate honours students. The purpose of utilising character-strength awareness was to introduce a new element of positive psychology into a complex work requirement such as group work. The participants were exposed to their individual character strengths through the VIA online questionnaire on character strengths, which were utilised during the positive-psychological interventions of the mentioned training programme. The content and methodology of the character-strength training programme are illustrated in Figure 4 below.

TOPIC	OBJECTIVE
Awareness of character strengths	• Raise individual awareness: VIA-character strengths online questionnaire. • Explain each character strength thoroughly.
Application of character strengths in group work	• Apprehend the importance of group work. • Apply character strengths within group work through supplied activities booklet. • Enable learners to identify character strengths of their group members. • Enable learners to assist group members with the awareness and benefits of character strengths
Reflection of character strengths training programme	• Discuss the effects of character strengths in group work. • Discuss the influence of a character strengths initiative within their professional careers.

Figure 4: Illustrating the content and methodology of a character-strength training programme focused on group work amongst IOP post-graduate honours students

The character-strength training programme depicted in Figure 4 above, were designed and developed according to previous positive-psychological interventions that included elements of character strengths. The content was based on a training programme developed by an Industrial Psychologist. The original programme focused on developing human potential through positive-psychological interventions based on experiential learning. The content of the programme presented in the present study, included various topics, namely: the identification of character strengths through visual and practical exercises; top and bottom character strengths of each participant; and categorisation of the virtues for each of the character strengths. Furthermore, it entailed identification of group members' character strengths; importance of group work; application of character strengths in group work exercises; and the reflection of character strengths in a group-work setting.

The programme was adapted by including group activities in which participants had to utilise their identified character strengths within group work. The programme was designed to create awareness of individual strengths. Thereafter, participants utilised their ‘signature strengths’ within group work and explored the effects of this positive-psychological initiative. The participants were involved in the training programme since this programme focused on individual development and group-work efficiency. These aspects are essential for an IOP post-graduate student as well as a future professional Industrial Psychologist.

Interventions involving character strengths usually focus on developing one’s strengths and its influence on individual wellbeing (Quinlan, Swain & Vella-Brodrick, 2012). Furthermore, utilising these strengths creates more benefits and encourages individuals to identify their ‘signature strengths’ (Quinlan, Swain & Vella-Brodrick, 2012). Most strength-based interventions are focused on developing students in tertiary education and the use of signature strengths, which leads to engagement and achievement (Quinlan, Swain & Vella-Brodrick, 2012). Measurements for the classification of character strengths must consider the environment, purpose of the intervention, as well as the different strategies that must be implemented for diverse groups (Quinlan, Swain & Vella-Brodrick, 2012).

The results indicated that the participants made various recommendations to improve the training programme. Based on these recommendations, the programme can be adapted as illustrated in Figure 5 below.

TOPIC	OBJECTIVE
Online character strengths questionnaire	• After a six month period re-test the students. • Compare the results with the previous signature strengths.
Application and reflection of character strengths in group work	• Discuss the effect of the character strengths implementation during group work over the past six months. • Explore alternative methods to improve character strengths within group work. • Explore ways in which the students can motivate each other to utilize character strengths during group work.
Future implimentation	• Enable the students to design and develop an action plan in which the students implement the improved methods of character strengths during group work. • Schedule a follow up session after another six-month period to explore the differences in implementation of character strengths within group work.

Figure 5: Illustrating the content and methodology of the adapted character-strength training programme, which focused on group work amongst IOP post-graduate honours students

Based on the recommendations, the researcher adapted the training programme, which can be used in further research or be present to future post-graduate classes. The researcher suggested that the students should keep a journal and record their experiences after the training programme was introduced, teaching them to apply character strengths within group work. A second initiative should be arranged after approximately six months in which the students utilise their notes to report back on their experiences of applying character strengths in a group setup. Afterwards, alternative methods should be discussed and the use of character strengths motivated with a view to develop an action plan that will continue the application of a strength-based initiative in a group-work setting. Later, another follow-up intervention of approximately another six months should take place in which the students report back on their total experience where they utilised character strengths during group work.

Subsequently, the third objective of the study are discussed.

Specific objective 3: *Report on the experience of the population after the character strengths training programme in accordance to group dynamics during group work:* The results for this objective are summarised in Figure 6 below.

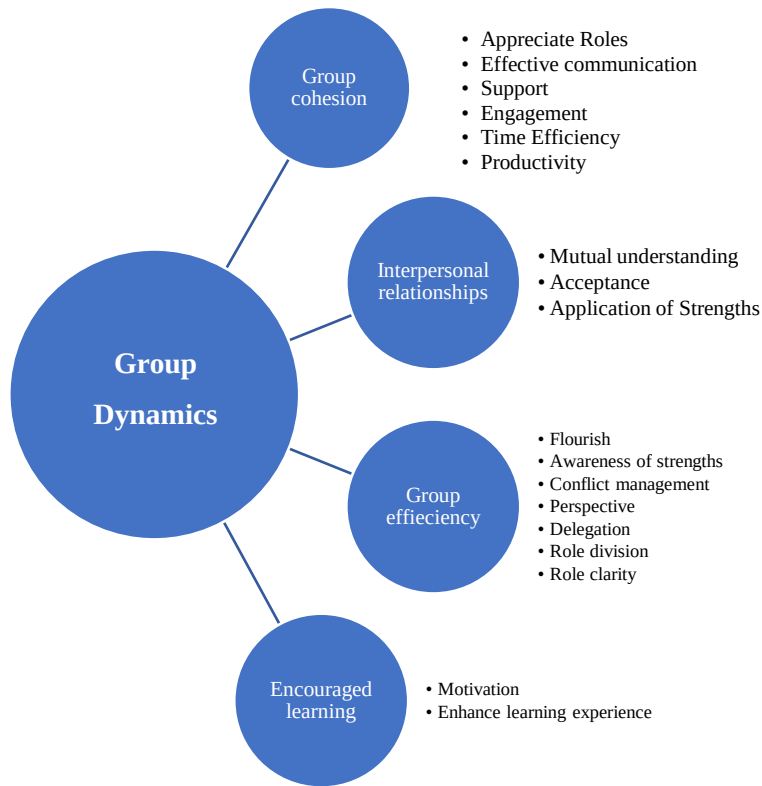


Figure 6: Illustrating the group dynamic themes and subthemes which the post-graduate honours students experienced after the character-strength training programme

According to Pianesi, Massimo, Not, Leonardi, Falcon and Lepri (2008), a group's performance decreases, due to the complexity of group dynamics. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to understand group dynamics if individuals are to function optimally within group work (Pianesi et al., 2008). The participants reported that their group dynamics were strengthened as they experienced group cohesion. The participants appreciated their roles, which affected their communication positively and helped them support each other during group work. Furthermore, they experienced that they were more engaged which enabled them to manage their time more effectively and increase their productivity.

Participants further reported that their interpersonal relationships were affected positively as they reached a mutual understanding and accepted the different experiences within the group. Furthermore, the participants could apply their character strengths within group work, which enabled them to learn from one another. Training interventions and facilitators can enhance the performance of groups. The reason is that training aims to improve the interpersonal relationships between group members and change their perspectives to overcome or cope with possible problems (Pianesi et al., 2008).

The participants experienced that once they were aware of their character strengths, they could help each other grow. This provided the opportunity for group members to flourish, and made the group function more efficiently. Moreover, the participants experienced that their group could manage group conflict more effectively, seeing that they were more open to other's perspectives. According to recent literature, a lack of role clarity and autonomy contributes to workplace stress, which creates an unhealthy climate within the organisation (Biron & Bruke, 2016). In this regard, the participants indicated that their individual character strengths allowed them to delegate work tasks among their group members, which assisted them in their role division and understanding their role within the group clearly (role clarity). Group work and co-operative learning give students continuous exposure to different perspectives and help maintain problem-solving skills (Noble & McGrath, 2008).

According to Carpenter and Pease (2013), most educators limit group work once the students begin complaining about problems they experience during such work. Instead of teaching them the appropriate interpersonal skills and create opportunities to develop individuals, educators avoid the activity, and rather focus on the syllabus. The most essential aspect of an educator's work is to teach or facilitate their student's skills development, which transcends their syllabus (Carpenter & Pease, 2013). The skill set that is required entails non-cognitive elements such as individual character strengths, soft, as well as and inter- and intra-personal skills (Carpenter & Pease, 2013). Due to the continuous change and the high demands of present society, students must develop those skills which will help them cope effectively outside the classroom environment (Carpenter & Pease, 2013).

To follow, the fourth objective of the study are discussed.

Specific objective 4: *Report on the experience of the population after the character strengths training programme in accordance to self-awareness during group work:*

The results for this objective are summarised in Figure 7 below.

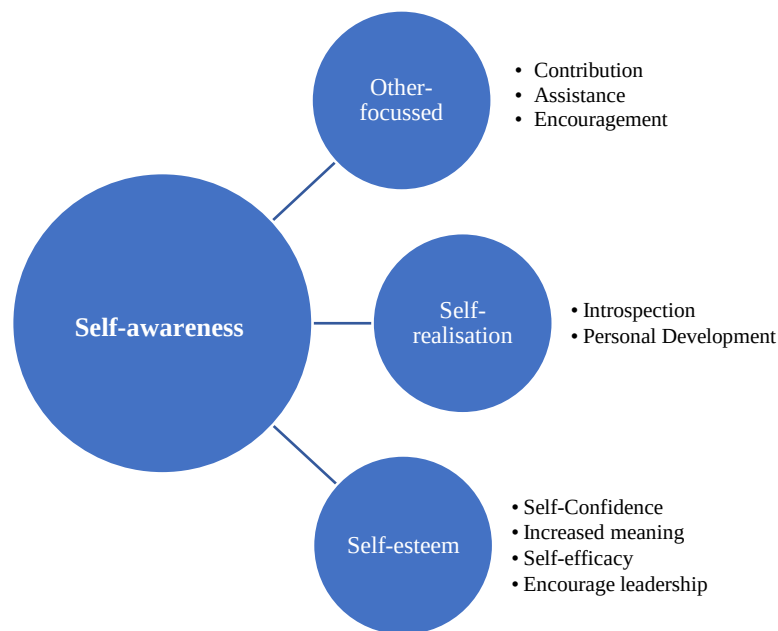


Figure 7: Illustrating the self-awareness themes and subthemes which the post-graduate honours students experienced after the character-strength training programme

Informed by positive psychology, Zwart et al. (2015) utilises a strength-based approach in their research study. They found that once the teachers became more self-aware, it helped them become more efficient facilitators of learning for their co-workers and students. Similarly, after the character-strength training programme, the IOP post-graduate honours students reported that once they became more self-aware of their own character strengths, they could identify other's strengths as well. This helped them understand their unique contributions and that of their group members towards group work. Furthermore, the participants affirmed that their self-awareness enabled them to encourage each other throughout the group work.

According to Zwart, Korthagen and Attema-Noordewier (2015), professional behaviour relates to individual qualities and its value system. Once employees become more aware of these individual character strengths, their professional behaviour increases since character strengths function as an individual's driving force. Similarly, the participants of the present study stated that the awareness of individual character strengths allowed them more introspection since they could perceive their abilities from a more objective vantage point. Furthermore, the participants attested that their self-awareness allowed them to grow. The reason was that they could observe how their group members model their character strengths, which helped them learn and develop accordingly. The participants reported that their self-esteem also increased by self-awareness of their character strengths, seeing that they experienced more self-confidence during group work. Also, this enabled participants to find more meaning within group work since they gained a better understanding of the purpose and benefits of group-based learning. The participants also experienced self-efficacy since they were more resilient during group work. Therefore, they were able to lead others within a specific field of expertise accordingly to their individual character strengths.

Below, the fifth objective of the study are discussed.

Specific objective 5: Providing the implications for future training of IOP post-graduate honours students with regards to a character strengths training programme in collaboration with group work:

The results for this objective are summarised in Figure 8 below.

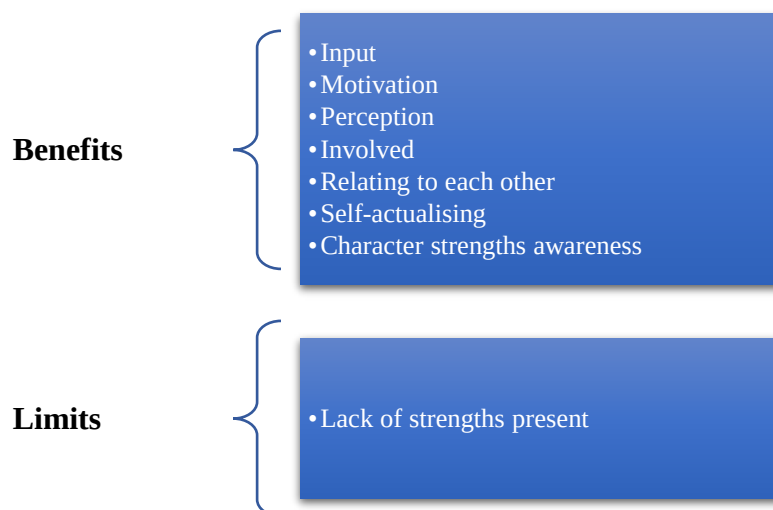


Figure 8: Illustrating of the benefits and limitations of a character-strength training programme within group work amongst post-graduate IOP students

The participants indicated various benefits of a character-strength training programme such as individual input, as mentioned previously, once individual become aware of their character strengths and as well as those of others, they understand their unique contribution towards group work. Other participants stated that this awareness of strengths helped them motivate each other, which enhances individual and group development. Furthermore, the participants indicated that their perception of group work changed, seeing that they did not feel ‘trapped’ anymore within group work, but rather perceived it as an opportunity to learn and grow. Another benefit, according to the participants, were that once they were made aware of their character strengths. Thus they felt more involved in group work by having more energy and feeling positively inclined towards the group.

The participants furthermore experienced that they could relate better to each other due to improved mutual understanding. Additionally, the participants felt they could motivate themselves and others around them due to a better understanding of themselves and those within their group. After the character-strength training programme, the participants could underwrite the benefits of character strengths as positive-psychological intervention, and were motivated to utilise it within their profession.

However, there were also limitations regarding the mentioned training programme. The participants reported that once character strengths are integrated within group work, there can be an overflow of similar strengths or lack of such strengths to share the group work equally. Such a condition may cause a lack of participation and motivation. Therefore, the participants suggested that once character strengths are introduced, the group should create an open and flexible environment in which individuals can explore other character strengths and not only their ‘signature strengths’.

One of the most important factors that must be considered during strengths intervention, is goal setting as well as follow-up interventions (Quinlan, Swain & Vella-Brodrick, 2012).

Correspondingly, Gander, Proyer, Ruch & Wyss (2012) explain that most positive-psychological interventions focus on only a single intervention. Thus, it would benefit the group to practice various initiatives for a more effective functioning. In this light, participants initially considered more timeous interventions more effective than shorter interventions (Quinlan, Swain & Vella-Brodrick, 2012). To ensure a successful character-strength intervention, certain factors should be taken into consideration, namely; understanding character strengths during the beginning of the intervention; providing activities which are current, engaging and valuable; develop a sound basis which promotes sustainability; and use these strengths continually (Quinlan, Swain & Vella-Brodrick, 2012).

3.2. Limitations

During the present research study, certain limitations were pointed out. The aim was to explore the impact of a character-strength training programme on group work amongst IOP post-graduate honours students. This took place during a two-day course. Thus, no follow-up procedures were introduced to ensure character strengths are practiced within group work. According to Clifton and Harter (2003), character strengths must be practiced in order for individuals to perceive their potential and for these strengths to develop fully and impact personal and work life.

Furthermore, the training programme for character strengths should have been introduced at the beginning of the year and not only at the end of the student's post-graduate year. A character-strength intervention is efficient although it can be time-consuming, seeing that there is no quick way to measure character quality (Park & Peterson, 2008). Therefore, the training programme should also be presented throughout the year. Strategic follow-up initiatives would have helped differentiate the experiences during group work, which would benefit the individuals and the group.

Limitations of the study further include that this sample size is not only relatively small, but may not be representative for all race groups. The reason being that the case study focused on a particular class group. The facilitator and trainer were the same person, it will be beneficial if this could be two separate people.

3.3. Recommendations

Recommendations for future training of IOP post-graduate honours students and their planned profession:

The participants suggested a range of elements to improve the current character-strength training programme for future practice within the field of Industrial Psychology. *The recommendations for future training are illustrated in Figure 9 below.*



Figure 9: Illustrating of the recommendations and suggestions of a character-strength training programme within group work amongst post-graduate IOP students

After undergoing the character-strength training programme, the participants suggested certain elements that would improve the present training programme. With reference to Tuckman (1965), participants proposed four phases for small-group development. They also emphasised that it would be beneficial to introduce such a training programme during the norming phase of the group development, which is usually within the induction period of their professional career. Furthermore, participants pointed out that a character-strength initiative must not be used merely to delegate tasks during group work. Instead character strengths in a group setup should be focused on developing the individual as well as group. Furthermore, participants suggested that a character-strength training initiative should be utilised during the onboarding phase to prepare employees for effective team or group tasks.

Finally, the participants made suggestions on the method of training, which should keep the participants interested throughout. In this regard, the character-strength training programme should be utilised as a team-building activity at the beginning of the post-graduate academic year to ensure collaborative group work throughout the year. Research suggests that goal setting and follow-up sessions are key to positive psychological interventions (Quinlan, Swain & Vella-Brodrick, 2012). Thus, it is recommended that the current training programme implement such follow-up procedures to encourage the practice and development of character strengths within group work in

IOP- students' academic and professional lives. Furthermore, it is recommended that interviews or questionnaires can be used during the follow up procedures to assist with data gathering.

To conclude, the final objective of the study is discussed.

Specific objective 6: Recommendations for future research and practice:

Industrial psychology in the academic field refers to the empirical and theoretical application of new knowledge and solutions when facing critical challenges and situations, which often results from socio-economic factors in an organisational context (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010). Applying principles of Industrial-organisational Psychology in the work place, entails utilising psychological principles as well as newly-developed knowledge and solutions to solve problems within the work place (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010). However, according to Barkhuizen, Jorgensen and Brink (2014), Industrial Psychologists are also exposed to problems outside the workplace, seeing that employees are influenced by culture, traumatic events, or possible mental health problems. Character strengths are associated with mental health as it assists in the recovery of psychological disorders (Park & Peterson, 2008). This enables Industrial Psychologists who encounter these problems among their clients or co-workers, to utilise character strengths and develop intervention plans. The researcher recommends that alternative methods can be researched for a character- strength training programme within the field of industrial psychology. This will enable these Industrial Psychologists to utilise a positive psychological approach in various aspects of their professional career.

In conclusion, as pointed out in chapter 1 of this study, character-strength training makes future IOP post-graduate honours students aware of their individual strengths. By applying these character strengths within group work, they are empowered to identify the character strengths in others. Thereby they can create a 'tool kit' to utilise within other areas of their professional career.

Ultimately, it is clear from the results that character-strength training seems to provide valuable knowledge to the IOP as both a practitioner and scientist (Van Zyl, Nel, Stander, & Rothmann, 2016). These professionals are empowered to solve specific work-related problems and help groups function optimally. As Industrial-organisational psychologists focus on optimising

potential and facilitate groups, individuals and organisations, character strengths within group work creates the opportunity for IOP professionals to utilise positive psychological interventions within all aspects of their work. Taking all these factors into account it will be beneficial for IOP post-graduate honours students to be exposed to character strengths training programme before they enter their professional careers to develop and practice their character strengths in preparation for their professional career.

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