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Meaning, personal purpose and the Big Five personality traits in exploring leader effectiveness in South Africa's FMCG sector during the Fourth Industrial Revolution

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Abstract

Aim/purpose – Effective leadership in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) era requires the right mix of personality traits, a deep sense of meaning, and personal purpose. The Big Five personality traits theory was chosen for its cross-cultural applicability and effectiveness in describing various personality traits precisely. The study had a two-fold objective: first, to explore the impact of meaning and personal purpose on the effectiveness of leaders in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector in South Africa (SA) during 4IR era, and second, to understand how meaning and personal purpose are embedded within the Big Five personality traits.

Design/methodology/approach – The research design was qualitative phenomenological, and 13 purposively sampled participants were interviewed to explore their experiences as senior leaders adapting to the 4IR demands in the FMCG industry in SA. The data were analyzed using a manual thematic analysis process.

Findings – The findings showed that leaders perform optimally when they have a sense of meaning and personal purpose and that leaders in SA's FMCG industry require support and expert guidance to adapt to the digital era.

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Research implications/limitations – Leadership development should address the new competencies required to transition to a new way of leading in the 4IR. This study is limited to South Africa's FMCG industry.

Originality/value/contribution – The study expanded the theoretical understanding of meaning and purpose and the integration of these concepts into the Big Five personality traits.

Keywords: leadership, meaning, personal purpose, fourth industrial revolution, five-factor personality theory, personality traits.

JEL Classification: O15, M10, M21.

1. Introduction

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and its accompanying innovative technologies have now become an integral part of the lexica of most sectors of human life globally. These technologies have significantly transformed how people live, connect, and work, profoundly transforming economies and industries (Schwab, 2016). Innovative leadership and management approaches are required to transform business models as traditional leadership concepts are unlikely to endure the digital revolution; instead, leadership must fundamentally change in response to advancing technologies (Toendepi & Viljoen, 2019). This shift is crucial for understanding new meaning and personal purpose and adapting to new, effective leadership strategies. To ensure the longevity of organizations into and beyond 4IR (Leurent & Shook, 2019), leaders must take on new identity roles, discover a renewed purpose for themselves, and influence those they lead. Personal purpose is the deep sense of meaning and existential fulfillment that drives an individual's values, goals, and passion (Smith, 2017). Personal purpose and meaning go beyond the "self" to how one impacts and contributes to societal well-being. The Five-Factor model of personality is one of the universal and cross-cultural multi-trait theories with the five broad trait dimensions of conscientiousness, neuroticism, extroversion, openness to experience, and agreeableness (Judge et al., 2002; Roos & Kazemi, 2022). Multi-trait theories provide a more comprehensive view of an individual's behavior (Mothersbaugh et al., 2020). Hence, a leader would lead by inhabiting specific personality characteristics and traits, as being an effective leader is associated with specific personality traits (Northouse, 2021).

For South Africa (SA), 4IR presents several opportunities on the one hand and critical challenges on the other. Such challenges are particularly glaring in SA's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry. A volatile Rand, changing consumer preferences, waning consumption, automation, digitization, inconsistent energy supply, and high energy costs are just some of the challenges fac-

ing SA's FMCG industry. Further, challenges emanate from less-than-optimal economies of scale in production and competition from countries with high productivity and low wages, such as Brazil, China, and India (National Economic Development and Labour Council, 2019). Consumer preferences and declining individual consumption due to the high cost of living, unemployment, and the laggard effects of COVID-19 are forcing manufacturers to explore alternative products and new markets.

Smart technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), additive manufacturing, renewable energy technologies, and the industrial Internet of Things can drastically minimize these constraints (Naudé, 2019), but only if leadership is fit for the purpose and ready to lead in these unprecedented times (Schwab, 2016). Conventional wisdom around leadership approaches must be revised in the face of such perplexing volatility, uncertainty, and non-linear complexity. Dolan and Garcia (2002) highlighted that leaders must address complexity by acquiring new skills to understand complexity, chaos, and systems theories. Work becomes meaningful when the individual fulfills the role and perceives it as having meaning, purpose, and significance (Merdiaty, 2024). Additionally, Park and Hai (2024) argued that a strong person-job fit enhances employee happiness and well-being, increasing passion and positive interactions within the work environment. A survey by Deloitte (2019) found that South African executives, compared to their counterparts in the rest of the world, lacked confidence in their readiness to harness the full potential of smart technologies by an overwhelming margin. Therefore, leaders are expected to lead this transformation with a sense of meaning and personal purpose while strategically navigating the operating environment for the benefit of society, thereby reframing leadership identity.

The two-fold aim of the study was to explore the meaning and personal purpose of the effectiveness of leaders in the FMCG sector in SA in the 4IR era and to understand the embeddedness of meaning and personal purpose in the Big Five personality traits.

The remaining parts of the article include a literature review of the study's key concepts, the methodology employed, findings, discussion, and conclusions.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Effective leadership and the 4IR

Petrillo et al. (2018) indicated that term 4IR was popularized by Klaus Schwab, the executive chairman of the World Economic Forum [WEF], describing it as a sophisticated technological revolution characterized by technologies that inte-

grate the physical, digital, and biological realms, transforming all economies, industries, and fields (Schwab, 2016). The First Industrial Revolution was powered by steam, the second by electricity, while the third and fourth focused on automation and digitization (Roser, 2015). Kwiotkowska et al. (2021) concur that 4IR generally involves technological and organizational transformation where new business models emerge with products and services digitization and automation of means of production. Various interchangeable terms are used to describe this era of industrial development, including 4IR, the second machine age, Industry 4.0, Industry X.0, Smart Factory, and the digital workplace (Savić, 2018). The WEF (2019) predicted future roles to be technology-related, including positions for specialists in big data, AI, machine learning, and digital transformation, as well as application analysts and developers.

With the advent of 4IR, the world experienced a significant shift in how leadership is understood, moving away from a hierarchical view of leadership towards a shared model (Cardona et al., 2019; Kelly, 2019; World Economic Forum [WEF], 2019). Veldsman (2019) argued that leadership is in crisis globally and requires an urgent reorientation to fit the purpose of the emergent new order. While recognizing that adapting to modern technologies will be challenging for most leaders, Nel (2009) noted that the soft revolution about people and leadership would be more arduous. Leonhard (2017) warned that what could be automated and digitized would be, but what would remain quintessential is the human capacity to cope. WEF (2023) pinpointed cognitive skills as the most important quality for workers in organizations where the effects of 4IR have already had an impact. Consequently, the ways of leading such organizations must match up through leadership having the adequate capacity to lead the transformation.

In the 4IR era, effective leadership is increasingly linked to adaptability and the ability to navigate the complex and dynamic environment and influence organizational people to reciprocate (Abu-Ulbeh et al., 2021; Northouse, 2021). Leadership influence is the nature of individuals or groups to motivate others to focus on achieving concerted goals (Tulasi et al., 2019). Further, Abu-Ulbeh et al. (2021) stated that the influencing process embeds the view that leadership effectiveness can be measured by how this influence on followers and stakeholders is exerted. Influential leaders have a personal purpose and lead meaningfully through a series of beliefs, values, ideas and personal visions of the organization, which are sold to the broader organizational people and stakeholders (Toendepi & Viljoen, 2019). Hence, personal values and philosophy contribute to developing a leader's personal purpose (Boyatzis & Dhar, 2021). Purpose gives a sense of meaning by directing life goals and daily decisions like a com-

pass, providing direction, guiding goal pursuance and attainment, and shaping a leadership identity (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Oberer and Erkollar (2018) argued that the leader's behavior predicts how the influence is instituted and measures leadership success. The intersection of the big five traits with a leader's sense of meaning and personal purpose is crucial in understanding leadership effectiveness in 4IR, as each personality trait in the model is associated with a specific behavior (Soto, 2020). As leaders play a critical role in the transformation in the 4IR era, the WEF (2023) pinpointed social influence as an emerging skill that leaders must master and must be done within an ethical climate where sensitivity to the followers' interests and dignity remains key. Guzmán (2021) noted that social, personal, and technical competencies are necessary for leaders to guide a successful changeover in the 4IR.

Further, the emergent 4IR workplace demands that leaders internalize digital, personal, interpersonal, and contextual intelligence and assume new roles. Tulasi et al. (2019) and Guzmán et al. (2020) concurred and acknowledged that Industry 4.0 real-time intelligent, interconnected, and automated manufacturing systems with direct communication between humans and machines, machine-to-machine and available resources are creating more efficiency and flexibility in systems. Hence, leaders first require digital/technological intelligence to assist them in exploiting and applying these technologies to maximize innovation and creativity and enhance organizational success. Digital leadership is fast, cross-hierarchical, team-oriented, cooperative, focused on innovation, and highly social and open (Oberer & Erkollar, 2018). Oberer and Erkollar (2018) and Kwiotkowska et al. (2021) agreed that, of late, leaders require openness to new meaning and cultural change to apply and use technology appropriately to benefit the organization and stakeholders. Further, leadership should catalyze change by unleashing positive energy into the system (Toendepi, 2021). Those leaders who can recognize the challenges and complexities thereon and harness these for systems change will be able to build the necessary positive pathways for a sustainable future (Toendepi & Viljoen, 2019).

Therefore, internalizing personal intelligence allows one to be in tune with the inner self and be conscious of feelings, values, beliefs, purpose, and meaning (Rasul et al., 2023). Henderson (2021) also found that a leader's inadequate worldview may hinder adaptation to transformational changes. Hence, the worldview must be intentionally conscious through a renewed personal purpose and understanding of the new meaning. Therefore, when one's purpose aligns with work, that individual's capacity to achieve work-life goals is heightened. Boyatzis and Dhar (2021) stated that a sense of purpose or meaning in work changes professional identity into a better fit with internal and external stand-

ards, which is also a step towards an ideal self. Rey et al. (2019) stressed that harmonizing personal and organizational purpose creates fluidity and synergy, whereby individuals derive meaning in their work, which becomes a highly motivating element. When the personal purpose is aligned with the company vision, commitment is heightened, helping the individuals and the organization achieve the higher purpose and vision of making the world a better place.

Gibson et al. (2020) defined an inspiring personal vision as the “guiding light” describing the “ideal self,” which encapsulates notions of a calling and a sense of purpose, which is distinct from identity. Northouse (2021) discussed visioning as the ability to articulate a vision that can assist followers in making sense of and acting on the problem. Li et al. (2023) proved the relationship between visionary leadership and employee creativity. Berg (2015) concurred that CEOs who lead with a vision outperform those without one and that vision drives motivation, mainly if it is a shared vision. A leader with an inspiring personal vision and a synergetic relationship with the organization’s vision becomes a catalyst that unleashes positive energy in the system. Toendepi (2021) described a catalytic leader as a network builder who raises collective consciousness through inclusive conversations and engendering a culture and climate conducive to ongoing learning, creativity, and innovation.

Purpose is connected to interpersonal intelligence, which focuses on making a difference in others’ lives, nurturing relationships, and connectedness. Interpersonal intelligence enables one to understand the feelings of others and facilitate cordial work relationships. Rasul et al. (2023) described interpersonal intelligence as seeing from the perspectives of others, empathy, counseling, and cooperation. Steger (2012) stated that meaning is nurtured by good behavior. Hence, interpersonal intelligence will assist leaders in the 4IR era in influencing and persuading workers not to panic but to understand environmental changes. However, the paradox of the hyper-digital era of 4IR has magnified the need for human qualities from leaders, including collaboration and social intelligence, agility and adaptability, a sense of purpose, innovativeness, ethical sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and empathy (Kelly, 2019; Leonhard, 2017; Leurent & Shook, 2019; Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019; Schwab, 2016).

Internalizing personal and interpersonal intelligence makes the leader a coach who brings the best out of people by influencing and building new mindsets (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019), deepening their ability to collaborate and influence the building of new mindsets around digitization and automation. Moreover, a coach fosters trust and open communication (West & Turner, 2018). Behjat (2012) stated that a coach who internalizes both personal (self-smart) and interpersonal intelligence, where the former relates to one’s feelings

and emotions and the other enables one to know the desires, feelings, and aspirations of others, creates the best fit. One of the characteristics of effective leadership is the ability to influence positive change. Therefore, a person's sense of purpose assists in articulating a personal vision (Berg, 2015). Then, the leader becomes an architect who clarifies what is to be accomplished (vision). Further, the architect leader deeply examines the system designs within the organization. This is the South African challenge where the technical skills level is low (Writer, 2020) and unemployment is high, at 33.5% in the 2nd quarter of the year (Maluleke, 2024). In SA, leaders in the FMCG industry are conflicted about fully automating their processes, given this and the risk of contentious battles with labor unions.

2.2. Big-Five personality traits theory

From a personality theory perspective, effective leadership can be said to depend on a leader's personal qualities. Judge et al. (2002) found the Five-Factor model of personality to be a perfect framework for estimating the relationship between personality and leadership. Roos and Kazemi (2022) suggested that individuals' consistent responses to environmental stimuli reflect their personality. Northouse (2021) asserted that personality is what makes one unique. Furthermore, Judge et al. (2002) reported a strong relationship between the Big Five traits and leadership and that extroversion was the trait most highly associated with leadership. Extroverted individuals score high in quality leadership traits due to positive energy levels, sociability, and charisma, which appeal to followers (Judge et al., 2002; Nai & Toros, 2020; Triwijayati, 2024). Leader effectiveness is also measured by how one uses the altruistic gift (Szcześniak et al., 2020) to foster growth and development in others by keeping abreast of the complex changes in the work environment (Hao & Yazdanifard, 2015). Therefore, it can be inferred that the positive interpersonal relations, acts of altruism, and social harmony in an extroverted leader influence one's sense of purpose and meaning in leading others. Leaders open to experience are most receptive to novel ideas, creative, curious, open-minded, and insightful (Herbert et al., 2023; Judge et al., 2002; Northouse, 2021). These individuals seek new perspectives, thereby igniting self-introspection about their existential purpose. This type of openness is correlated with divergent thinking (McCrae, 2002). Moreover, Bass and Stogdill (1990) also identified originality as "a hallmark of openness" and a key trait of effective leaders. Traits such as creativity, originality, and openness foster a spirit of continuous learning and improvement, which stimulates new meaning and personal purpose as individuals continue to adapt to the evolving environment.

Agreeableness refers to pro-sociality (Szcześniak et al., 2020), trust (McCrae, 2002), compassion and tolerance (Nai & Toros, 2020), cooperation, conformity, and nurturing (Northouse, 2021). It can be inferred that agreeableness influences the quality of interpersonal relationships, which is central to one's sense of meaning and fulfillment in leading others. Therefore, leaders who excel at inspiring and influencing others find personal purpose. Effective leaders are visionaries who articulate a clear direction (Hao & Yazdanifard, 2015) and may also find fulfillment in catalyzing positive change.

Conscientiousness “refers to the tendency to be thorough, organized, controlled, dependable and decisive” (Northouse, 2021, p. 36). Szcześniak et al. (2020) also pointed out that conscientiousness involves the inclination to adhere to socially endorsed rules to fulfill specific obligations to others. Nia and Toro (2020) added calmness, low emotional distress, and anxiety to the traits of a conscientious individual. Effective leadership also entails “being perceived as leaderlike” (Judge et al., 2002, p. 768). Hence, it can be inferred that conscientiousness positions a leader's behavior to influence the setting of meaningful long-term goals that contribute to personal purpose.

The Big Five model is a comprehensive model of personality traits, representing tendencies to display consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions (McCrae, 2002; McCrae & Costa, 1996). Leaders who are low in neuroticism are described as resilient, calm, and emotionally stable (Judge et al., 2002). Northouse (2021) concurred that neuroticism is the tendency to experience feelings of depression, anxiety, insecurity, and vulnerability. Further, emotional intelligence, a leader's ability to monitor their feelings, beliefs, and internal state, as well as those of their followers, has been identified as a crucial attribute of a strong leader (Northouse, 2021). In 4IR, leaders must remain calm and composed in the face of adversity, treat the circumstances as opportunities for learning and growth, and demonstrate resilience in pursuing a vision and establishing new meaning and purpose at work.

2.3. Meaning and purpose

The development and promotion of adaptability require a new kind of leadership or at least a new emphasis on specific leadership behavior. Leaders must articulate the unique meaning and purpose during the 4IR and beyond, as this will motivate them to persist rather than quit in the face of challenges. Effective leadership requires competencies such as readiness, spontaneous response, and acceptance of change (Abu-Ulbeh et al., 2021). These competencies should be housed in the leader's psyche and be related to how personal purpose is inter-

preted. Henderson (2021) stated that an authentic purpose increases the likelihood of meaningful work. 4IR technologies influence information technology, how businesses are run, and the kind of leadership applied. Hence, digital transformation is not only about technology but also about leaders who understand key digital elements that affect the organization and focus on changing the mindset of employees, systems, processes, and culture before implementing specific digital strategies (Toendepi & Viljoen, 2019).

Within behavioral leadership research, there is a shift towards the human side of organizations to increase productivity, efficiency, and the whole value chain. Hence, finding meaning and personal purpose in work creates an inner balance and a sense of comfort with oneself (Rey & Bastons, 2019). 4IR also needs a more specific focus on learning and innovation to be spearheaded by leaders who make strategic decisions in leading the changeover (Guzmán, 2021) and understand their purpose at personal and organizational levels. Consequently, besides personality traits, a leader's sense of meaning and purpose can significantly affect their effectiveness, especially in the context of the 4IR.

Frankl (2008) asserted that humans are driven by a quest for meaning in life, famously arguing that life could have meaning and purpose even under highly challenging circumstances. Meaning and purpose are often used interchangeably or interrelatedly (George & Park, 2013; Kılınç et al., 2020; Roger & George, 2018). Berg (2015) argued that purpose is a deliberate futuristic choice that benefits the self and society. Steger (2012) described purpose as a unique mission to strive for in life and meaning as an ingredient to flourishing. McKnight and Kashdan (2009) described purpose as a cognitive process woven into one's identity and behavior, stimulating goals and behavior. Further, McKnight and Kashdan (2009) elaborated on how having a purpose lowers stress levels and buffers against psychological and physical suffering during hardships. Rey et al. (2019) stated that purpose is a source of motivation, which energizes one amid radical change. As a result, individuals with a strong sense of purpose are more likely to inspire, adapt to change, and promote innovation.

Cardona et al. (2019) also saw the two as connected, describing purpose as the unique gift one offers to the world, which is related to and informed by one's innermost drivers (the bits of intelligence). Furthermore, purpose provides a sense of meaning but does not replace the effort required to identify meaning daily (Cardona et al., 2019). Similarly, Steger (2017) framed meaningful work as having a purpose, being congruent with and providing personal meaning, and offering an avenue to contribute to whatever one deems to be the greater good. Teodorescu (2015) states that human beings will not feel lost and aimless with a captivating narrative, which gives meaning and purpose to their lives.

However, George and Park (2013) established a distinction between the two, whereby, on the one hand, meaning is a feeling of significance and the experience of life making sense. On the other hand, purpose is depicted as the impression of having overall direction and aims in life, lending itself to optimism about the future (George & Park, 2013). Similarly, McKnight and Kashdan (2009) viewed the two as different, whereby purpose is a core, self-directing life aspiration, significantly distinct from meaning, which relates to how one interprets and processes life experiences to make sense of them. Recognizing both viewpoints as valid, the most crucial insight is that meaning and purpose are equally critical to a leader's well-being, fulfillment, and effectiveness.

Therefore, Leadership 4.0 must synchronize personal and organizational purposes to derive synergy that makes the organization sustainable. Rey et al. (2019) asserted that this duality unleashes positive energy into the organization. Once leadership demands meet the personal purpose, this congruency enables one to go further in leading the organization. As a result, leaders need to internalize personal intelligence, appeal to the inner self, and be self-aware of the values and beliefs that underpin one's purpose and meaning. Deloitte (2019) found that South African executives needed to be well-prepared and confident to navigate these changes effectively. Teodorescu (2015) asserted that it is normal for human beings, when going through work-related transitions, to experience a sense of loss, confusion, fear, and or insecurity because they have lost the golden thread that connects their professional life. Therefore, a leader's purpose or true north and a sense of meaning often emerge from such life experiences. Hence, leaders must cope with new technologies and emerging ethical demands to augment smart ways of doing things.

3. Method

Qualitative phenomenological research was carried out to understand the leaders' experiences by focusing on the similarities of their lived experiences to explore the phenomenon (Creswell, 2019). Study participants were purposively sampled from a population of senior leaders within the FMCG industry in SA. The participants had considerable experience in leading others in FMCG organizations. The researchers used their subjective judgment to identify sources of comprehensive data, and the snowball technique (Cohen & Arieli, 2011) was used to increase the number of participants through referrals. Consequently, thirteen (13) senior leaders in the FMCG industry were identified across the spectrum of expert areas and invited to participate, as data saturation in qualita-

tive research is influenced by the quality and richness of the data rather than by the size of the sample (Braun & Clarke, 2021), the 13 participant sample was deemed sufficient. Saunders et al. (2019) described data saturation as the point during an interview when additional data collection results in no new insights, indicating that further data adds little to a deeper understanding of the topic. Table 1 below profiles the participants.

Table 1. Participants profiles

| Participant | Educational qualification | Number of years in FMCG | Number of years in leadership | Position |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| PT01 | BSc Engineering | 15 | 12 | Product Group Director |
| PT02 | BSc Marketing | 15 | 8 | Trade Marketing Executive |
| PT03 | MBA | 15 | 11 | Operations Director |
| PT04 | Masters in Engineering | 18 | 12 | Marketing Manager |
| PT05 | Masters in Business Economics | 16 | 16 | Customer Director |
| PT06 | BSC Finance | 20 | 17 | Finance Director |
| PT07 | BSc Procurement. Bachelor of Laws | 23 | 14 | Vice President, Customer Development |
| PT08 | Masters in Business Administration | 20 | 6 | Country Manager |
| PT09 | Masters Business Leadership | 30 | 23 | Customer Strategy & Capability Director |
| PT10 | Masters in Engineering; MBA | 19 | 15 | Digital Transformation Director |
| PT11 | Masters in Human Resources Management | 26 | 20 | HR Director |
| PT12 | BSC Computer Science | 2 | 8 | Data & Analytics Manager |
| PT13 | MBA | 16 | 20 | Operations Director |

Note: The sample provides a well-rounded representation across various functional and professional streams, including Supply Chain (Manufacturing), Procurement, Sales, E-Commerce, Marketing, Finance, Human Resources, and Information Technology.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews whereby open-ended questions allowed for flexibility and further probing by the researchers where necessary (Saunders et al., 2019). Open-ended questions explore the experiences and sensitive themes (Tong et al., 2007). An interview guide was used to channel the interviewing process, and the following questions were included in the guide:

- What do you think is the effect of 4IR on leadership practices in the FMCG?
- What leadership competencies are most relevant for the 4IR?
- Do leaders in the FMCG sector require technical or human skills for 4IR? Expand on each.
- What are the essential leadership behaviors for the 4IR?

- What qualities should leaders possess?
- What mindset do leaders need to have?
- What will leaders become eventually?

The data were collected over two months, from mid-September to November 2020. Each participant was interviewed once; the average interview duration was 40 minutes. As the data was collected at the height of the COVID pandemic, the virtual option through MS Teams was used to ensure the safety of participants. This option also tested how leaders were able to use technology for communication. Strict protocols were implemented to ensure the participants' confidentiality and privacy. All interview recordings were date-stamped and assigned a codename ready for transcription. The Braun and Clarke (2016) six-stage thematic analysis framework was used to analyze the data manually. The six steps entail familiarizing oneself with the data, creating initial codes, identifying themes, studying the themes, describing the themes, and then finally doing the write-up (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The primary objective of the analysis was to reveal the meaning and essence of the phenomenon being studied as experienced by the participants. One of the overarching themes that emerged was what leaders need to be (being), which represents the focus of this article. The findings are presented in a narrative format where direct quotes from participants support the narrative (Percy et al., 2015; Reay et al., 2019). Although three themes and 15 sub-themes emerged from the analysis, only one theme, the being of leaders in 4IR and its seven sub-themes, is exploited for this article.

4. Findings

Table 2 shows the theme of leadership and its seven sub-themes.

Table 2. Theme and its sub-themes

| Theme | Sub-themes |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The being of leaders in 4IR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead with personal purpose and a sense of meaning. • Visionary and futuristic. • Life-long learners. • Be curious with a growth mindset. • Die-hard collaborators and innovators. • Leaders no longer the nucleus of ideas and decisions. • Leaders as agents of inclusion. |

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The key finding was that leaders in the FMCG industry in SA needed to be prepared and equipped to drive the transformation required in the 4IR. One participant described the lagging behind as disinterest, a lack of appetite driven by fear, and a lack of understanding. The need for a noble personal purpose, which acts as a moral compass, was emphasized. This was mentioned in the context of doing what benefits both self and society today and beyond.

We need to be strong advocates for driving change, not just as an FMCG company, but as a whole industry. It is important to identify the real priorities for driving change and to leverage existing technologies to accelerate this change. further, if you are not a frontrunner in driving those impacts on society, you are also, in the end, dead in the water because consumers do not want you anymore. (PT06)

PT07 and PT08 shared the same sentiments on the importance of leading with meaning and purpose, which positively impacts communities and the environment.

What draws me to [company X] is this purpose of serving... So, it is about having that element of we are here to serve the greater good and not only ourselves and if we can all live behind that code and that moral compass, I think it is gonna help us, going forward... It starts with a moral compass. We must have a moral compass that we are not doing it as profit-generating only, but we're doing it because we think it's right and it's best to serve our people. (PT07)

... So, when [name of company] donates food, they start within that community. Today, there's a big clean-up in [name of location] and [name of location] because we can't say it's a government issue because we're producing food in this environment. (PT08)

The participants implied that 4IR calls for leaders to anchor in a higher sense of purpose and meaning based on acting morally and ethically right for others, the organization, and the world. The evolution of leadership in the digital era, previously perceived as an undoubtedly orthodox hierarchical model that reserves leadership for a select few, has been overturned. 4IR technologies have flattened the structures as employees can collaborate more quickly across disciplines. The participants stated that leaders were no longer at the center of decision-making and idea-creation and were now required to share and collaborate with those with the expertise and capability. This is significant because it speaks to the heart of the leader's identity. Participants argued fervently for a relinquishing of positional authority.

The impact of the change is making reliance on hierarchy and authority, as a leader, meaningless and not useful anymore. So, as leader to lead, gone are the days where you rely on hierarchy. (PT11)

... Whereas when you start introducing the underlying currents of the fourth industrial revolution and digital transformation, it does require leadership to be less autocratic and a little bit more of a servant leadership style and provide autonomy to people to test and learn. (PT10)

The younger generations are more tech-savvy than the older ones, who, in most cases, lead them. As a result, a shift towards a collaborative mindset and way of being where leaders humble themselves, recognize that they are no longer the only source of expertise, and embrace a shared and inclusive philosophy is required. The participants stated that the role of leaders should be centered on driving collaboration and embracing diversity and inclusion, thus emphasizing the importance of collaborating across generations, genders, skills, and background differences.

I think, firstly, we need to change. I think the way leadership looks currently, in a sense, is that we have a less-than-ideally-diversified workforce in terms of age and gender or generation and gender. (PT04)

The younger people who are more open to technology need to find space in key organizational roles. These people are not fearful of technology; they were born with it and want more of it, and it does not frighten or scare them. So, that part in terms of generational diversity, I think, needs to be in place. (PT03)

So, I think a sharing mindset to say accountability is across all the levels. So, the more information you share with the people, the more empowered they are to make the decisions. So, it is that mindset to say, ... ensure that information filters down and bottom-up all the time? (PT13)

I do not know if it is involvement if that is the word, but we must also include more and embrace the opportunity of the unknown. So, as a big player, I might not know everything, but I want to learn, not only from inside my organization, but I must be able to pivot myself to learn... So, that involvement, that collaboration, that inclusion needs to happen... (PT07)

However, this requires that leaders be open, humble, vulnerable, and eager to learn, listen, and let go of the conviction that they are required to know everything. A good leader thrives on high-quality relationships with all stakeholders, respect for the contributions of others, and commitment to learning with the team.

... So, I have found that with senior leaders, it is okay to be vulnerable, to learn with their team rather than ahead of their team, there has been greater collaboration, we have seen greater innovations and levels of creativity, and a lot faster adoption whereas, with leaders that typically wanna learn ahead of the team so that they can answer questions, make decisions, there has been a little bit of a step back. (PT10)

And as I said, is this thing of being vulnerable as a leader, there is nothing wrong with it... and I am gonna have to be vulnerable and learn from someone around me or even a Gen Z or a Generation Y that embraces it and has a different way of thinking about it. (PT07)

Leaders experience extreme difficulty in making the required paradigm shift. Undoubtedly, the current mode of leadership, which uses command and control, is being superseded by more flat and flexible options aided by technology.

...the appetite to shift from the current C-suite members won't necessarily be as great because it is not something they know. While they may appreciate the value of having an advanced tech environment, it is something that is not fully understood; it's something that they fear and something that, in the school of investment that everybody comes from, never makes sense. So, people will hop along until they are put in a corner to make the shift. (PT03)

Being visionary and futuristic also emerged, warning leaders to have a clear vision of the future, be determined to see it through, and inspire others to implement such ideas. The participants framed the importance of starting with a vision of how things can be in the 4IR world. Leaders who articulate their vision and conform it to the organization's mission can motivate themselves personally and professionally.

I think first is the vision because from my experience, the vision... so that you understand the future so that you start working in that direction, ahead of the need... in many cases where there was no vision, you're not prepared for a change because you keep thinking of the world as you know it. You are not pushing the boundaries of what can be or will be to become broader. Moreover, when we're talking about this revolution, it's really about the unseen. In many cases, it's about being prepared for what we've not seen and how we are preparing for the things that we've not seen yet. However, you know it's coming by being in touch with the industry and the world's developments. (PT05)

Be visionary about where you want to take things. I want to think of the guys like Jack Ma... Those guys believed in something great. They were never happy with the fact that today is great, so they're al-

ways driving for things to be better. So, the mindset is that of evolving improvement or continuous improvement in what we have now versus what we'll have in the future, but they're also visionaries. (PT03)

The participants stated that in the 4IR, one needs to be bold and courageous to drive personal vision and bring people along.

So, on the one hand, we need to be bold and be able to be... how do you phrase it? Courageous to take the decisions based on what we see coming, but you have to do it jointly. (PT06)

One participant cautioned that having a vision alone is insufficient; leaders must inspire others to turn it into reality.

You have got to be good at setting the vision for where you want teams or organizations to go. So, clarity and consistency in your communication are very important. (PT09)

Many suggestions on what a growth mindset entails were advanced, the predominant ones being curiosity and orientation towards lifelong learning, a willingness to appear vulnerable, and an ability to admit to not knowing everything. A sense of wonder, curiosity, and an insatiable appetite for learning and contextual understanding were also mentioned as critical to success in 4IR.

I think you've gotta be curious as a leader. So, you must have an interest in your environment... However, that curiosity you've got to have as a leader. Otherwise, you become quite insular, not just as an individual but as an organization, so you don't get the stimuli from outside. (PT12)

It's a beginner's mindset and a mindset of where it has to start with learning and doing things that haven't been done before... As leaders, sometimes there's an expectation where you need to know, and you have to lead from the front, and you have to drive the elements of whatever happens, but I think we're in a time where we are shaping and learning as we go. (PT07)

So, this concept of lifelong learning is propelled by not focussing on having a residue of knowledge in yourself. So, those leaders don't want a chance to learn now and know everything, but they learn as they need things going forward, and they continue to learn... Without that, you're not gonna survive in the future. (PT11)

These responses indicate that 4IR represents a challenge for managers and requires them to be bold and abandon the perception that leadership is always about having all the answers and accept that it can be vulnerable and that they should be prepared to hear others.

...that cross-functional approach. And that's why I'm talking about the right people on the bus, and I'm not talking just about the technical guys. (PT05)

Other participants recommended a holistic and systemic view that incorporates working across companies, industries, and value chains.

So, as prominent players, I might not know everything, but I want to learn... So, involvement, collaboration, and inclusion need to happen, not because we're [company name], we must only talk to big people. We should be talking to Joe Soap on the streets, the mom-and-pop store, or even the tabletop counter at the taxi rank. Because I think we can all collectively do something great and benefit from that. (PT07)

I think I've had to apply it a lot recently, and that's networking and networking broadly because there are experiences in other industries that will be very relevant. Because a lot of these things merge. So, being broadly networked, I think, will be very useful for leaders. (PT09)

Something I said around cross-industry collaboration has ignited a point that I wanna potentially iterate on. We typically, in FMCG, try to benchmark ourselves against other FMCG organizations because they have KPIs and measures of success similar to what we would have within the industry. Moreover, what I have found very powerful is the ability to collaborate with and benchmark across industries to take the best that every industry can offer and then form the new normal for how FMCG should run. (PT10)

The findings underscore the cognitive abilities of a leader as a fundamental aspect in the digital era, as all that can be automated or digitalized is going to be. Leaders who lead with meaning and personal purpose stand a greater chance of surviving the era. Leaders need not be the source of knowledge but visionaries, coaches, catalysts, and collaborators who can successfully drive organizations through digitization. The old leadership model is being challenged, and a more progressive, collaborative, and empowering model must be instituted. As this requires a deeper understanding of personal purpose and readiness to change, an individual's personality is determinant.

5. Discussion

The study had the two-fold objective of exploring meaning and personal purpose on the effectiveness of leaders in the FMCG sector in SA in the 4IR era and of understanding the embeddedness of meaning and personal purpose in the Big Five personality traits. Leaders' personalities and their impact on leader effec-

tiveness have been extensively researched (Judge et al., 2002; Ng et al., 2008). The findings showed that leaders in SA's FMCG industry currently struggle to adapt to the digital era and need expert assistance, mainly because effective leaders can perform optimally only when a sense of meaning and personal purpose is apparent.

Regarding the first objective, the literature informed that having a sense of meaning and personal purpose provides leaders with a foundation to orientate life goals and daily decisions by guiding goal pursuit and attainment (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Having a personal purpose also buffer against psychological suffering during hardships (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). It is a source of motivation (Rey et al., 2019) that energizes during distress and enhances effectiveness by enabling an individual to transcend the self and contribute to societal flourishing.

Specific personality traits are linked to the qualities of an effective leader (Northouse, 2021). Effective leadership in the 4IR era requires more than just the right mix of personality traits but also a deep sense of meaning and personal purpose. Each personality trait in the model is associated with a specific behavior (Soto, 2020). Hence, personality traits form the basis of personal meaning and purpose, which enhance a leader's ability to navigate challenges in the 4IR. The leaders in the SA FMCG require expert support as the emergence of the new order propelled by 4IR technologies requires agility and adaptability to navigate the complex dynamic environment. Finding an authentic self and leading with meaning and purpose enhances effectiveness in leading others. Beyond personality traits, a leader's sense of meaning and personal purpose significantly impact their leadership effectiveness in 4IR. Leaders with a strong sense of purpose are likely to inspire, drive ethical decision-making, adapt to change, and promote innovation (Rey et al., 2019). Although meaning and purpose are used interchangeably (Kılınç et al., 2020; Roger & George, 2018), personal values, beliefs, and philosophy contribute to personal purpose (Boyatzis & Dhar, 2021). The new leadership identity is curved by seamlessly internalizing the contextual, digital, personal and interpersonal intelligence, which shape the emerging leadership roles of visionaries (creative thinkers) (Berg, 2015; Gibson et al., 2020; Northouse, 2021), architects (Gøtze, 2013; Veldsman, 2016), catalysts (Toendepi, 2021), and coaches (Behjat, 2012; Ibarra & Scoular, 2019). The additional new roles can ensure the organization's sustainability (Leurent & Shook, 2019; Toendepi & Viljoen, 2019).

The second objective was to understand the embeddedness of meaning and purpose in the Big five personality traits. Extroversion is strongly associated with leadership due to its positive energy levels, sociability, and charisma, which appeal to followers (Judge et al., 2002; Nai & Toros, 2020; Triwijayati, 2024).

The findings showed that the leaders in the FMCG industry in SA require expert assistance to shift the paradigm. Participants acknowledged that leadership needs to have a collaborative personality. Hence, leadership identity requires individuals to re-examine beliefs, values, and worldviews to strengthen and align their behaviors with leadership aspirations. The trait of agreeableness encapsulates the element of pro-sociality (Szcześniak et al., 2020), which influences quality interpersonal relationships central to one's sense of meaning and fulfillment in leading others. Leader effectiveness is also measured by how one uses the altruistic gift (Szcześniak et al., 2020). The openness to experience features behaviors such as imagination, creativity, and a willingness to embrace new ideas and experiences also remain central (Herbert et al., 2023; Northouse, 2021). Those open to experience are creative and innovative and appreciate novel ideas from others.

The quest for purpose and meaning and the need to engender a shared model of leadership (Cardona et al., 2019; Kelly, 2019; WEF, 2019) are critical, mainly because automation and digitization are inevitable (Leonhard, 2017). Hence, the trait of conscientiousness positions the behavior of a leader and facilitates the creation of life-long goals that are meaningful and fulfilling to contribute to personal purpose. Such underlying abilities can ignite the existential pursuit of meaning and purpose in one's work and that of others (Smith, 2017).

6. Conclusions

The findings pointed out the potential of leadership grief from failure to inoculate meaning and personal purpose amid disruptions. They expanded the theoretical understanding of how meaning and personal purpose are essential in leader effectiveness. Leaders must be trained to internalize digital, personal, interpersonal, and contextual bits of intelligence, curving emerging roles and leadership identity in the 4IR era. The study found that leaders in FMCG in SA needed to be more aware of the context in which they lead and be prepared, willing, and able to deal with the rigor of this digital era. The theoretical implications in this article include the fact that leadership development must adapt to the new models of leading in the 4IR. This article also highlights how personal purpose and meaning are embedded in the Big Five personality traits. The practical implication is that finding meaning and personal purpose in work leads to a sense of inner balance and self-acceptance, which, in turn, enhances leadership effectiveness. Therefore, leaders must develop personal intelligence, connect with their inner selves, and maintain self-awareness regarding the values and beliefs supporting their sense of purpose and meaning.

Therefore, one of the key recommendations was for leaders to seek professional help from experts, as findings pointed to a phenomenon resembling a crisis of identity. Furthermore, leadership development and training should be redesigned to bring together the leaders and those led to address the new competencies required to transition towards a new way of leading in the 4IR and to understand the embeddedness of meaning and personal purpose in the Big five traits. Northouse (2021) emphasized that personality defines uniqueness, and Judge et al. (2002) found that the Big Five personality factors are an excellent framework for understanding the link between personality and leadership. Finding meaning in work and personal purpose helps create an inner balance, allowing individuals to be comfortable with themselves (Hai & Park, 2024; Rey & Bastons, 2019). In addition to personality traits, a leader's sense of meaning and purpose can significantly influence their effectiveness, especially in the context of 4IR. Responses to environmental stimuli like 4IR reveal an individual's personality (Roos & Kazemi, 2022). Hence, extroverted leaders with agreeable personalities are prosocial (Nai & Toro, 2020; Szcześniak et al., 2020), deriving meaning and personal purpose in their work. Furthermore, leaders who are open to experience in the 4IR and are conscientious (dependable, organized, and decisive) (Northouse, 2021) will also show greater passion for the job (Hai & Park, 2024) as they deem it meaningful and purposeful.

The limitation of the study resides in its focus solely on senior leaders in the FMCG industry in SA. It is recommended that this study be augmented with quantitative research to verify the findings on the role of meaning and personal purpose in enhancing leader effectiveness and their relation to the Big Five Personality traits. The study can also further quantify the embeddedness of meaning and personal purpose in the Big Five personality traits. 4IR is a period of deep reflection and self-discovery, where leadership "being and becoming" signifies a new leadership identity and character, emphasizing the authentic self that guides actions. The leadership grief and identity crisis are evidence of the eminent reality that automation and digitization are unavoidable. What remains essentially is the human will to adapt to new operating methods, as technological adaptation is a key driver of a sustainable future. Leading from a sense of meaning and personal purpose minimizes grief when multiple intelligences are internalized, ushering in additional roles of creative thinkers, systems designers, enablers, and coaches.

Author contributions

Dudu Moloko – 50% (research concept and design, collection and/or assembly of data, data analysis and interpretation).

Joyce Toendepi – 50% (writing the article, critical revision of the article, final approval of the article).

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