




Chapter 4

An empirical exploration of leadership approaches in African Independent Churches in Mangaung.

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1. Introduction – an interest in African Independent Church leadership

A statement by Oduro about leaders of African Independent Churches (AICs) that they don't have mission boards, send missionaries, hold missionary conferences, or have mission budgets (Oduro, in Knoetze, 2016:2) motivated this research. Yet, there are AICs all over the world and in every African state (Kealotswe, 2014:228). Oduro says that the AICs see performing mission as the mandate of God to the church (Oduro et al., 2008:159-161). Out of this interest the research was conducted to explore leadership approaches of AICs in the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. Thus, the main research question aimed to describe the personal leadership

approach and style of the leaders of AICs in this context: *What leadership approaches and styles do leaders of the AIC congregations in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality have?*

To define the group of churches that sort under the term AIC is a complicated matter because of the complexity and independent nature of these churches. The acronym AIC can be understood as African Indigenous / Independent / Initiated / Instituted Churches, and represents a wide variety of churches (Oduro et al., 2008:iv). This broad term represents about 60 million different churches in Africa that groups into more than 10,000 denominations or smaller movements. This grouping can be viewed as a group for Africans, by Africans, in Africa (Tennent, 2010:291).

2. Exploring relevant leadership approaches and styles as a theoretical framework

The term “leadership” remains an elusive one to define and has fascinated people for centuries (Nel, 2020:192). In this study, the researcher looked at leadership in a religious context. For Christians, the concept of religious leadership dates to the biblical era. When looking at leadership illustrated in the Bible, it shows us a variety of different kinds of leaders. (Jenkins, 2021:308-310). This helps one to see that Christian spiritual leadership is a complex matter with variety and nuances and is not one-dimensional. Likewise, African Christian leadership is also not one-dimensional (Bolden, 2009:3).

2.1 African Christian Leadership

African pastors are key leadership figures and influencers on the continent. In a study conducted with 8,000 African Christians on their perception of their African Christian leadership, the following areas of influence were identified as areas that they perceive are influenced by their leaders: the prevention of drug abuse, education of children and youth, sex and HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) education, entrepreneurship, music, church leadership and development (Ngaruiya, 2019:29 & 38-41).

Oduro et al. (2008:126-128) indicate four principles that guide the kinds of ministries that AIC leaders engage in, namely a sense of God's calling of an individual to ministry, specialised ministries that individuals choose to operate in, dependence on God via the Word of God and faith in God for the work that is being conducted, and a deep sense that the Holy Spirit provides support in conducting ministry. On a negative note, Amofo describes African church leaders to generally be occupied with material wealth, focused on ancestral spirits, worldly wisdom and might. The values displayed are self-serving, intolerance and inefficiency, to name a few (Amofo, 2013:154). Leadership is a complex matter in an African setting, and in the rest of world society.

2.2 *Introducing the leadership approach of Avery*

The work of Avery, *Understanding Leadership: Paradigms and Cases*, assists to clarify some of the complexity in leadership theory.¹ This work seeks to create a frame of reference for leadership that helps leaders as practitioners and researchers alike to have paradigms for leadership that is helpful to the understanding and learning about this fragmented topic (Avery, 2004:3-4).

Avery suggests the use of four approaches to tie together vast amounts of information and theory, and to create a common understanding of leadership (Avery, 2004:17). These approaches are also not mutually exclusive categories, and some aspects of leadership in a specific context might be present in more than one approach. The four approaches are classical leadership, transactional leadership, visionary leadership, and organic leadership. These approaches align chronologically with the eras in which the leadership literature reflected a particular way of thinking and writing about leadership (Avery, 2004:18).

1 The work of Avery is used as framework in understanding the shifts in leadership paradigms (Niemandt 2019:77-88). The relevance of this framework for AIC leadership is explored in this chapter.

Table 2.2.1: Four leadership approaches and characteristics of Avery

	Classical	Transactional	Visionary	Organic
Major era	Antiquity – 1970s	1970s- mid 1980s	Mid 1980s – 2000	Beyond 2000
Basis of leadership	Leader dominance through respect and/ or power to command and control.	Interpersonal influence over and consideration of followers. Creating appropriate management environments.	Emotion – leader inspires followers.	Mutual sense-making within the group. Leaders may emerge rather than be formally appointed.
Source of follower commitment	Fear or respect of leader. Obtaining rewards or avoiding punishment.	Negotiated rewards, agreements and expectations.	Sharing the vision; leader charisma may be involved; individualised consideration.	Buy-in to the group’s shared values and processes; self-determination.
Vision	Leader’s vision is unnecessary for follower compliance.	Vision is not necessary, and may not be articulated.	Vision is central. Followers may contribute to leader’s vision.	Vision emerges from the group; vision is a strong cultural element.

Classical leadership is marked by a powerful leader, and followers with little power other than the power to disengage and withdraw support from the leader. A strong hierarchical structure is present, with a punishment and reward system. Leaders have all responsibility and followers are very passive (Avery, 2004:38). Some limitations of classical leadership are the trouble that comes with succession, complex problem-solving, when followers are required to provide additional commitment, or when followers start to change their thoughts on coercive leadership and refrain from following (Avery, 2004:21).

Transactional leadership has a basis where leaders and followers negotiate agreements as forms of transactions. The leaders have a strong base of power in a punishment-and-reward system but tend to have a negotiation-and-consensus-seeking aspect to making the transactions (Avery, 2004:22 & 38). It can play out with a leader meeting the needs of followers in return for their contributions (Osmer, 2008:176-177). This form of leadership relies on the skill of the leader, a strong sense of direction, and the cooperation of those following (Avery, 2004:22). Leaders need to take followers' points of view into account when negotiating.

Visionary leadership starts where a leader receives and conveys a vision to an organisation, and the leader motivates the followers emotionally to help to realise the specific vision. It expects more co-responsibility, initiative, and participation from followers, but ultimate responsibility and accountability still rest with the visionary leader (Avery, 2004:38). This form of leadership is better suited than classical and transactional leadership in times of change, and this form emerged amid big changes taking place globally at a much faster rate in relation to times past. The focus shifted more towards leadership than management in organisations (Avery, 2004:24). It is a leadership style much more adept to turbulent times in society.

Organic leadership is good for assisting leaders to operate in a state of chaos. In this paradigm or approach, no single person, not even the leader, is in full control of the situation, and responsibility is shared between leaders and followers. Followers are supposed to lead themselves and organise themselves, and thus good communication is imperative for functionality (Avery, 2004:38). This most recent leadership approach is strongly informed by networked organisations that do not have a single leader. (Avery, 2004:36-27).

2.3 Other relevant leadership styles in churches

Various other leadership styles may be found within different churches and congregations. Some of these include transactional, charismatic, servant and transformational leadership styles (Echols, 2009:91). Cooper highlights transformational, transactional, transactional-transformational leadership and servant leadership styles (Cooper, 2005:49). Pali mentions the following

leadership styles as appropriate to use in the Kingdom of God: pastoral leadership, transformational leadership, person-orientated, enabling, humble servant, shepherd, visionary, evangelical, public, missional, communal, and task-competence leadership, to name a few (Pali, 2016:148 & 193). Missional, relational, servant and transformational leadership are discussed briefly below as it is referred to in the analysis of the data.

Missional leadership seeks to implement the missional church theory and ecclesiology. A foundational concept to missional leadership is the focus of church life and congregational life to be directed outwardly; towards God and towards people around the congregation and not a focus directed inwardly to the congregation itself (Burger, 2017:25). It is about the leader being a disciple that follows Jesus in an authentic missional spirituality, with a focus on discerning the activities of God, and partnering with Him in his actions on earth (Niemandt, 2019:89).

Relational leadership focuses on the relations between the leaders and congregation members and implies a proximity in contrast to superfluous or non-existent relationships between leaders and congregation members in very large church congregations. Members are all in relation to one another in a loving community of relationships modelled by the relationship within the Trinity. Leaders are responsible to facilitate relational networks within relationships in the congregation and in relation to the local context (Niemandt, 2019:82).

Servant leadership is people-orientated with a focus on the betterment of the individual. It aims to serve the individual in the congregation before the follower is encouraged to serve others in similar fashion (Echols, 2009:93). It is a self-sacrificial and counter-intuitive leadership approach. Osmer calls Jesus the *embodiment of God's royal rule in the form of a servant* (2008:183). He proposes that this form of leadership should encourage the followers to embody the servanthood of Christ to other people (Osmer, 2008:192). It is a leadership that sees the leader serve the congregants in order that they can learn and form the modelling of the act of service, and in return serve others.

Transformational leadership is people-orientated like servant leadership, but with a focus on the betterment of a corporate group of people and not primarily individuals (Echols, 2009:93). As an inclusive leadership style,

transformational leadership seeks to help groups to improve the common good of a particular population (Echols, 2009:88). Transformational leadership often makes use of the four I's to help motivate followers to bring about transformation: *idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration* (Hoch et al., 2018:504). It sometimes takes a community through a process of deep change in terms of mission, identity, operating procedures and culture (Osmer, 2008:178). The focus remains on effecting change in a group at the hands of a change process.

2.4 Leadership – concluding remarks

These brief definitions highlight some of the dominant religious leadership styles that proved helpful in exploring the leadership approaches of leaders. To summarise this section, we have four approaches to leadership; namely, classical, transactional, visionary, and organic that will serve as a basis for interpreting the data in the next section. The additional leadership styles that are described serve to broaden the scope of evaluating the leadership styles and approaches of the leaders. With this theoretical background in mind, the research methodology of the study and its findings will be discussed.

3. Research methodology and findings regarding leadership approaches

A qualitative methodology was chosen to answer the research question. The qualitative approach provides an in-depth voice to the study in contrast to the statistically driven approach found in quantitative and mixed method approaches (Fouché et al., 2011: 142-143). A semi-structured interview was used for gathering data from the leaders of AICs in the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. Three participants were selected with purposive sampling (Strydom, 2011b:232). All three of these leaders identified and described themselves as leaders of local AIC congregations.² All three selected congregations form part of the AIC groups of churches that were birthed in South Africa. AIC congregations do not have a clear set of

2 See du Preez 2022 for a comprehensive discussion of the research methodology and procedures.

including and excluding criteria, but all three of the leaders indicated that they do belong to this broad category of congregations called AICs.

The following is a short description of each participant and their congregational context:

- **Participant 1** is a black male, 55 years of age. He is the pastor of the local congregation and the bishop of a network of churches that were branches of the main church which he pastors. The congregation of P1 had 60 attending members and was established in 1970 by the current leader's parents. This also served as the headquarters for various other branches that had been planted across the Free State province and across the provincial borders. The leader is the bishop of this group of churches and has several pastors leading the different branches.
- **Participant 2** is a black male, 48 years of age. He was the pastor of the local congregation and also the president within a network of churches that had a bishop leading the group of AICs. The congregation of P2 had 80 attending members and was established in 1942. It formed part of a wider network of branches of this specific group of churches. The current leader is the president of this local congregation, with reverends as part of his local leadership team. The president has a bishop above him in the network that he submits to.
- **Participant 3** is a black male, 49 years of age. He is the reverend of the local congregation within a network of churches that have bishops leading the group of AICs. The congregation of participant 3 had 220 attending members and formed part of a network of churches that was established in 1918. The current leader of this local congregation served as a reverend, and he reported to a bishop and an archbishop.

The interviews were transcribed from the audio recordings and translated to English where needed. The data was imported to the Atlas.ti software for analysis. Both a deductive as well as an inductive approach was used in analysing the data. It is possible to make use of this kind of hybrid approach to the coding of qualitative data. This approach incorporates the use of a deductive set of codes in a code book, as well as seeing what codes arise inductively during the coding process (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006:1&4).

3.1 Deductive coding

A codebook served to organise the text for interpretation. A template for a codebook could be used, or a set of codes gained from theory, or by a preliminary scanning of the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006:4). The four leadership approaches of Avery formed the base of the code book (see Table 3.1.1). This codebook was thus developed based on a theoretical framework that was found in the literature review process and the initial scanning of the research data (Gibbs, 2014:285).

Table 3.1.1: Deductive codebook with code groups and codes

Marker	Classical leadership code group	Transactional leadership code group	Visionary leadership code group	Organic leadership code group
Structure and/ or leadership position	~Strong hierarchy	~Position in leadership structure	~Dynamic leadership position	~Group shared leadership
Follower power	% Follower power zero	% Follower power low	% Follower power medium	% Follower power High
Motivation to follow)) Fear and respect)) Negotiations and rewards)) Directional vision)) Commitment by collaboration
Decision making	\\ Decides alone	\\ Decides by consultation	\\ Decides by collaboration	\\ Decisions mutual

What was found in the research data? The first four themes correlate with the four leadership approaches of Avery and the relevant code group with the same names, classical, transactional, visionary, and organic leadership. Next, the additional themes that arose from the inductive coding will be discussed, as well as the connection for each participant. The transformational leadership and servant leadership themes, along with the four leadership approaches of Avery, assist to answer the research question. After the inductive and deductive coding of the data, it was combined into two tables (see Tables 3.1.2 and 3.1.3) to provide an overview of the results of both deductive and inductive analysis.

Based on the theoretical framework, all four code groups could have been included as themes, but in the research data the organic leadership paradigm did not feature a single time (see Table 3.1.2). Not one of the four codes of organic leadership was connected to any participant. Thus, it could not be viewed as a theme represented in the data. The other groups from the code book are considered as themes in the research, as all of them have significant occurrences in the research data. These themes are classical leadership, transactional leadership, and visionary leadership.

Table 3.1.2: Deductive coding results summary

	Classical leadership code group	Transactional leadership code group	Visionary leadership code group	Organic leadership code group
Structure and/or leadership position	~Strong hierarchy P1 P3	~Position in leadership structure P2	~Dynamic leadership position P1	~Group-shared leadership
Follower power	%Follower power zero P3	%Follower power low	%Follower power medium P1 P2	%Follower power high
Motivation to follow)) Fear and respect P3)) Negotiations and rewards P1 P2)) Directional vision P1)) Commitment by collaboration
Decision making	\\ Decides alone	\\ Decides by consultation	\\ Decides by collaboration P1	\\ Decisions mutual

After looking at the inductive coding of the data, five additional codes were created (see Table 3.1.3). The three codes pertaining to leadership styles; namely, missional leadership markers, transformational leadership markers, and servant leadership markers, are all prominent leadership

styles in spiritual leadership, and have also been included in the theoretical framework. These three codes were also considered as themes emerging from the data and will be referred to as transformational leadership, servant leadership and missional leadership. The remaining two codes; namely, helping others and respecting others were not considered as themes as they do not represent a distinct leadership style or approach, although they had many occurrences in the data set. The six themes have provided the following results in relation to each participant.

Table 3.1.3: Inductive coding results summary

Other leadership markers code group			Other codes group	
Transformational leadership marker	Servant leadership marker	Missional leadership marker	Helping others	Respecting others
P1		P1	P1	P1
P2	P2	P2	P2	P2
		P3	P3	P3

The deductive data and three themes arising from the results (classical, transactional and visionary leadership) serve as the main anchors for helping to determine the dominant leadership approach of each congregational leader. The three inductively sourced themes (transformational, servant leadership and missional leadership) fulfil the role of providing richer descriptions of the leadership styles.

4. A discussion of findings the AIC leaders' approaches

The discussion in this section aims to describe which leadership approaches align best with each research participant's deductive code groups, and how the inductive data gathered support or expand the findings of the deductive coding to create thicker descriptions of the participants' leadership approaches.

“In this sense, every qualitative study, irrespective of which specific method is used, interprets its data because the data never speaks for itself. It is always processed and interrogated in order to obtain answers to particular questions, to shed light on a particular dimension of human experience, and/or to clarify a particular aspect of an experience or a situation (Willig, 2014:147).”

Participant 1: As seen in the findings, participant 1 had code occurrences in each of the four categories for visionary leadership, one code with a couple of occurrences in the transactional leadership code group, and one code with a number of occurrences in the classical leadership category.

- **Classical leadership:** Although participant 1 is in a strong hierarchical position, he operates as a leader practicing a visionary leadership approach. It would not be unprecedented for this leader to operate with tactics-associated classical and transactional leadership, especially given the hierarchical structure in which he is operating.
- **Transactional leadership:** This code is not a recurring one and is outweighed in quality and quantity of codes rather highlighting the visionary leadership code of)) Directional vision. As in the case of the overlap between leadership approaches, it is not uncommon for leadership to operate within different approaches at various times.
- **Visionary leadership (dominant approach to leadership):** With the overlaps discussed above in mind, and the rest of the codes that all sort under the visionary leadership code group, this leader primarily operates within the visionary leadership approach. To further illustrate the point, here is the first answer that the participant gave in the interview: *“I can say, uhm Leadership in the congregation is about giving direction. Uhm, if you say you are leading that you are at the forefront. Meaning you are taking the congregation somewhere. That is my understanding of leadership (P1:4).”*

▪ **Expansion on leadership approach via inductive coding:**

Transformational leadership: It is indicated that the transformational leadership marker was prominent for participant 1. In the case of participant 1, it supports the findings of the deductive coding, as the leader is an inspirational and visionary figure who mobilises other leaders in the community to bring about corporate change relating to issues of moral decay.

Participant 1 is a leader who has a strong association with visionary leadership while operating in a classical leadership structure, and from time to time he employs transactional leadership methods. In addition, he has a transformational leadership style that ties in well with his visionary leadership strength.

Participant 2: Because of the brevity of participant 2's interview it was slightly more difficult to interpret the data, but because of the way that the participant reiterated certain topics and codes, it provided more validity to the results. There were only three code types in the deductive code set that occurred for participant 2, with two belonging to the transactional leadership group, and the other to visionary leadership. Although classical leadership does not feature in this participant's interview data, a comment on this approach will also be made.

- **Visionary leadership:** It is not such a strong marker for illustrating power to followers that it would help in categorising the leader as a visionary leader, but it is evident of more than one approach informing his approach to leadership.
- **Transactional leadership (dominant approach to leadership):** Looking at his codes that illustrate his dominance in the transactional leadership approach, the)) Negotiations and rewards code features the strongest here. This code emphasises the nature of transactional leadership lying in the transactions and rewarding of followers; an example: "*Leaders can improve themselves, self if they understand the Word of God and the Word of God will to translate them, so that they can be right thing (P2:34).*"

▪ **Expansion on leadership approach via inductive coding:**

Transformational leadership: It is indicated that the transformational leadership marker was prominent for participant 2. The references for participant 2 are not strongly connected to the visionary component of transformational leader, as is the case for participant 1. The transformation that is sought by participant 2 is focused on a small circle of influence, including the local congregation and one or two entities outside the congregational borders. *“In our community like, uh, we organise some clothings. E, From different, people they used to give different kind of clothings and also the breads and the breadrolls. So, I am going, I am taking them there to the community surrounding us. Because there are a lot of people who are suffering in that area (P2:19).”* Participant 2 has quite a few transformational leadership markers and it does speak of his inclination to see change in his congregation and surrounding community. It adds another dimension to understanding his leadership inclination and transactional leadership approach.

Servant leadership: The leader serves the follower, and the follower learns how to serve, and in turn serves others as it was modelled by the leader to the follower. Participant 2 had this servant leadership theme occurring, and it indicated that the leader is focusing on the leaders whom he is leading. He aims to assist them in order that they can conduct their ministries and serve others. This adds depth to the leadership perspective of participant 2.

Participant 2 has a strong focus on transactional leadership while he is operating within a classical leadership approach, and he seeks to act as a servant-leader who wants to equip his followers in order that they can serve others in return.

Participant 3: He had all his codes and occurrences in the deductive coding sorted under the classical leadership approach.

- The results capture the extent to which this leader is positioned in a strong hierarchical structure. For example: “*I am a Reverend in my church and there is a bishop for whom I am accountable. Above our bishop, we have an Archbishop whom both the bishop and I are accountable to and take orders from*” (P3:11). This leader has a prominent marker of his own compliance to his leaders through a reverence and respect for their positions, and the constitution of the church. He also has the marker of zero power to the followers because even he as a leader has no freedom to take initiative in his own congregation.

There are no occurrences that connected him to another leadership approach during the deductive coding phase, and thus he has a very prominent connection to the classical leadership approach. Although he is not the top leader in the hierarchy, he is still operating within this leadership approach as both a leader and a follower.

- **Expansion on leadership approach via inductive coding:** The additional codes for transformational and servant leadership did not feature with participant 3.

Participant 3 had a very strong classical leadership approach to leadership and operates within a strong hierarchical structure with little room for initiative. He is not the top leader in the hierarchy, but a follower, and leads the structure with other leaders dictating most of his ministry activities.

Figure 1 illustrates the links between the participants, the deductive code groups, and the inductive codes.

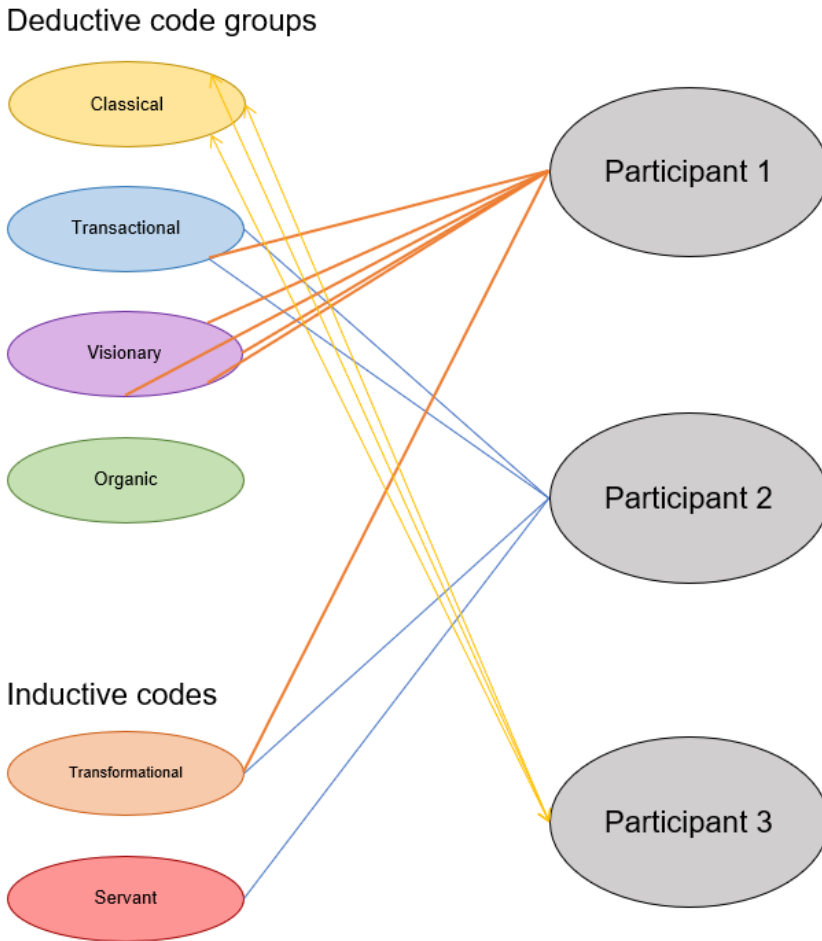


Figure 1: Map of links between participants and deductive groups and inductive codes.

In conclusion, it can be said that participant 1 has a visionary approach to leadership within a classical leadership structure, and transformational and missional leadership as a supporting style. Participant 2 has a transactional leadership approach within a classical leadership structure, and servant leadership as a supporting style. Participant 3 has a classical leadership approach within a classical leadership structure, and no other prominent additional leadership styles.

No research is without limitations and the following may be stated as limitations. There are always things that can be improved on, and that other researchers in the same field of study can learn from for future research. The sample size for this study was three participants. If this number could have been increased, it could have yielded results that would have provided more depth in the understanding of the leadership of the participants. The differences and similarities could have been more nuanced by a bigger sample size. The sample profile could have been selected from a more diverse group of leaders from different AICs. This study is a once-off study, and the validity of the data would be increased if the findings of the study could be discussed with the participants in a follow-up interview or even more than one follow-up interview. To provide more validity to the data, the use of multiple methods could have been helpful by making use of a Delphi study on the same topic with all the leaders taking part, or perhaps a focus on group interviews. Quantitative data gathering could have been helpful by making use of a questionnaire of differing leadership approaches and missional leadership theory. This could have assisted in increasing the validity of the findings of the qualitative data.

The relationship between the researcher and the interviewees should be noted. The researcher is a white male of the higher middle-class conducting interviews with black leaders from a low socio-economic context a power relationship was present. The researcher was cognisant of it and aimed to make use of power regulation to regulate the power dynamics during the interviews (Strydom, 2011a:123-124). An improvement could be to have research assistants who are from the same ethnical background as the participants. Language also plays a role in the relationship between researcher and interviewee. The interviews were conducted in English. It is not the mother tongue of either the participants or the researcher. If the interviews were in Sesotho, it could have provided better-articulated answers to the research questions.

5. Reflection and conclusion

A study on new understandings of leadership in the African context shows that an Anglo-centric essentialist approach to leadership development is often taken in order to understand the African leadership space (Bolden, 2009:16; Eyong, 2016:148).

Much more is being said and still needs to be said on the de-colonisation of Africa.

To answer the research question, it was found that participant 1 has a visionary approach to leadership within a classical leadership structure, and transformational leadership as a supporting style. Participant 2 has a transactional leadership approach within a classical leadership structure, and servant leadership as a supporting style. Participant 3 has a classical leadership approach within a classical leadership structure, and no other prominent additional leadership style.

The leadership framework that was chosen was partly used to assist the study in dealing with an extremely complex topic such as leadership by trying to use broad guidelines that looks a bit more at a chronological summary of leadership, than a current perspective of leadership. New perspectives of African leadership approaches could have been more beneficial to the research in gaining endemic understanding of leadership on the African continent. If one would like to gain a more in depth understanding of leadership in African Independent Churches, further endemic research would need to be conducted. Perhaps African anthropological and social studies would assist in a multi-disciplinary approach to greater understanding into leadership within the African church setting.

The topic of leadership in African Independent Churches is one that has not been explored much in academic circles or amongst African Independent Churches themselves. There is much scope for future research in this area.

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