

## **Existentialism and Its Implications for Leadership: Examining the Existential Philosophical Perspective in Leadership Practices**

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### **Abstract**

This study addresses how existential philosophical perspectives inform leadership practices across the themes of authenticity, freedom and responsibility, situatedness, and irrationality. The major objective of the study is to explain how the existential perspective may become integrated into the leading approach addressing ambiguity, moral dilemmas, and meaning making inside organizations. The objective of this study is shaped around the question: How can existential philosophical perspective be linked to leadership? The study describes, based on a review of the works of Kierkegaard, Sartre, Heidegger, and Nietzsche, how self-awareness, autonomy, and moral responsibility express themselves in leadership. It supports the thesis that existentialism empowered leaders to make free choices within conditions of uncertainty while leading their followers authentically, nurturing resilience and sensitivity in them. Similarly, the study also shows that leaders can find a way in the middle of the so-called existential vacuum: the sense of emptiness surrounding all organizational contexts. From the practical side, Mengel's Existential and Motivational Analysis model combines existential reflection with motivational strategies toward more sustainable leadership development. In linking the insights of philosophy to contemporary leadership theories, this paper contributes to the richness of the field of leadership studies concerned with holistic, ethical, and human-centered approaches to leadership.

*Keywords:* Existential, leadership, authenticity, freedom, responsibility, meaning, self-awareness, ethical, philosophy, decision-making

### **Introduction**

Existentialism, introduced by Kierkegaard in the middle of the 19th century, is a philosophical movement that emphasizes the value of individuals' autonomy and decision-making powers in constructing their own existence and discovering meaning in life (Sartre, 1943). According to Mart (2012), existentialism, in the full sense of its philosophy, is one that examines the very peculiar conditions making up the individual's life experience, pointing to existence as a matter of self and subjectiveness. It is a philosophy that comes to terms with the deepest questions about human feelings, decisions humans make, the responsibilities they carry with them, and the thoughts that shape their perceptions of the world. From this perspective, existentialism calls on man to take responsibility for one's life, to make intentional choices, and to bear with the option to determine freedom in a world. Existential philosophy has influenced many sectors,

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including psychology, literature, and leadership. Therefore, the objective of the paper is to explore how leaders can include facets such as authenticity, freedom, and responsibility (existentialism themes) into their leadership styles. More specifically this study intended to address research question like “how can existential philosophical perspective be linked to leadership?” Further, using the existentialist concepts of freedom, responsibility, and authenticity, this paper attempts to extract insights into ways leaders can manage the intrinsic uncertainties of their jobs and arrive at more purposeful and effective decisions.

Existentialism is a freedom-oriented philosophy that puts the individual's existence at the center of all other questions; it emphasizes that the individual's being is the very foundation on which one bases their actions, decisions, and eventual being. This philosophy holds that everyone is entitled to make their own decisions and possesses the intelligence to evaluate them. People view this autonomy as a fundamental human characteristic that distinguishes the individual as an agent of free will and self-determination (Adeleye, 202). Whereas traditional views perhaps would explain human behavior in terms of some preordained or externally imposed framework, existential philosophy challenges such ideas and instead locates human nature and morality as something not fixed or universally defined but rather created through voluntary choices individuals make in the world profoundly personal and subjective experience of existence (May, 1983). Existential philosophy focuses on the autonomy and free will of the individual, making the claim that people make their own essence and morals through personal choices rather than having it predefined or by structure. It highlights existence as being subjective in nature, modified by choice.

Existential philosophy is an important approach to leadership because it provides a framework that focuses on the human experiences and existential realities that beset leaders and their followers. In that sense, focusing on the individual's freedom to choose and the responsibility that emanates from that freedom, existentialism provides a useful lens through which leadership can be critically considered. This is not a question of strategic decision-making or authority; rather, it has to do with an in-depth engagement with human condition in full realization of the anxieties, uncertainties, and responsibilities attached to the leadership role. Therefore, existentialists view leaders not solely by their title but by the authenticity of their decisions and their impact on themselves and others. Followers too are seen as autonomous agents whose experiences and choices are integral to the leadership process (Lawler, 2005).

In a nutshell, existentialism is a philosophy that focuses on the human condition and exhorts each of us to live honestly, or, as existentialists would say, honestly, from the beginning, with existence having no greater significance than the one we choose to give it. It centered on the idea that a person's mental state results from their encounters with life's inevitable truths, such as freedom and its corresponding obligations, existential loneliness, and meaninglessness (Hanaway, 2019). It is the philosophy about the human condition that calls for life to be lived authentically with regard to created freedom, responsibility, and meaningfulness by an individual. It points to how such facts of life as loneliness and meaninglessness in life affect the mind of a person.

### **The Foundations of Existentialism**

Existentialism is personified by a group of well-known intellectuals as a philosophical movement that views humanity as the architect of its own destiny. Philosophers of the 20th century such as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Jasper, and Albert Camus deeply reflected their interpretation of existentialism. However, Jean-Paul Sartre and Soren Kierkegaard are typically regarded as its founders (Adeleye, 2021). Existentialism, adopted by philosophers such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus, holds

humanity responsible for its fate. It is generally traced back to the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and Søren Kierkegaard, and it emerged as one of the more characteristic movements in 20th-century philosophy.

Existentialism is the view of human existence that is based on basic questions like "Who is man?" and "What does it mean to exist or to be human?" This philosophy assumes that being human entails encountering some universal difficulties: the loneliness of a cold, uncaring universe; the certainty of pain, suffering, and death; and the reality that each person, regardless of how surrounded by others, must pass through the milestones in life, namely, birth and death alone. These existential threats may create what is known as an existential vacuum when individuals feel a deep sense of emptiness, meaninglessness, apprehension, and isolation because their goals are not fulfilled. Existentialism also highlights the tension between freedom of choice and the responsibility that comes with making choices. Individualist perspectives emphasized that individuals bear full responsibility for the consequences of their decisions, however difficult, while also recognizing the potential to rise above adversity. Despite all the hardships, existentialism also recognizes human potential to rise above hostility, find meaning in life, and gain hope even in desperation (Farran, 1997; Nauman, 1971). Existentialism is concerned with the nature of existence, encompassing man's lonely struggle in the atmosphere of suffering and his search to find meaning. It teaches person responsibility for choice yet asserts the capacity of man to surmount any situation and even make meaning out of despair.

Søren Kierkegaard, widely regarded as the father of existentialism, examined the concept of individual existence and the subjective nature of truth and faith in his work *The Sickness unto Death* (Kierkegaard, 1849). Initially Kierkegaard was influenced by the ideas of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, but later he rejected Hegelian philosophy in favor of developing his own, which later became known as existentialism (Kirillova & Ulitina, 2017). Kierkegaard received little recognition outside his home country during his lifetime. However, after his death, he had enormous influence on German, French, and American philosophy, literature, and theology. His philosophy is not purely technical; it borders on a fusion of theology and philosophy, much like those of Pascal and Augustine (Rempel, 1959). His works mostly relate to human existence, highlighting the human individual's concrete reality, hence emphasizing personal experience and introspection over abstract thinking (Kirillova & Ulitina, 2017).

The philosophy of the *Übermensch* was put forth by Friedrich Nietzsche in his 1883 work. "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" is a significant work by Nietzsche published in 1883. However, some of the ideas explored in "Thus spoke Zarathustra" were first introduced, though in a preliminary form, in his earlier 1882 book, 'The Gay Science'. The word "Übermensch" can be translated as "Overman" or "Superman," and it embodies a hypothetical individual who oversteps conventional human limitations and ethical ideals of behavior to fashion a personal meaning and purpose in life. According to Nietzsche, the *Übermensch* was a person who fulfilled human potential and would rise above conventional religion and the networks of obligations of the existent social order, able to empower and transcend himself. He views that people are expected to invent their values and meaning in life; they are expected to live amidst adversities resiliently and ingeniously (Nietzsche, 1882).

Martin Heidegger, in his magnum opus, "Being and Time," in 1927, presents the world with a basic existential phenomenology. Heidegger addresses the fundamental question of being and our relationship with the world. His work shifts from epistemic concerns, i.e., knowledge, to an ontological focus on the nature of existence. Central in Heidegger's phenomenology is the concept of authenticity, presence, and situationism of human experience, which contrasts with the traditional view of human nature and activity (Heidegger, 1927). The philosophy of existential phenomenology wherein he describes the nature of being and what it means to be human. He speaks of authenticity and situational presence that thoroughly opposes the traditional conceptions of human nature and activity.

Jean-Paul Sartre further expands existentialist thought with his work "Being and Nothingness" (1943). The existentialism of Sartre considers the theory of existence that precedes essence, hence meaning people are not born with a defined purpose of life. People develop their essence as they make life-changing decisions. The structure is based on freedom and responsibility since one has the conscious formation of identity and how one will live an authentic life (Sartre, 1943). In *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) argues that existence precedes essence; humans do not come into this world with any pre-ordained purpose, and an individual's essence is thus determined through the choices one makes in life. He emphasizes freedom and responsibility for living an authentic life.

In "The Myth of Sisyphus," published in 1942, Albert Camus explores the absurdity of human existence. Camus asserts that even if life has no meaning, one gives it meaning through chosen acts that further humans' existential freedom coexisting with the absurdity of life. Sisyphus is the metaphor of a man condemned to roll a boulder uphill, only to roll down once more into eternity, representing the human condition. According to Camus (1942), we need to think of Sisyphus as happy, and in the struggle itself, one finds meaning, futile though it be.

These intellectuals formed the foundation of existentialism as a philosophy, each with vastly different insights into being, freedom, responsibility, and meaning seeking. Their works continue to influence many disciplines, ranging from philosophy through literature and psychology to leadership studies.

### **Existentialist Perspectives on Leadership**

Leadership would then involve the act of persuading others in shaping meaning, purpose, and direction within organizations (Yukl, 2010). The functionalist approach to traditional leadership theories frequently prioritizes leadership positions, styles, and behaviors at the expense of independent agencies (Tourish, 2013). An existential perspective challenges the concept of functionalism and instead focuses on how leaders and followers make choices and take responsibility in collaboratively shaping their organizational reality (Thompson, 2021). Likewise, Nietzsche's philosophy offers profound insights into leadership dynamics, particularly through the *Übermensch* concept. Given that Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*, a person who surpasses traditional morals through superior ability (Nietzsche, 1882), shares similarities with the trait theory of leadership. This theory posits that leaders are fundamentally distinct individuals due to certain characteristics such as intelligence, confidence, and charisma (Colbert et al., 2012). Similarly, the *Übermensch* is a being of superior traits, strength, and vision, one who can transcend conventions of society-manifesting a core belief in characteristics that set some individuals apart from others (Nietzsche, 1882). In this regard the concept of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and the trait theory of leadership are both basically linked to a core belief in characteristics that distinguish the few from the many. Additionally, building upon Nietzsche's *Vision Fortich* (2010) argues that observing human life and history has shown that people are not the same; there are special individuals, "wealth types," who possess special traits and possess the ability to influence the world.

Furthermore, in work like "Being and Time," by Heidegger (1927) emphasizes the importance of authenticity and situational awareness of leadership from the leading perspective. As per his philosophy, the leader should know the human condition and is supposed to change the situation in the context of the lives of his followers. Instead of relying solely on an established leadership style, a leader must be concerned with both the situational and potential aspects of followers. This leads to a responsive style of leadership to the complexity of human experience and the changing contexts in which leadership exists.

Sartre's idea of the precedence of existence over essence is what opens the view that a leader can be conscious about making his true choices and authentic actions, thereby crafting his identity and leadership style. Assuming their freedom and responsibilities, leaders take the stand to influence others in genuine and meaningful ways from an existential standpoint.

Especially Camus's philosophy, the concept of the meaning found in absurdity, brings a different dimension into leadership. Like Sisyphus, leaders may be asked to perform tasks indefinitely; however, by embracing the absurdity within those tasks and enjoying that pursuit, they can galvanize resilience and determination among teams. This existential approach toward leadership illustrates how relevant purpose and motivation are within uncertainty and adversity.

Incorporating existentialism into leadership practice would mean that it shifts from selfish to holistic leadership that would focus more on the welfare of the individuals and organizations at large (Agbude et al., 2017). The transcendental ego and projecting existence towards meaningful futures will allow leaders to seek purpose in their existence, as well as nurture a deeper, more genuine link with followers, enabling them to make ethically sound choices (Von Fircks, 2020). Bringing together existentialist ideas in leadership development underlines the importance of self-awareness, empathy, and ethical decision-making as guides for individuals and organizations along adaptive and sustainable trajectories (Spencer & Albertyn, 2019). Leadership fosters a holistic approach, prioritizing individual and organizational well-being. It emphasizes self-awareness, empathy, and ethical decision-making, guiding leaders toward meaningful, adaptive, and sustainable practices.

Existentialism, as a philosophical basis, throws an ultimate understanding into the leadership by emphasizing the themes such as situatedness, irrationality, authenticity, freedom, and responsibility.

#### *Situatedness and Irrationality*

Existentialism asserts that human existence is authentically located in situations that convert into the basis for decisions and actions (Heidegger, 1927). In this respect, leaders have always to act according to their situational awareness while taking into account the complexity and ambiguity of human behavior. Heidegger's stress on being in the world indicates that successful leaders guide their authentically uncertain movements by understanding their followers' conditions. This perspective encourages adaptive leadership, wherein decisions are responsive to dynamic organizational environments rather than rigid frameworks.

Another major aspect of existentialism is irrationality, where it is said that it is impossible to rationalize human emotions and actions due to their impulsive nature (Sartre, 1943). Leaders must accept it rather than suppress it. Sartre's philosophy thus encourages leaders to move toward freedom of choice and authentic action while stimulating an environment for the followers too, in order to exercise freedom. This creates meaningful bonds and increases organizational resilience during times of turbulence (Ciulla, 2006). Hence, the existentialist perspective on leadership is about situatedness, where choices are informed by specific contexts and realities every leader and follower are faced with. It is also very aware of irrationality in human emotion and action that encourages leaders to accept such motives and work with them, rather than suppress them to enhance authenticity and adaptiveness within organizational dynamics.

#### *Authenticity in leadership*

In existentialism, authenticity refers to the idea of staying loyal to one's own character, principles, and soul in the face of outside influences. Additionally, both existential philosophy and authentic leadership are distinctly western concepts that strive for the same goals of "living (and leading) with meaning and purpose" (Deurzen, 2012). Philosophers who espouse existentialism, such as Sartre (1943) and Heidegger (1927), stress that being authentic entails acknowledging one's autonomy and duty to mold one's own life. It necessitates that people behave authentically as opposed to fitting in with social norms. On the other

hand, inauthenticity is the result of people denying their own autonomy and blindly adhering to social norms, which prevents them from experiencing true fulfillment and self-expression.

A process whereby leaders become self-aware of their values, beliefs, identity, motives, and goals and grow to achieve self-concordance in their actions and relationships is the definition of authenticity and, by extension, authentic leadership (Gardener et al., 2005). Thus, leaders that are authentic are shown to have clarity about their beliefs and principles, as well as self-awareness and a personal perspective. Additionally, they are shown as acting based on their beliefs and principles, expressing themselves through the role of leader, and deeply identifying with that role (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Authentic leadership is an aspect of self-awareness wherein leaders act congruently with their values, beliefs, and principles by building trust in relationships. The authentic leader shows clarity in his identity through principled actions and connects deeply with the leadership role.

According to Duignan and Bhindi (1997), authenticity in leadership is characterized by moral and ethical behavior. Leaders who match their behaviors with their underlying values and beliefs create a culture of trust and integrity. Genuine leaders establish connections based on trust, own their limitations, and support the development of others. Furthermore, today's leaders would undoubtedly reap enormous benefits on both a personal and organizational level if they set their own objectives in line with their core principles. Thus, all those leaders whose goals are aligned with their core principles will have the opportunity to feel a deep sense of purpose and fulfillment. If one sets goals that align with his fundamental values, it is not just being driven by achievements in the outside world; there is also an intrinsic drive that keeps one passionate and committed. This type of alignment binds one's identity to one's professional aspirations, producing far greater satisfaction and meaningful feelings of success. Organizationally speaking, leaders who set objectives that align with their principles will have naturally created an organization aligned with integrity and authenticity. Therefore, their actions and decisions are thus guided by a similar moral compass that gains the trust of the employees, the stakeholders, and the customers (Niculescu, 2014). Authentic leadership is based on a moral and ethical foundation, where leaders act in concert with their core values to create trust and integrity. Leaders who set goals congruent with their values feel fulfilled personally and also contribute to organizational congruence, building a culture of trust and authenticity.

Authenticity is an overall existential concern that is attained by investigating human concerns including one's own views and values, meaning and purpose in life, freedom, accountability, ambiguity, uncertainty, temporality, and eventually finitude (Fusco et al., 2015).

### *Responsibility and Freedom*

Existentialist perspectives on responsibility and freedom assert that individuals have the intrinsic liberty to make independent choices and carry entire responsibility for the outcomes. Sartre (1946) asserts that humans are "condemned to be free" because, lacking any predefined essence or divine mandate, they must construct their own essence through acts and decisions. Further, Sartre (1946) underlines that freedom also includes substantial responsibility, requiring individuals to confront their principles, live truthfully, and completely own their acts. A recent study emphasizes the ongoing significance of Sartre's views in modern philosophical conversations.

Heidegger (1962) expands on the idea of "being in the-world," arguing that real freedom is the capacity to see one's place in a larger scheme of things. This understanding includes accepting the truths of existence, such as death and life's contingency. Contemporary theorists like Guignon (2010) and Solomon (2005) underline that existential freedom entails a constant process of self-discovery and self-creation

within situational circumstances. Crowell (2020) investigates the relevance of existentialist thought today, particularly addressing authenticity and ethical responsibility. Yalom (1980) investigated how existentialist concepts apply to modern problems, emphasizing the importance of existential freedom and responsibility in contemporary existence.

Solomon (2005) emphasizes ethical responsibility as well as the moral aspects of freedom, encouraging leaders to consider the ethical implications of their decisions and take responsibility for their outcomes. This framework helps leaders navigate complex moral dilemmas and make decisions that prioritize stakeholders' well-being.

Furthermore, according to Ladkin (2010), personal accountability that existentialists place on leadership is important in decision-making processes. Leaders make many decisions that are tough and have huge ramifications for companies. When applying the tenets of existentialism, leaders acknowledge that they are free to choose but completely accountable for the results of their decisions. This approach could lead to more considerate, ethical, and transparent decision-making processes in leadership.

### *Self-Leadership and Existentialism*

Self-leadership is defined as the process through which individuals influence themselves to achieve the self-established goals (Manz, 1986). This includes self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation in order for an individual to take responsibility for oneself, make conscious decisions, and stay focused against discouragement. Furthermore, the place where existentialism and self-leadership meets lies in personal growth, character development, and authenticity. Existentialist thought is thus funneled into a thematic bridge to self-leadership theories like self-action leadership (SAL), emphasizing existential growth through personally led frameworks and actions (Jensen et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2010). Existential notions, such as freedom and authenticity, represented within the practices of self-leadership, offer holistic ways of developing leadership for people and organizations that focus not only on efficiency and effectiveness but also on moral integrity and existential growth. This would mean that the integration of existential principles into models for self-leadership other than personal responsibility, decision-making, and character development can therefore show the possibility of more authentic and effective leadership journeys (Vail, 2014). Existentialism merged with self-leadership can enable personal growth, authenticity, and character development. Self-leadership models integrate the existential principles of freedom and authenticity to better allow individuals and organizations to move toward more morally grounded effective leadership journeys.

Likewise, existentialist beliefs have a strong connection with self-leadership in the strict sense through underscoring key notions of freedom, authenticity, and edification (Gibbs, 2010). Existentialist thought straddles a particular perspective, maintaining rationalist and non-rationalist discourses while focusing on the totality of existence and the importance of individual agency in the construction of leadership style (Gibbs, 2010). The existential-humanistic leadership style embeds existential I-Positions, which refer to an individual's various self-positions or perspectives regarding their identity, existence, and experiences. Such positions are not fixed, thus subject to change as per context, emotions, and personal growth. Further, existential-humanistic style advocates neutralizing structural power imbalances between leaders and followers, thereby facilitating joint meaning-making and adaptive trajectories within organizations (Von Fircks, 2020). Existentialist views, particularly the Sartrean perspective, emphasize authenticity, freedom, and the morality of concern in leadership, calling on leaders to project themselves into the future with a sense of purpose and responsibility (Cherré & Lemieux, 2019). Existentialism is very close to self-leadership, with a focus on freedom, authenticity, and personal growth, yet with recognition of the fluidity of self-identity and leadership style. The existential-humanistic approach to leadership is concerned with shared meaning-making, adaptive growth, and balancing power between leaders and followers for purpose and moral responsibility.

Existentialism's interventions into the studies on leadership provide a platform for ethical, humanistic, and pragmatic leadership that highlights the inseparability of personal freedom, decisional making, and psychological equanimity in self-leadership (Agbude et al., 2019; Vail, 2014). Existentialism enriches the study of leadership through the promotion of ethical, humanistic, and pragmatic approaches that combine personal freedom, decision-making, and psychological balance in self-leadership.

### **The Existential Vacuum and Leadership**

The existential vacuum, as described by Viktor Frankl, refers to a widespread sense of emptiness and lack of purpose that individuals might experience in modern organizational environments (Frankl, 1946). Existential philosophy plays a significant role in understanding both the existential vacuum and leadership. The existential vacuum, as explored in numerous studies by Rasheed and Jasim (2022), highlights the sense of emptiness or lack of meaning in individuals, which can impact their development and well-being. Leadership, on the other hand, is viewed through an existential lens as a platform for ethical, humanistic, and pragmatic practices (Agbude et al., 2017). Existential coaching models grounded in philosophy have shown promise in addressing leadership development needs within professional partnerships, offering a mechanism to unlock potential and facilitate growth (Spencer & Albertyn, 2019). Additionally, the concept of authentic leadership from an existentialist perspective emphasizes the importance of being true to oneself and embracing freedom, authenticity, and benevolence in leadership roles (Benoît Cherré & Lemieux, 2019). Overall, existential reflections are critical for understanding the essence of leadership and addressing existential vacuums that may hinder personal and professional growth (Morov & Morova, 2015). The existential vacuum points to a void that restrains personal and professional development, a void that can be healed by leadership through ethical and humanistic practice. Existential coaching and authentic leadership, based on the ideas of freedom and authenticity, provide paths toward unlocking potential and the meaningful development of people and organizations.

Leaders play a pivotal role in addressing existential challenges by imbuing their teams with a sense of direction, purpose, and significance (Hannah et al., 2020). By aligning organizational goals with individual values and fostering a culture of meaning, leaders can mitigate the existential vacuum, enhancing employee motivation and well-being (Lemoine et al., 2019). Additionally, leaders must embrace authenticity and vulnerability to successfully confront the existential void by being upfront about their issues and uncertainties. Leaders must foster a culture of trust and transparency, allowing people to communicate their worries and goals so that individual connections are improved, and a supportive and resilient culture is promoted within the organizations (Brown, 2018). Leaders might enable the realization of organizational objectives compatible with individual values, thus creating meaning and employee wellbeing. By being authentic, showing vulnerability, and being transparent, leaders can create a culture of trust and resilience that would soften the impact of the existential vacuum and bind people together in the organization.

#### *Creating Meaning in Organizations*

Existentialist philosophy contends that encountering "real" meaning is the key to achieving human contentment in life (Metz, 2002). Frankl (1985) asserted that people have an inbuilt drive to discover meaning, and that meaning is a function of involvement, agency, and self-direction. Similarly, self-determination theory developed by Deci and Ryan (2012), which is an empirically derived explanation of human motivation and personality in social circumstances that distinguishes between autonomous and controlled motivation, explains that meaning is more than an action; it is a continuous, self-driven process where people could find a meaning by putting actions into service of their personal values and goals. This



kind of self-determined pursuit for meaning is particularly important for personal well-being because it underpins feelings of fulfillment and self-agency. This process is similarly important within organizational settings, where it can lead to better alignment between personal and corporate values and thus drive employee engagement and motivation toward the achievement of favorable outcomes, and hence success. Therefore, meaning is a self-determined process that is not only vital for an individual but also necessary for achieving favorable results within an organizational context (Chirkov et al., 2003). Existentialist philosophy and self-determination theory support that meaning is self-driven and prerequisite for personal fulfillment and motivation. In the organizational context, connecting personal values with corporate objectives results in employee engagement that motivates success and results.

Creating meaning in organizations that involves aligning corporate missions with employees' personal values and aspirations is especially important. Effective leaders articulate a compelling vision that resonates with the workforce, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose (Rosso et al., 2010). This alignment boosts employee engagement and commitment, leading to improved performance and organizational success (Dutton et al., 2014). By promoting transparency, authenticity, and ethical behavior, leaders can cultivate a culture where meaningful work flourishes (Spreitzer, 2016). Furthermore, Azevedo (2024) suggests that organizations are not just functional entities but collectives that embody existential norms. These norms provide members with a shared understanding of what it means to be part of the organization. This collective meaning-making is vital for maintaining organizational identity and effectiveness.

### *Experiential Values in Leadership*

Experiential values in leadership emphasize empathy, authenticity, and personal growth as foundational principles for effective leadership (Avolio et al., 2011). Leaders who prioritize experiential values understand the importance of emotional intelligence and self-awareness in building trust and fostering collaboration (George, 2003). By valuing lived experiences and promoting a supportive environment for learning and development, these leaders empower their teams to innovate and adapt to dynamic organizational landscapes (Day et al., 2014). Experiential values in leadership emphasize empathy, authenticity, and personal growth; emotional intelligence and self-awareness are important in developing trust and collaboration

According to Day et al. (2014), the ability for reflection on experiences and their thoughtful integration is a key differentiator for effective leaders. This will be the process of experiential learning, which will allow leaders to learn costly lessons from past actions and decisions in pursuit of a deep understanding of themselves and the environments in which they operate. Leaders who have such reflective practice are not only much more aware of themselves; they also show sensitivity toward the needs, motivations, and aspirations of their followers. This increased level of awareness establishes a closer, more sincere leader-to-team connection, which is critically important to establishing trust and credibility. In a similar vein, the concepts of self-development, empathy, and authenticity highlight the evolving role of leadership in modern organizations, where ethical leadership practices and a deep understanding of human motivations are essential for creating resilient and thriving workplace cultures (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Reflective practice enables leaders to learn from past experiences, developing self-awareness and sensitivity toward their followers' needs. This would further solidify the leaders and teams' connectedness, so important for the development of trust, credibility, and ethical leadership that builds cultures resilient and thriving.

In summary, experiential values are very crucial in laying the foundation for successful leadership and form the basis upon which a leader solves problems, creates relationships, and makes ethical decisions. As a result, incorporating such values into leadership will allow for authenticity and adaptability. It not only strengthens a leader's relationship with his/her subordinates, but it also provides for a work environment

that enhances innovativeness, resiliency, and long-term organizational success with continued positive results and a strong, cohesive leadership presence.

### *Philosophical Critique*

Existential philosophy, its implementation in organizational contexts, calls for a much more complex set of issues. If anything, existentialism values subjective experience on an intrinsic level and stresses radical freedom, autonomy, and authenticity. Organizations, on the other hand, are groups of people that have a common goal, clearly defined duties, and established hierarchies. This raises a fundamental philosophical issue and one very important limitation: Existentialism's strong emphasis on human agency and meaning may not be well suited to describing the relational and systematic processes that invariably define organizational life. For instance, existential authenticity requires people to live authentically by adhering to their freely chosen ideals and convictions. However, organizations have to face the reality that the personal conviction against organizational purpose, stakeholder demands, and legal obligation, all of which may well embrace out existential authenticity. Existentialism strongly rests on the assumption of full responsibility and decision making in view of an uncertain world.

Existentialism strongly lays forth the complete responsibility of a person for his or her choices and the confrontation with uncertainty. This would make leaders more resilient through ambiguity but perhaps at the cost of increased stress and moral dilemmas arising from personal ideals that run into conflict with organizational imperatives. In a structured environment with shared responsibility through teams and systems, the philosophical requirement for radical accountability could be burdensome. Therefore, existential principles carry the risk of role conflict and psychological strain in situations that need interdependence, compromise, and alignment with organization. In another way, individualistic framing from an existential philosophy must negotiate more effectively with its contextual meaning and practical integration in order to connect to an organizational setting in its many operational and collective manifestations.

## **The Role of Existential Coaching in Leadership Development**

Existential coaching is a specialized application that combines key principles of existential philosophy with coaching practice. Essential elements include existential authenticity, choice, and anxiety, with major contributors such as Sartre and Heidegger guiding the model (Turebayeva et al., 2024). This type of coaching model mixes up most psychotherapeutic traditions but usually focuses on goal-directed and solution-oriented strategies and procedures to enhance effectiveness in coaching settings (Langdridge, 2012). Furthermore, existential coaching has been proven to help enhance leadership development inside professional partnerships by encouraging participants to reflect on their roles and contributions (Spencer & Albertyn, 2019). Existential coaching is the combination of existential philosophy with coaching methodologies where authenticity, choice, and anxiety surface as the main concerns, based on the works of Sartre and Heidegger. It furthers leadership development with increased self-awareness, goal-directed interventions in relation to effectiveness in the workplace.

Existential coaching is important for leadership development through the way the unique aspects of existential philosophy unlock potential and growth within professional partnerships of leadership development. The perceptions of leadership work to find individuals with a greater purpose, thereby contributing effectively to leadership development and making choices that would benefit the collective (Spencer & Albertyn, 2019). Existentialism suggests that individuals have the freedom to envision

alternative perspectives within their given context. This freedom, achieved through coaching and reflective processes, can lead to changes in self-perception, relationships, and overall organizational dynamics (Bachkirova, 2012). Existential coaching is also in line with the trajectory equilibrium approach through the underscoring of neutralization of the power imbalance as institutions arise from the attainment of existential I-positions, which are the perspectives or roles individuals adopt in relation to others and sign-manifolds. However, one should seek to combine existential coaching with a leader development system that comprises mentoring, reflective exercises, and elevated leadership experiences for individuals to gain a better identity as a leader, intellectual humility, and grow in their scholastic pursuits. Existential coaching panaches a holistic and feasible leadership development approach, promoting ethical, humanistic, and pragmatic leadership across diverse sectors (Godwyns et al., 2017). Existential coaching tends to foster leadership growth through personal development, reflection, and consideration of the other's perspective in the professional partnership. Existential coaching allows and provokes ethical and humanistic leadership, along with deeper self-awareness for growth in leadership, by addressing power imbalances and integrating coaching with mentoring and reflective exercises.

#### *The Existential and Motivational Analysis Model*

The Existential and Motivational Analysis (Emotian) model by Thomas Mengel brings together the works of Viktor Frankl and Steven Reiss in one scheme for leadership and concomitant leadership development (Mengel, 2012). This model puts into place Frankl's Sources of Meaning Profile to assist individuals in prioritizing areas of meaningful engagement and value actualization. This also incorporates the Reiss Motivation Profile for coaching people on striving and values (Mengel, 2012). The balanced approach that Emotian offers toward leadership development lies in bringing together elements like existential reflection and motivational analysis, with an emphasis on existential reflection and motivational analysis if one is to understand and improve leadership qualities fully at the same time (Mengel, 2012; Alexey & Morova, 2015). This model is applied because of its practical utility in coaching scenarios, which may show individuals the path toward effective leadership practices and personal growth. What is unique about Thomas Mengel's Emotian model of leadership is that this concept of leadership is looked at from an existential perspective, which he combined with motivational theories. Existential approaches to leadership provide insight into the deeper aspects of leadership, such as self-awareness, the motivation of the leader, and his or her sense of purpose (Trepte, 2016). The model connects existential reflection with motivational analysis in the development of self-awareness, purpose, and personal growth-skills quite useful in the coaching situation on the path toward effective leadership.

In this framework, the Emotian model asserts effective leadership as being grounded in the leader's capacity to understand and deal with existential challenges without losing motivation. For that reason, Dinsmore and Cabanis-Brewin (2006, p. 163) stated, "The leaders must grasp the interplay of organizational and behavioral elements to create an environment that meets the team's motivational needs. Key factors in determining the quality of this environment include active participation and minimal interpersonal conflict."

The motivational aspect of the Emotian model builds on known ideas, such as self-determination theory, and blends them with existential issues (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Kadenic and Tambo (2021) posit that leaders who can integrate their personal incentives with greater existential goals are more likely to retain sustained engagement and effectiveness in their leadership responsibilities, particularly in project management environments.

The Emotian model can thus be especially instrumental in times of turbulence because it offers leaders some framework through which they can steer their concerns in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity (Miska & Öner, 2015). It seeks to increase the resilience and adaptiveness of leadership capabilities by increasing existential intelligence among leaders and relating such intelligence to motivational factors.

Thomas Mengel's Emotian model offers an intriguing framework for understanding leadership from the standpoint of existential philosophy and motivational theory. Much research is still to be done to confirm its claims fully, yet it holds immense potential to create more self-aware and purposeful leaders, especially within project management and turbulent organizational environments.

### **Conclusion**

Existentialism adds depth to leadership by emphasizing authenticity, freedom, and responsibility. It encourages leaders to be true to themselves, make freely available choices, and take responsibility for their actions, thereby enriching leadership approaches. This school of thought departs from the traditional theories on the same, as it explains the individual experience, choices, and uncertainties that exist in human existence. The school encourages leaders to confront their existence, make authentic choices, and take responsibility for personal and organizational outcomes (Barrett, 1962; Sartre, 1943; Heidegger, 1962). Authenticity in the concept of existentialism implies that leaders should be genuine to themselves, living in their values and beliefs, therefore creating a culture of trust and integrity in the organization (Duignan & Bhindi, 1997). Authenticity is not an exercise in lonely individualism but a quality of leadership that can inspire and empower others. This emphasis on freedom and responsibility aligns with the leader's role in working through ethical dilemmas and making decisions that uphold personal and collective values. By acknowledging the existential reality of freedom both as a burden and as a privilege, leaders can create a far more profound sense of purpose and meaning within their organizations (Sartre, 1956; Solomon, 2005).

In addition, leadership based on existentialism also opens a greater possibility of a holistic and humanistic approach in which the leaders are existentially directed towards their followers. This type of engagement is particularly relevant to the solution of existential vacuum situations in which people have no sense of purpose or meaning. In such a vacuum, existentialist leaders can uniquely fight back by creating an organizational culture in which the different contributions that people can make are highly valued and personal objectives are aligned with organizational goals (Frankl, 1985; Lemoine et al., 2019). The pragmatic application of existentialism in leadership goes beyond individual self-awareness to establish a conducive and adaptive organizational context. Indeed, models such as Thomas Mengel's Emotian Model paint a very vivid picture of the integration of existential and motivational factors, making it highly effective in heightening leadership effectiveness within the most intricate and turbulent environments (Mengel, 2012). It is a model that emphasizes understanding and dealing with an individual's existential needs in an organization, such as purpose, meaning, and authenticity, as well as his or her motivational drivers, such as goals, incentives, and rewards. Leaders who balance these aspects may create a more supportive, adaptive organizational culture that enables teams to navigate challenges resiliently with a sense of purpose and alignment of personal and organizational values. To drive sustained success, leadership is anchored in turbulent contexts.

Existential philosophy is a super-rich and valuable lens through which one conceives of leadership in both theory and practice. It encourages leaders to experience the full range of human experiences, to lead in as many authentic ways as possible, and to build meaningful connections within organizations. This approach aids leaders not only in enhancing their effectiveness as leaders, but also in creating an ethical, responsible, and meaningful organizational culture. Such is the existential approach that joins the core attributes of ethical and humanistic leadership, where self-awareness, empathy, and ethical decision-making are supposed to guide people and organizations toward adaptive and sustainable trajectories. Moreover, existential leadership allows for the possibility of empathetic and understanding working environments within the professional setting. A leader who is open to the various experiences and

perspectives represented by different members of his team creates a work environment that encourages collaboration and creativity. The more empathetic leader responds better to the interests of his employees. This could mean improved job satisfaction and morale. This would benefit not only individual employees, but also the organization by improving performance. If employees feel recognized and appreciated, they would be more likely to engage themselves with the job and be motivated toward an adaptive organizational culture.

The existentialist view of leadership would resonate very well with the current organizational development initiatives of sustainability and social responsibility. The more companies grasp the need for their own practices to resonate with the larger values and mores that exist in society, the stronger the base from which leaders can attempt to make real and lasting changes. It goes beyond the obvious and makes leaders realize that greater impacts from their actions are likely to breed permanent changes for the better, such as a culture of accountability and stewardship.

Overall, existential philosophy imparts an enormously integral, very humanistic perspective toward leadership. On the contrary, this would serve to bind leaders to their roles, be there, act with integrity and empathy, and make decisions expressing a serious resolve toward ethical principles and sustainable practices. Thus, leaders who live these values achieve capacity, allowing them to enhance their own effectiveness while creating organizations that prove more resilient, adaptive, and contextually value-aligned with the world in which they operate. It is through existential leadership that there is the potential for such leadership to grow in a world full of complexities.

### **Contribution**

The present paper enriches the literature by giving a philosophical perspective of leadership practices by embedding in the organizational dynamics existential themes, like authenticity, freedom, responsibility, situatedness, and meaning-making. This study intends to create a link between existentialist thought and contemporary theories of leadership, putting forth a proposition of self-awareness, ethical responsibility, flexibility, and traits often absent in standard leadership models emphasizing structure and strategy.

Further, the models developed look at skills, traits, and styles; (Northouse, 2016), they often avoid discussions of the emotional, psychological, and existential struggles leaders must undergo. This paper adds knowledge to the existing literature by capturing existential thought and self-leadership theories with coaching methodologies toward compositionality in a way that accounts for contextual realities, uncertainties, and individual agency. In addition, this paper acknowledges some of the real-world challenges of applying philosophical frameworks within the confines set by organization systems, pointing to leadership mechanisms of an adaptive and humanistic nature. It highlights models such as Mengel's Emotian framework, which deals with these challenges through the mixture of existential reflection and motivational analysis.

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