Michael Thema

+27722647349

michaelthema@gmail.com | *LinkedIn* | Skype ID: michael.thema

SUMMARY

Seasoned Non-Profit Program Leader and Education Strategist with over a decade of proven impact in driving academic excellence, managing multi-million-rand budgets, and scaling community programs across South Africa. Adept at aligning stakeholders, optimizing branch operations, and delivering consistent learner success—maintaining a 90%+ pass rate and post-school placement record for over 10 years. A strategic thinker and systems builder, known for combining grassroots engagement with data-driven insights to grow access, equity, and efficiency in underserved communities. Blends leadership in educational program design with emerging data science and analytics skills to inform decision-making, evaluate impact, and shape the future of inclusive development.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Project Lead – STEM Special Projects

Ikamva Lisezandleni Zethu, Gauteng | *Sept 2020 – current*

- **High-Impact STEM Strategy:** Spearheaded a province-wide STEM initiative reaching over 4,620 learners across four provinces, driving innovation in education through tailored curricula.
- **Stakeholder & Donor Alignment:** Maintained strong alignment between project outcomes and donor expectations, fostering long-term partnerships through transparent reporting and measurable results.
- **Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Built and nurtured strategic relationships with circuit managers, principals, educators, and School Governing Bodies (SGBs), securing buy-in and sustained support.
- **End-to-End Budget Management:** Oversaw an annual R2.7M project budget—planning, forecasting, and allocating funds to maximize impact and ensure full donor compliance.
- **Operational Excellence:** Delivered all project goals on time and within budget by implementing streamlined planning, execution, and reporting practices.
- **Data-Driven Reporting:** Produced in-depth reports and insights for leadership and stakeholders, enhancing project transparency and credibility.
- **Community Engagement:** Partnered with local schools and NGOs to extend reach and impact, strengthening community involvement and ownership.

Data Science Intern (Remote)

Sand Technologies | *Sept 2024 – Dec 2024*

Key Responsibilities:
- **Predictive Modeling for Admissions:** Built and deployed machine learning models to rank institutional applicants, improving accuracy and efficiency in admissions decisions.
- **Data Pipeline Engineering:** Designed and maintained scalable data pipelines using AWS (S3, EC2), Docker, and Apache Airflow, ensuring robust and reliable data flow.
- **Data Quality & Analysis:** Managed large datasets to ensure integrity and actionable insights, supporting high-stakes decision-making processes.
- **Cloud & DevOps Integration:** Leveraged Docker for containerized model deployment and ensured seamless scalability on AWS infrastructure.
- **Cross-Functional Collaboration:** Worked closely with engineering and product teams to integrate models into existing systems, aligning with business objectives.
- **Data Versioning & Lineage:** Implemented tracking and versioning practices using Apache Airflow to enhance

model transparency and reproducibility.

- **Performance Optimization:** Focused on scalability, reliability, and cost-efficiency of models deployed in cloud environments.

Branch Manager October 2015 – 2020

Ikamva Lisezandleni Zethu- Gauteng, South Africa

- **Strategic Program Leadership:** Led long-term strategy for branch growth, expanding reach by partnering with 6 additional schools and increasing access to education in underserved areas.
- **Talent Recruitment & Program Oversight:** Designed and managed the Grade 12 learner success program; recruited and retained a high-performing team of tutors and mentors, resulting in a sustained 90%+ pass rate since 2013.
- **Stakeholder Engagement & Public Relations:** Cultivated strong relationships with community leaders, school officials, donors, and parents, increasing visibility and support for the organization's mission.
- **Governance & Compliance:** Coordinated regular governance meetings and community engagement sessions, ensuring transparency, inclusive participation, and timely distribution of official records and minutes.
- **Policy Implementation:** Ensured policies and the organizational code of conduct were regularly reviewed, updated, and communicated to all stakeholders, promoting a culture of accountability and inclusion.
- **Financial Oversight:** Managed annual branch budgets for over 10 years, maintaining compliance and optimizing resource use to maximize program impact.
- **Operational Excellence:** Oversaw daily branch activities, data entry, and administrative systems; implemented effective planning, monitoring, and evaluation protocols that improved decision-making and reporting accuracy.
- **Community Engagement:** Drove consistent 95% learner enrollment through localized outreach and sustained community involvement efforts.
- **Post-School Pathways:** Maintained a 90%+ success rate of learners transitioning to tertiary education, internships, or employment.

Branch Assistant

Ikamva Lisezandleni Zethu, Gauteng | *Jan 2013 – Sept 2015*

- **Administrative Backbone:** Provided critical support through meticulous record-keeping, document preparation, and day-to-day office coordination.
- **Program Execution Support:** Assisted in planning and delivering community outreach events, increasing program awareness and participation.
- **Volunteer Engagement:** Supported coordination and scheduling of volunteer activities, ensuring alignment with the organization's mission and timelines.
- **Cross-Team Collaboration:** Worked across departments to maintain operational continuity and support learner recruitment and academic initiatives.

Experiential Training

Caltex Service Station | *May 2012 – Jan 2013*

- **Customer Relations:** Handled customer queries and conflict resolution, building a foundation of strong interpersonal and service skills.
- **Team Leadership:** Led daily briefings and task assignments, ensuring team clarity and smooth shift transitions.
- **Inventory Management:** Maintained optimal inventory levels, oversaw stocktaking, and coordinated fuel supply orders.

- **Performance Reporting:** Generated business performance updates for the owner, contributing to decision-making and service improvements.

EDUCATION
- **Higher Certificate in Data Science** (Explore AI Academy, 2024)
- **Data Analytics Certificate** (ALX South Africa, 2023)
- **BCom Financial Management,** (UNISA, Current)
- **National Diploma in Management**, (Tshwane University of Technology, 2007–2010)

Certifications & Compliance

- Willing to undergo vetting and fingerprint clearance
- Familiar with public sector compliance and reporting standards
- Clean record, ready for background checks as required

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

Kick=It Rephele – Life Coach Volunteer | *Jan 2011 – Mar 2012*

- Mentored youth in goal-setting and teamwork, fostering communication skills critical for client and stakeholder collaboration

TECHNICAL SKILLS
- Excel (Advanced formulas, Pivot Tables, Data Visualization, Macros)
- Power BI (Dashboards, DAX, Visual Reporting)
- PowerPoint (Executive-level storytelling)
- Budget Forecasting & Financial Tracking
- IT Spend & Resource Analysis
- Data Pipeline Automation (SQL, AWS)
- Process Optimization & Automation
- Stakeholder Communication (Finance & IT)

SOFT SKILLS

- Leadership & Team Management
- Effective Communication
- Problem-Solving & Critical Thinking
- Independent & Team Collaboration
- Attention to Detail
- Collaboration & Teamwork
- Adaptability & Flexibility
- Time Management
- Strategic Thinking
- Conflict Resolution

CORE COMPETENCIES
- Operations & Program Management
- Team Leadership & Performance Oversight

- Sales Process Support & CRM Optimization
- Client Retention & Stakeholder Engagement
- Strategic Planning & Execution
- Budget Management & Forecasting
- KPI Development & Performance Reporting
- Cross-Functional Collaboration (Sales, Marketing, Product)
- Tools: Asana, Trello, Power BI, Excel, Slack, AWS, Python

Reference available upon request