

LEADERSHIP FOR A
WINNING NATION

Hands-on

Learning from our implementing partners

Learning through Doing: Measuring leadership development

enke: Make Your Mark's Youth Leadership Initiative

enke¹: Make your Mark is a youth leadership and social innovation initiative that aims to reduce inequality by connecting young South Africans across social divides, equipping them to lead, and inspiring them to take action. Our theory of change is that if we can connect, equip and inspire these young people, while still in high school, they will have the opportunity early on to engage with the world around them and to experience what it takes to create impact. Through this, we hope to set them up to tackle both issues in their own lives and become agents of change within their communities, throughout their lives. We want to see a generation of young people who, regardless of where they are born, have the skills and the self-belief to fulfil their dreams for their future and for the future of their country. enke aims to empower participants to harness their potential and challenges them to inspire and empower others in their own community to do the same. Our hope is that an enke participant leaves the programme inspired with a new-found confidence and skills to take hold of opportunities which they previously saw as inaccessible to someone like them.

Our programme does this through three core activities. The first, **the enke: Ignition Project**, works with university students and develops their leadership capacity as well as their skill in facilitating programmes for other young people. The graduates of the Ignition Project then become facilitators for the second aspect of our work – **the enke: Forum**. The Forum brings together between 60 and 150 Grade 11 learners for a week-long residential programme that focuses on our three core aims of connecting, equipping, and inspiring

participants through experiential activities and engaging with various thought leaders and high profile personalities. In order to build relationships across the social divides of South Africa, we specifically aim to ensure that the demographics of the participants match those of broader society – both in terms of race and class. In order to do this our recruitment targets both former Model C and private schools as well as township and rural schools (often through corporate social investment (CSI) bursary programmes). We believe that if this generation is going to be able to tackle the gross inequalities and massive social challenges of South Africa, it must be able to build partnerships across divides and shake up development thinking through youth-led innovations. Since 2009, we have held 5 Forums, one each annually in Johannesburg, and in 2012 we held two Forums in Johannesburg and Cape Town, with a total of 660 youth from all over South Africa (8 provinces).

During the Forum, participants unite around a shared vision for a brighter future for South Africa, work through the three main themes of self, others and context, and plan community action projects (CAPs). These CAPs are implemented over the next nine-months through **the enke: Youth Award** programme, in which we provide support and monitoring of their progress. Through this model, we believe that we have created a mechanism whereby each layer of activities reinforces a multiplier effect of youth-led social transformation, by learning through doing. In 2011 alone, 52.7% of our high school participants started Community Action Projects (youth-led social initiatives for the community), and these projects had an impact on 4 656 people in communities across South Africa.

Embracing "Learning through Doing"

When we first started this work, one of our big

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¹ Enke means "ink" in Sepedi.



challenges was to figure out how to measure impact. This seems to be a frustrating issue for many organisations working in the field of leadership development, as the effect you might want to measure is very hard to attribute directly to your intervention. An increase in self-confidence, for example, may well be attributable over time to the difference between being an awkward 16 year old, and a naturally more settled 18 year old; or similarly, a participant identifying that they feel like they have good leadership skills may be more a factor of having been noticed already and thus selected for the programme (in other words, there is a very strong self-selection bias). Likewise, self-reported behaviour change measures don't necessarily provide insight into whether these are sustained over time.

As we struggled through these questions, we decided to put in place a core set of standard tools that would provide as solid and clear information as we thought we could get - and then we would get

This has given us confidence in the quality of our programme. While our participants were "learning through doing" in their CAPs, we seized the same spirit and decided to "learn through doing" a range of alternative evaluation exercises.

Question 1: Can Participants Identify Strong Leaders?

Something we realised early on was that all our measurements were self-assessments by participants, and so we ultimately didn't have any way of uncovering the relationships that were developing between participants and what they really thought of each other. So, in order to get some insight we snuck one last question onto our original questionnaire: "Which three of your fellow participants have had the most impact on you this week?" Our hypothesis was that "outstanding" participants – those most nominated by their peers – would be likely to implement the most effective CAPs. We were wrong – on many levels.

Firstly, what emerged was that the most-nominated participants were overwhelmingly from private schools (although the single most nominated participant was actually a learner from rural the Free State). What we hadn't realised was that in the setting of the Forum – small group discussions, large plenary sessions, team-building sessions – learners who were already more confident (and particularly confident about vocalising their opinions) were likely to emerge as dominant. While we should have predicted this, what was equally fascinating was that many of the most-nominated participants did not run particularly effective CAPs or gave up early in the process. In fact many of the participants who ultimately ran the most successful projects in the 2011/12 programme received no more than two or three peer nominations!

These findings helped us to start unpacking some of our own thinking about leadership and how it functions in different settings. In asking the question, we had presumed that influential people would be effective leaders – but none of the evidence showed this presumed link. As we considered the implications of this, we realised that often the mechanisms by which young people are assessed for leadership capacity – especially



creative and try to find supplementary mechanisms of evaluation. The core of our monitoring tools is a self-perception questionnaire, administered on arrival at the Forum, on the final day of the programme and again at the completion of the nine-month Youth Award programme. Questions focus on the participants' perceptions of their own leadership, confidence, communication ability, project planning and management skills. Having a standardised monitoring tool has enabled us to track consistent improvements over time.



around access to additional opportunities such as scholarships or courses – is premised on interviews, and interactions in the formal space where people such as those most-nominated thrive. Our most effective participants, who were creating and deploying extraordinary projects in their communities, may well not fit traditional models of leadership. As we work towards an ultimate goal of reducing inequality and sparking social change through innovation, it is thus vital for us to find ways to identify real leaders, not just those that talk a good game. We're still figuring out how to do this ourselves, and how to create opportunities to notice and recognise alternative ways of leading.

Question 2: Do groups do better?

One of the core philosophies underpinning our work is the importance of connection, and the power of bringing young people together. So we decided to investigate whether there was any correlation between the number of participants from a particular school, and their effectiveness in running projects. We had imagined that it would be much harder for a participant to actually get a project off the ground if they were the only person in their school or community who had had the experience, and conversely that those schools where there were more participants would result in stronger projects.

In order to interrogate this, we took a look at the drop-out and conversion rates of CAPs according to a variety of factors: province, type of school, and participation in a CSI programme. We classified "drop-out" as participants who did not start a CAP, and "conversion" as those participants who completed their CAPs and submitted at least 6 monthly reports over the Youth Award period. As the numbers are emerging, we are seeing the beginnings of interesting trends – although we will need multiple years of data before being able to draw any firm conclusions. Interestingly it does not seem to be an inhibiting factor for participants to work alone. At this point we're not sure where to go with this kind of tracking, but are confident that cross-referencing the data of drop-outs and successes with other factors will, over time, provide a fascinating insight on the sociological factors that influence the likelihood of success for

our participants.

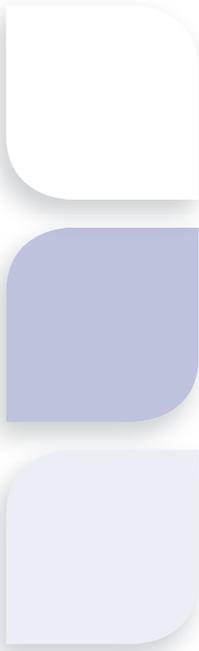
Question 3: Can we measure social capital?

Having attempted in our data collection for the 2011/12 programme to measure the perceived leadership of participants and the extent to which factors shaped their success in deploying CAPs, this year we have tried to explore whether we were having any impact on the social capital of our participants. In order for our participants to negotiate the transitions from school into successful lives, we believe that they will need to develop multiple, diverse connections and networks in order to be able to negotiate the multiple transition points and challenges of being young in South Africa. At the Forum and in their engagement with their schools and communities through deploying CAPs, we hope that we are able to increase and improve their networks, and create new opportunities for the participants.

In trying to measure this we turned to the work of Dutch academic Martin van der Gaag, who developed survey tools that were used in a national survey of the social capital of the Dutch in 1999/2000². Two of these surveys were particularly interesting, as they measured firstly the social distance of individuals from a variety of Positions in society, and secondly to a number of their resources. So, for example in the "Position Generator" survey, respondents would be asked whether they knew anyone who held particular social positions (ranging from unskilled worker to physicians) and would have to map for each position whether they were a family member, friend, acquaintance, or if they did not know someone. Similarly, the "Resource Generator" asked questions about the individuals' access to particular resources (ranging from being able to borrow a large sum of money to being able to repair a car) and again noting the distance.

We decided to adapt this survey to the South African setting, and try to make it relevant to a younger audience by including questions such as "do you know someone who could help you

² Van Der Gaag, M & Snijdersb, T.A.B "The Resource Generator: Social capital quantification with concrete items", *Social Networks* 27 (2005) 1–29).



apply for university” or “do you know someone that could write you a job reference”. We had initially believed that these surveys would give us a mechanism to objectively measure the depth and reach of the participants’ social capital, and that they would be a tool we could use over time to measure any shifts. Although we have not yet begun to analyse the data comprehensively, we have already realised that the survey ultimately cannot measure the objective nature of one’s social capital, but rather your perception of social capital. This emerged as we were flipping through surveys, and came across one participant who we knew well and was a member of another youth development programme, where she was an outstanding participant. This participant had made some fascinating statements: she did not believe that she knew anyone who could write her a job reference (whereas we were certain that the programme director of the other organisation would have been more than willing to).

The realisation that we were measuring perceptions rather than reality initially deflated us until we realised an important aspect of social capital that we had overlooked: the agency to activate that capital. If young people do not believe that they have access to particular social resources – even where they objectively do – they will continue to be stuck in positions of exclusion and vulnerability. Identifying this gap has helped us plan for 2013, to focus very specifically on ensuring that our participants develop the capacity to both see what social capital they do have, and the confidence to activate that capital.

Where to from here?

Our journey of “learning through doing” to evaluate the impact of our programme has been extraordinarily rewarding and we would urge any organisation to reflect about new ways of

uncovering information about their impact. We realised early on, however, that if we were to test new ideas, we needed a core set of tools that we did not tamper with in order to ensure that we have longitudinal evidence of the same quality. Having a strong research foundation has opened our eyes to new opportunities and has brought a much deeper understanding of our own programme’s strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps even more importantly, it has provided us with evidence that has shifted our own fundamental assumptions about how leadership, connection and social capital functions. Even where the data sometimes feel unwieldy, or overwhelming, we have seen that by embracing new mechanisms we are constantly able to surprise ourselves, keeping our enthusiasm and curiosity fresh and alive!

This learning brief tells of the hands-on experience of:



Physical Address:	Postal Address:
4th Floor	PO Box 31562
87 De Korte Street	Braamfontein
Braamfontein	2017
Johannesburg	Gauteng

Tel: +27 11 403 1241/3
Email: more@enke.co.za
Web: www.enke.co.za
Facebook: www.facebook.com/enke.co.za
Twitter: follow @enkeMYM