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***Paradoxes experienced by
Women in management within a
Financial Services Institution***

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Gordon Institute of Business Science,
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Abstract

Paradox is gaining pervasiveness in and around organisations thus increasing the need for an approach to its management. The aim of this study is to attempt to gain a deeper understanding into paradoxes experienced by South African women managers in a financial services institution, how they have managed these and the factors that could contribute to this.

Twenty, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with senior South African women managers in a financial services institution. The feedback was analysed using a combination of narrative, content and constant comparative analysis. This study analysed four categories of paradoxes: those of structure, agency, identity and power and it was found that paradoxes of identity and paradoxes of power were the most experienced paradoxes. An additional paradox of transformation emerged from the results. In addition, the women interviewed managed the paradoxes experienced through acceptance, confrontation and transcendence. Practical suggestions for the identification and management of paradoxes as well as recommendations are offered.



Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other University.

Signature

Date



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Declaration	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
1 Chapter 1 – Introduction to Research Problem	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Research Motivation	1
1.2.1 Paradoxes	2
1.2.2 Women in Management	4
1.2.3 Financial institutions	6
1.3 Research Scope	7
1.4 Research Problem	8
2 Chapter 2 – Literature Review	9
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 Defining Paradoxes	9
2.2.1 Tensions	10
2.2.2 Reinforcing cycles	11
2.2.3 Management	12
2.2.4 Categories	14
2.2.5 Identifying paradox	15
2.2.6 Representation	16
2.3 Gendered organisations	17
2.4 Women in Management	20
2.4.1 Management theories	21
2.4.2 Gender stereotypes	24
2.4.3 Gender differences in management style and decision making ..	26
2.5 Responses to Paradoxes	28
2.6 Conclusion	30
3 Chapter 3 – Research Questions	31
4 Chapter 4 – Research Methodology	32
4.1 Proposed Research Method	32
4.1.1 Reasoning for proposed method	32
4.1.2 Procedure	33
4.2 Proposed Population and Unit of Analysis	34
4.3 Size and Nature of Sample	35
4.4 Data Collection, Data Analysis and Data Management	35
4.4.1 Data Collection	35
4.4.2 Data Analysis	37
4.4.3 Data Management	40
4.5 Data Validity and Reliability	40
4.6 Potential Research Limitations	41
5 Chapter 5 – Results	42
5.1 Introduction	42
5.2 Results	42
5.2.1 Demographics	42
5.2.2 Research Question 1	44
5.2.3 Research Question 2	45



5.2.4	Research Question 3	51
5.2.5	Research Question 4	58
5.3	Conclusion	68
6	Chapter 6 – Discussion of Results	69
6.1	Introduction	69
6.2	Reviewing the Paradox Framework	69
6.2.1	Research Question 1	70
6.2.2	Research Question 2	73
6.2.3	Research Question 3	81
6.2.4	Research Question 4	86
6.3	Conclusion	90
7	Chapter 7 – Conclusion	93
7.1	Introduction	93
7.2	Findings Summary	93
7.2.1	Paradoxes	93
7.2.2	Women in Management	95
7.3	Recommendations	96
7.4	Future Research	97
7.5	Conclusion	98
8	List of References	100
9	Appendix 1 – Consistency Matrix	122
10	Appendix 2 – Interview Guide	124

List of Figures

Figure 1 – A Paradox Framework	13
Figure 2 – Reviewing the Paradox Framework	70

List of Tables

Table 1 – Demographics of Participants	43
Table 2 – Paradoxes	50
Table 3 – Paradoxes per organisational level	50
Table 4 – Management of Paradoxes	66
Table 5 – Management of Paradoxes per Category	67
Table 6 – Summary of Paradoxes identified	92



1 Chapter 1 – Introduction to Research Problem

1.1 Introduction

Women in management face multiple paradoxes arising from their structural and gendered locations that add to the uncertainty of negotiating organisational life (Martin, 2004). In South Africa, women compose 52.1% of the total population and 41.4% of the total workforce (The Business Women's Association, 2006). Women constitute only 16,8% of all executive managers, 11,5% as Women Directors and 6,4% are CEOs and Board Chairs (The Business Women's Association, 2006). As indicated by these statistics, women are playing an increasingly important role in organisations. Yet the statistics also indicate an imbalance in the representation of women in management. Investigating the lived experiences of women managers can illuminate the paradoxes endemic to organisations. Specifically, this contextual investigation explores links between paradoxes and women.

1.2 Research Motivation

For the purposes of this paper, a paradox is seen as the simultaneous presence of opposites, and the research is interested in paradox in the sense of “the interesting tensions, oppositions, and contradictions” (Scott and Van de Ven, 1989, p. 564) as experienced by women managers.



1.2.1 Paradoxes

With increasing technological change, global competition and workforce diversity, paradoxes are revealed and intensified. Managers, for example, are asked to increase efficiency and foster creativity, build individualistic teams and think globally while acting locally. As Lewis (2000, p769) explained, “In sum, the more complex, diverse and dynamic organisations become, the traditional either/or thinking oversimplifies management practices and demands. At the extremes, organisational life appears chaotic or alienating. Yet, managing paradoxical tensions denotes not compromise between flexibility and control but awareness of their simultaneity. Exemplars offer both/and insights into organisational characteristics and performance, emphasising the coexistence of authority, democracy, discipline and empowerment and formalisation and discretion.” Much effort has been devoted to resolving or understanding paradoxes as they divulge inconsistencies in logic or assumptions. They present opportunities to discover different assumptions, shift perspectives, and pose problems in fundamentally different ways.

The notion of paradox as an underlying theme has received attention in the analysis of the organisation. A thicket of paradox-related notions has grown up recently in organisation studies, including articles that use paradox to explain something, and articles that dwell on the concept of paradox itself (Johnston and Selsky, 2005). Organisation and management theories involve a special type of paradox namely, social paradoxes where the opposing terms are often somewhat vague and instead of logical contradictions, tensions and oppositions between incompatible positions must be considered. Many such paradoxes



have long been identified by Burrell and Morgan (1979), Pfeffer (1982), Quinn and Cameron (1988), Smith and Berg (1987), Van de Ven (1983) and Van de Ven and Poole (1988). These paradoxes include: the difficulty in reconciling the explanation of behaviour as a function of structural determination with equally strong claim that it is the product of positive action (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Van de Ven and Poole, 1988); good arguments for two incompatible conceptualisations of organisational climate – as an aggregation of individual climate perceptions or as a macrolevel system property (Glick, 1985, 1988; James, Joyce and Slocum, 1988); the question of whether social organisations are fundamentally stable orders or continuously changing emergents (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Pfeffer, 1982; Weick, 1979); and the trade-off between the need to establish individual identity in groups and the collective nature of group action (Smith and Berg, 1987).

One of the most fundamental and striking paradoxes of contemporary management is the pursuit of “participation”, “involvement” and “commitment” on the one hand and the urge for control and exercise of power, familiar themes to managers, on the other (Dehler, Welsh and Lewis, 2001, p505). The modern environment requires, more than ever, a “simultaneous managing across all fronts” response from management strategists (Richardson, 1995, p.12). Managers are expected to be able to manage paradoxes and the ability to do this is dependent on personal beliefs. Being able to handle paradox is essential to managers because much in organisational practice is paradoxical (Brunsson, 1989; Sjöstrand, 1997; Streatfield, 2001). Managers need to proactively take



part in the dynamic processes that paradoxes produce in order to shape these, while retaining some sense of direction.

Leaders must instead navigate complex change by embracing paradox and coming to grips with the fact that paradoxical tensions are a normal part of contemporary organisational life; here leadership entails becoming increasingly adept at operating under contradictory conditions and being willing to accept the “and” notion of decision-making rather than the traditional “either/or” framework (Lewis, 2000, p. 3). Management literature contains many contributions which acknowledge the need for “hard” and “soft”, “loose” and “tight” approach within organisations (Richardson, 1995, p. 1). There is a growing recognition that significant advances in management and organisation theory will require ways to address paradoxes inherent in human beings and their social organisations.

1.2.2 Women in Management

Success factors and barriers to organisational advancement, particularly male stereotyping and preconceptions about women’s roles and abilities, underscore the gendered nature of organisational life (Catalyst, 2000). Berthoin and Izraeli (1993, p. 63), in a overview of women in management worldwide, stated that “probably the single most important hurdle for women in management in all industrialised countries is the persistent stereotype that associates management with being male.” In 2004, it was found that these problems still persisted as a worldwide review of the status of women in management speaks of the barriers created by biased attitudes towards women in management (ILO,



2004). It has been found that the extent to which the managerial position is viewed as “male” in gender-type, the characteristics required for success are seen as more commonly held by men than by women. All else being equal, a male appears more qualified, by virtue of his gender alone, than does a female to enter and advance in management. Gender stereotyping of the managerial position fosters bias against women in managerial selection, placement, promotion, and training decisions. This can be seen in the 2006 Business Women’s Association study where women constitute only 16,8% of all executive managers, 11,5% of directors and 6,4% of CEOs and Board Chairs and yet comprise 41.4% of the total workforce (The Business Women’s Association, 2006).

In a study of women’s managerial status in 41 countries for which internationally comparable 1998-1999 data were available, Wirth (2001) found that in nearly half of the 41 countries, women typically hold between 20 and 30 percent of legislative, senior official, and managerial positions. These countries include: Austria, Germany, Greece, Israel, Peru, and Singapore. In 16 of the 41 countries women hold between 31 and 39 percent of such jobs. These countries include New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, and the UK. On the other hand, in a few countries, such as the Republic of Korea and Sri Lanka, women hold less than 10 percent of legislative, senior official, and managerial positions. A 2004 update of global progress revealed that in 48 countries using the same ILO classifications as Wirth (2001), women’s share of managerial jobs increased by only between 1 and 5 percent in 26 countries between 1996-1999 and 2000-2002. While a few countries, such as Costa Rica showed steep increases (23.5



percent), others, such as Canada, (23.7 percent), and Ireland, (25.6 percent) experienced declines (ILO, 2004). Similarly, in South Africa, among all companies listed on the main board of the JSE Securities Exchange and 17 state-owned enterprises, women constitute 10.7 percent of all board directors (Business Women's Association, 2004). In 2006, women constituted 11,5% of Directors and 6,4% of CEOs and Board Chairs (The Business Women's Association, 2006). This is a slight increase on the 2004 figures but despite this, it is still well below the figures seen in the countries mentioned above.

1.2.3 Financial institutions

The UK finance sector is a rather conspicuous example of the pervasively powerful and gender unequal effects a male culture can have on the careers of females (Woodward and Ozbilgin, 1999; Parker, Pascall and Evetts, 1998). A historically male culture, like the banks, which denied gender difference and operates under free market mechanisms, has been exclusionary to women (Rutherford, 2001). The banking sector in South Africa has undergone several surveys to identify key challenges facing them. As part of this, they investigate critical success factors and compliance with the financial sector charter for performance ranking in top ten South African banks' (Banking Survey Report, 2004). Presently most banks in South Africa are claiming to have eliminated discrimination by changing their educational parity and social attitudes towards women. Hence, to a great extent qualified and talented women are found working parallel to male counterparts as actuaries, chartered accountants, economists, business administrators, and senior managers. However, women



are found holding only 1.6% of all board directorships and only 4% of all executive positions in South Africa's banks (Banking survey Report, 2004). This indicates an under representation of women in senior management.

To conclude, the concurrent roles of woman and manager, subordinate and supervisor situate women managers in nearly unavoidable paradoxes born of their structural and gendered positioning (Nadesan and Trethewey, 2000). Paradoxes have been extensively studied but the focus changes to stubborn paradoxical issues and paradoxes that women still face. I believe that the paradoxes encountered in management underpin many management challenges and are worthy of study in their own right.

1.3 Research Scope

This research will focus on corporate women in management positions. The research scope will be limited to South African female managers within a financial services institution who a) have a leadership and / or management role in the organisation, b) have control over day-to-day operations, and c) have decision-making powers (The Business Women's Association, 2006). These women will rank between senior executives to top managers including executive board members as defined by the Employment Equity Act (1998). It is believed that women that fall into these categories would have a wide range of management experience. The financial services institution in which the research was conducted is a large organisation listed on the Johannesburg Stock



Exchange and has approximately 22000 staff members (The Businesswomen's Association, 2006).

1.4 Research Problem

As Poole and van de Ven (1989, p. 3) point out, "Paradox is one key to understanding how to work with theoretical contradictions and oppositions embedded in complex traditions". While much has been written about paradoxes, no current treatment fully captures its complexity or its pervasiveness. Paradox is unavoidable and uncomfortable, and anything that can be done to negotiate paradox more effectively is useful. As mentioned previously, in South Africa, women compose 52.1% of the total population and 41.4% of the total workforce (The Business Women's Association, 2006). Therefore the focus of the study will be on women. The study will attempt to gain a deeper understanding into paradoxes experienced by women managers, how they have managed these and the factors that could contribute to this.



2 Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature reviewed in this section further defines the concept of paradoxes. The theory reviewed also describes the gendered organisation and women in management. Theories of gendered organisational culture consider the role that societal and organisational expectations and values have both on the people within the institution and the foundational structure of the institution. Management is typically presented as genderless, although it has hidden masculine orientation. However, a gender in management approach argues that because men and women are socialised differently, they manage differently (Linstead, Brewis and Linstead, 2005)

2.2 Defining Paradoxes

Paradoxes engenders numerous and varied meanings. According to Lewis (2000, p. 760), “Paradox denotes contradicting yet interrelated elements – elements that seem logical in isolation but absurd and irrational when appearing simultaneously”. Etymologically, paradox derives from *para* (before, alongside of, beyond) and *dokien* (to think) (Maryboy, Begay and Nichol, 2006, p.2). Thus, we can think of paradox as a way of perceiving that operates before, in tandem with, or beyond our “normal” way of thinking (Maryboy, Begay and Nichol, 2006, p.2). Further Lewis (2000, p. 763) notes the notion of the “negative dynamics of paradox”, where tensions and conflict arising from paradox often lead to anxiety and defensiveness, which inhibits performance and impedes personal



development. This indicates that paradoxes have a profound impact on the individual experiencing them. A greater understanding of paradoxes can assist individuals in managing them better. Some researchers claim that comprehending paradox requires more than defining its characteristics; it requires a guiding framework, a tool to help researchers to explore paradoxical tensions, reinforcing cycles and their management (Argris, 1993; Cameron and Quinn, 1988; Smith and Berg, 1987).

Clegg parsed the paradox literature into two groups (Clegg, 2002). On the one hand studies “materialising” paradox make the claim that paradox is “inherent to the nature of the phenomenon” (Clegg, 2002, p1). On the other hand, studies “representing “ paradox make the claim that paradox is “the means of representation of a phenomenon” (Johnston and Selsky, 2005, pp 186). Theorists observe evident tensions, oppositions or ambiguities in social systems and construct them as paradoxes (Lewis, 2000). In each group, theorists have delved into the implications for managerial practice. They try to resolve paradoxes in creative ways that can be useful to management (Lewis, 2000; Cunha et al, 2002).

2.2.1 Tensions

Tensions form the underlying sources of paradox. Paradoxical tensions are perceptual, that is, cognitively or socially constructed polarities that mask the simultaneity of conflicting truths (Lewis, 2000). These paradoxical tensions signify two sides of the same coin. In organisational studies distinctions are



apparent in polar constructs as quality/cost, differentiation/integration, stability/change and cohesion/division. Putnam (1986) summarises three interrelated types of tensions. *Self-referential loops* operate when contradictions are embedded within a cohesive statement, concept or process. *Mixed messages* denote inconsistencies between statements or between verbal and non-verbal responses that appear during social interactions. Over time, such tensions may become objectified within *system contradictions* entrenched “within the goals, reward systems, resource demands and division of labour of an organisation” (Putnam, 1986 pp161).

2.2.2 Reinforcing cycles

Reinforcing cycles are considered the negative dynamics of paradox. As one seeks to resolve paradoxical tensions, they may become trapped within reinforcing cycles that perpetuate and exacerbate the tension for paradox is a double-edged sword (Lewis, 2000). Simply put, tensions may serve as a trigger for change spurring one to rethink existing polarities and recognise more complicated interrelationships. At the same time, tensions may simultaneously inhibit change.

Typical and often first reactions by individuals are defensive, clinging to past understandings to avoid recognising their cognitive and social idiosyncrasies. Part of the problem may be due to the fact that defences denote “any policy or action that prevents someone (or some system) from experiencing embarrassment or threat and simultaneously prevents anyone from correcting



the causes of embarrassment or threat” (Argyris, 1993, p.40). By suppressing the relatedness of contradictions and maintaining the false appearance of order, defences may temporarily reduce anxiety. In suppressing one side of a polarity, it intensifies pressure from the other. Attempting to reduce the frustrations and discomfort of tensions, one's defensive behaviours initially produce positive effects but eventually foster opposite, unintended consequences that intensify the underlying tensions.

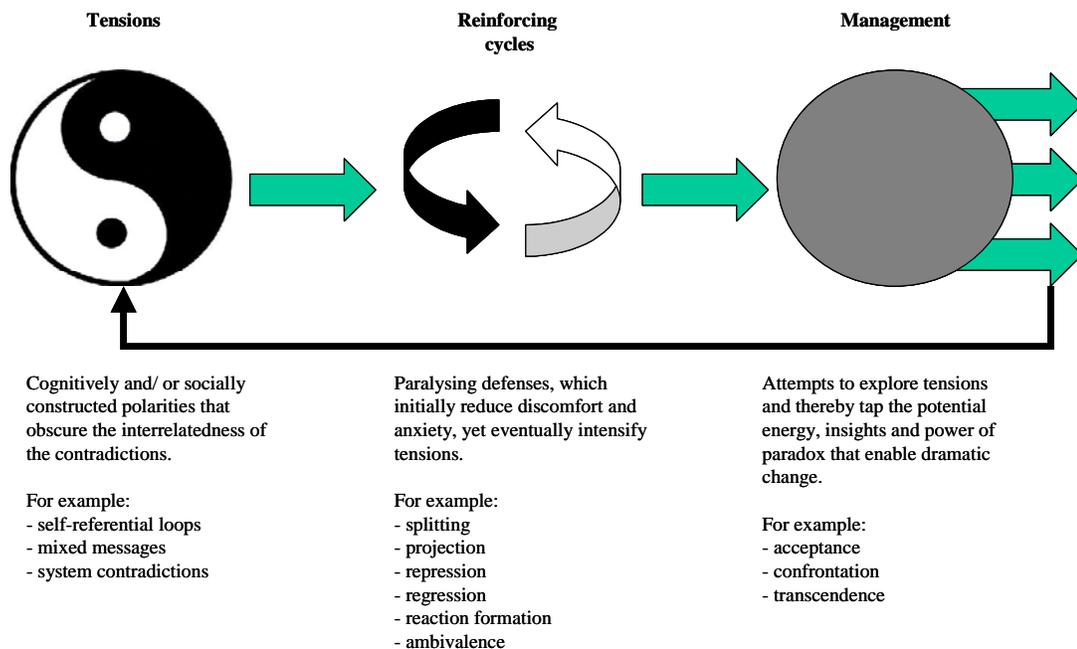
Researchers such as Smith and Berg (1987) and Vince and Broussine (1996) have detailed numerous defences operating at individual, group and organisational levels. They have catalogued six defensive reactions towards paradox. *Splitting* entails further polarising contradictions. *Projection* signifies the transfer of conflicting attributes or feelings often onto a scapegoat or repository of bad feelings. *Repression* or denial denotes blocking of awareness of tenuous experiences or memories whereas *regression* involves resorting to understandings or actions that have provided security in the past. *Reaction formation* entails excessively manifesting the feeling or practice opposite to the threatening one. On the contrary, *ambivalence* signifies the compromise of conflicting emotions within 'lukewarm' reactions that lose the vitality of extremes (Lewis, 2000, p 763).

2.2.3 Management

Managing paradox means capturing its enlightening potential (Lewis, 2000). In other words, the positive potential of the paradox is tapped. The goal is to

journey beyond reinforcing cycles, dramatically rethinking past perceptions and practices. One's natural inclination when faced with paradox is to attempt to resolve them. Yet in today's complex organisations, models based on linear and rational problem solving do managers a disservice. Managers need to recognise, become comfortable with and even profit from tensions and the anxieties they provoke for "the contribution of paradox to management thinking is the recognition of its power to generate creative insight and change" (Eisenhardt and Westcott, 1988, p.170)

Figure 1 – A Paradox Framework



Source: Lewis (2000)

Figure 1 illustrates these three components discussed. The arrows between components in the figure denote the exploration process. By linking management back to tensions, the framework depicts exploration itself as



paradoxical. Exploring paradox is an ongoing and cyclical journey rather than a linear progression marked by a distinct endpoint or resolution.

2.2.4 Categories

Paradox has been investigated in times of expected turmoil such as organisational change (Medved, Morrison, Dearing, Larson, Cline, and Brummans, 2001), in overarching facets of organisational culture (Meyerson, 1991), and in everyday situations of organisational life (Wendt, 1998). Stohl and Cheney (2001) note that tensions (clashes of ideas or principles or actions and resulting discomfort), double binds (situations wherein one injunction conflicts directly with another), and ironies (stances toward paradox that allow participants to realise and possibly transcend limitations) are linked to paradox and are inherent in organisational life. They categorise organisational paradoxes into four general areas (Stohl and Cheney, 2001, p. 360):

1. **Paradoxes of structure:** Concerning the architecture of participation and democracy— for example, “Be spontaneous, creative, vocal, and assertive in the way we have planned!”
2. **Paradoxes of agency:** Concerning an individual’s (sense of) efficacy within the system—for example, “Do things our way but in a way that is still distinctively your own!”
3. **Paradoxes of identity:** Concerning issues of membership, inclusion, and boundaries—for example, “Be self-managing to meet organisational goals!”



4. **Paradoxes of power:** Concerning the locus, nature, and specific exercise of power in the organisation—for example, “Be independent, just as I have commanded you!”

2.2.5 Identifying paradox

A key challenge when exploring paradox is locating and bracketing the phenomena (Hatch and Ehrlich, 1993). Research depicts three potentially valuable approaches for identifying paradox – narrative, psychodynamic and multiparadigm (Lewis, 2000):

1. A *narrative approach* is applied by analysing discourse to identify paradox. Those using this strategy rely on the premise that paradoxes are both socially constructed through one’s rhetoric and conversations.
2. A *psychodynamic approach* is where one conducts research with not on others to help researchers and organisations recognise inner conflicts. One method explained by Lewis (2000) requires people to track their conversations, writing what they say in the right column and what they think in the left. By providing feedback, the researcher seeks to help the individuals reflect on their tensions and escape vicious cycles via more open communication.
3. Lastly, a *multiparadigm approach* entails using opposing theoretical perspectives as sensitising devices (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989). For example, Ybema (1996) collected thick anthropological data that enabled analysis from disparate perspectives. By using multiple paradigms, such as a interpretivist or positivist lens, Ybema recognised



that “the complexity of group membership, the ambiguity of rules and the coexistence of common and contrasting interest and identities are all reasons to expect unity and division to occur successively or simultaneously” (Ybema, 1996 pp 43).

2.2.6 Representation

The daunting task of conveying the intricate and seemingly absurd nature of paradox is referred to as representation (Lewis, 2000):

1. *Conceptualising paradox* entails building constructs that accommodate contradictions. Rather than polarise phenomena into either/or notions, one needs to use both/and constructs for paradoxes allowing for simultaneity and the study of interdependence.
2. Strategies for *mapping paradox* provide potentially valuable means of representing tensions and defences in action. Argyris (1993) detailed a method of mapping conversations. Documenting the context, behaviour and consequence of successive statements serves to organise conversational processes into an exploratory model of how defences reinforce patterns of behaviour. Such models might illustrate how vicious cycles ensue when one clings to existing frames of reference and avoid critical self-reflection and more open discourse. Models are then testable by seeing if one’s pattern persists in differing conversations or if closely related others share the pattern. The result is a rich image of the nature and dynamics of mixed messages.



3. *Theorising paradox* entails developing a frame that encompasses opposites, enabling a more complicated understanding of their coexistence and interrelationships.

The overview of literature broadly outlines the characteristics, categories and means of identifying and representing paradox. This guide may help one actively seek out paradox or explain anomalies as they arise to extend understandings of contradictory emotions, demands and practices – understandings more in tune with the paradoxical nature of individuals, groups and organisational life.

2.3 Gendered organisations

Organisational theory and management literature has been dominated by the view that gender does not matter. According to Gherardi, “Organisational theory as a body of knowledge about organisations and as a theoretical discourse has adopted the gender perspective somewhat belatedly compared to other academic disciplines like history or literature. OT [organisation theory] has been more tenacious than other disciplines in defending a ‘gender-neutral’ position which minimises gender differences” (Gherardi, 2002, p24). This conceals the fact that what is seen as good leadership is based on male norms. The mainstream view of waged work in the twentieth century was built on the view that men were paid workers and women, unpaid, met the needs of the family members (Ferree, 1995; Williams, 2000). This gendered perspective of women



and men's employment and its relationship to family created the backdrop against which contemporary organisational blueprints were constructed.

The link between gender and organisations is often credited to the groundbreaking analyses of Kanter (1977) and Acker (1990), whose work offers new understandings of the complex infrastructure of people and processes that support and maintain institutions. The theory of gendered organisations suggests that organisations be viewed as the outcomes of process that operate on multiple levels (West and Fenstermaker, 1995). Deconstructing the gendered assumptions inherent to these interactions highlights the ways that organisations are in fact gendered rather than gender neutral (Acker, 1989).

Acker (1990) argues that the embedded substructure of gender difference is part of organisations. Writers have concentrated their efforts on decoding organisational culture for its genderness and have explored different approaches of problematising gendered cultures (Hearn, 1992; McDowell, 1997; Gherardi, 1995; Wacjman, 1998; Maddock, 1999). Itzin (1995) connects the maleness of organisational cultures to the gender inequality that exists in wider society. Marshall (1993) also examines organisations as cultures and claims that these cultures are dominated by male values. Accordingly, these values create what is essentially a high-context culture, or one in which communication transactions include preprogrammed information that is easily understood by dominant cultural members (that is, men). In high-context cultures, organisational messages are transmitted with only minimal supporting information, which organisational women, as cultural outsiders, may find difficult



to decipher (Marshall, 1993). Women, therefore, may appear to be on their guard and precarious in their efforts to negotiate this high-context organisational culture. Finally, management practices are also guided by masculine norms (Murphy and Zorn, 1996), including norms of expression, decision-making, leadership, self-promotion, and humour (Ashcraft, 1999).

Acker (1990) identifies several ways that gendering occurs in social systems including organisations. The first two ways relate to the 'construction of divisions along lines of gender and the construction of symbols and images that explain, reinforce or oppose division' (Acker, 1990, p.146). The symbolic conscious or unconscious behaviours, actions and inactions reinforce gender-based divisions. Secondly, interactions between and among men and women convey social exchanges that enact dominance and subordination. Finally, gendered stratification within organisations results in gendered interactions and practices which are acted upon every day (Smith, 1988).

In other words, men's ways are expected and enacted in management behaviour. Yet women who enact masculine organisational norms may violate social gender norms and, without efforts to mitigate possible offence to men, may invite swift and harsh retribution by offended males (Martin, 1996). Organisational women must often negotiate an unfamiliar culture, where violation of prescribed organisational norms or the violation of prescribed gender role norms creates paradox. Years of study have confirmed that organisations rooted in and dominated by masculine values (Acker, 1990; Marshall, 1993; Mills and Chiramonte, 1991) may catch women in multiple



paradoxes (Wendt, 2001). These conditions still persist. Acknowledging the gendered organisation complicates our understanding of paradox.

2.4 Women in Management

The early leadership studies defined leadership in a male context. Research (Cames et al., 2001; Schein, 2001) provides us with an understanding of the pervasiveness of the belief that men, in particular, continue to view males, more so than females, as more likely to possess the characteristics required to be an effective manager or leader. A recurring theme in the management literature of recent decades has been the feminisation of management. Popular books have been published about women managers and about femininity in management (Chater and Gaster, 1995; Helgesen, 1990). In the mainstream management literature many authors have suggested that managers in modern organisations need traditionally feminine qualities such as the ability to facilitate and support their employees, intuition, a communal style of communication, and a collaborative rather than a hierarchical leadership style (Kanter, 1989; Mintzberg, 1989; Peters, 1987). Although the management literature can be said to show a feminisation in the sense that traits and qualities that are traditionally associated with women are now incorporated in management texts (Fondas, 1997), a feminisation of management jobs in the traditional sense, that is that women have entered management in large numbers, has not taken place, at least not worldwide (Willemsen, 2002).



2.4.1 Management theories

Early leadership theories depicted leadership implicitly or explicitly as a male prerogative, and the minimal numbers of women in management during the respective periods confirms that the role of management was largely seen as a male domain (Jogulu and Wood, 2006). This continues to persist as indicated by the South African statistics on women in management. Early work on gender differences reported both differences and similarities in the social behaviours, cognition, and temperament of the children in their meta-analytical study (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). It is interesting to note that the results of this review were widely reported as a finding of “no differences” in the behaviour of adults (Jogulu and Wood, 2006). However, more recent research into gender differences have reported that differences in behaviour, attitudes, and skills do exist in samples of adults, and that these differences may have implications for women and men at work.

2.4.1.1 *Early theories*

In the 18th and 19th centuries, philosophers suggested a theory of leadership which was termed the “Great Man” theory (Denmark, 1993). This theory assumed that personal attributes of the great man “determined the course of history” (Denmark, 1993, p. 344). The great man was believed to have unique and exceptional features and qualities that distinguished him from his followers (Bass, 1990). Only very few people were thought to have such abilities, which were believed to be innate, that is leaders were born with these qualities (Denmark, 1993). In this body of literature, women were not taken into account



as possible leaders. The name given to encapsulate this theory illustrates that women were not perceived as leaders in any capacity at this time, and leadership research during this period related solely to males.

2.4.1.2 Gender difference theories

As outlined in the previous section, all the early leadership studies developed theories which emanated from the Great Man theory. Thus, the theories described men and male leaders. This had the effect of excluding women from being seen in the role of a leader. At this time, men and women were considered to have very different behaviours, skills, and attitudes, and these “differences” were thought to handicap women in their career advancement (Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990).

In the 1970s, literature on gender differences began to be published that set out to explore the extent of differences in men’s and women’s behaviour (Jogulu and Wood, 2006). This research into gender differences had at its base a desire to understand whether males and females differed on a variety of traits and behaviours because of their biological determination, the implication being that differences in behaviour between men and women are innate or acquired from very early socialisation. At this time, the perspective seemed to be that women were different to men and that difference appeared to be equated with deficiency (Fagenson, 1990).



2.4.1.3 *Contemporary theories*

The beginning of the gender difference theories marked a shift in the leadership literature, as the behaviour, skills, and attitudes of women were considered, recognised, and evaluated. In turn, leadership styles were evaluated through the perspective of gender differences, and the focus began to shift to a desire to understand how men and women led their subordinates. This focus was made possible because of early work by Burns (1978) which described two very different types of leadership.

Burns (1978) defined transactional leaders as people who emphasised work standards, assignments and had task-oriented aims. Therefore, these leaders' focal points were believed to be on finishing tasks, with rewards or disciplining of followers intended to influence and improve employee performances. In contrast, transformational leaders were defined as people who identified potential in their followers (Burns, 1978). These theories of transactional and transformational leadership marked the shift to a recognition of women in management and their feminine characteristics which were clearly acknowledged and valued. At the time these theories were achieving prominence, the numbers of women were also beginning to rise dramatically in management roles. Women are more likely to possess leadership characteristics and attributes that are predominantly effective in contemporary circumstances compared with their male counterparts (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and Van Engen, 2003).



An empirical study of managers by Mandell and Pherwani (2003) reports that females score higher on the transformational leadership scale compared to males (Mandell and Pherwani, 2003). Therefore, it is evident that women possess the qualities of transformational leaders, and it is these qualities that are believed to be required in today's organisations, which are flatter and less hierarchical in structure. Women in management roles exhibit these "feminised leader behaviours" according to Omar and Davidson (2001, p. 40), yet there are few women in management.

One significant finding that has arisen from the transactional and transformational theories of leadership is the suggestion that transformational leadership, more so than transactional leadership, is linked to leadership effectiveness: women managers, on average, tend to be more transformational and more proactive in addressing problems (Jogulu and Wood, 2006). As such, these contemporary transformational and transactional leadership theories can be seen as playing a significant role in raising the profile of women in management and leadership roles within an organisational context.

2.4.2 Gender stereotypes

In general, gender stereotypes promote the idea that women are more emotional, intuitive, and socially oriented, whereas men are more dominant, rational, and instrumentally or task-oriented (Willemsen, 2002). Linked to the work of Bem (1993) and others, the "male experience" is perceived as the natural standard and norm for management and the stereotypical good



manager is perceived as predominantly masculine (Powell et al., 2002). The perceptual stereotyping of management (and successful managers) as congruent with traits attributed to men has a long pedigree (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson and Rosenkrantz, 1975; Bernardin, 1982). Earlier studies have shown that these perceptions and beliefs were held as strongly by women as by men (Basil, 1972; Schein, 1975) but more recent studies have shown that attitudes – especially women’s – have changed here (Dodge, Gilroy and Fenzel, 1995).

2.4.2.1 Stereotyped beliefs

Stereotyped beliefs about the attributes of men and women are pervasive and widely shared. Moreover, these stereotyped beliefs have proved very resistant to change (Dodge, Gilroy and Fenzel, 1995; Leuptow, Garovich and Leuptow, 1995). To summarise briefly, men and women are thought to differ both in terms of achievement orientated traits, often labelled as “agentic” and in terms of social and service orientated traits, often labelled as “communal” (Bakan, 1966). Thus men are characterised as aggressive, forceful, independent and decisive whereas women are characterised as kind, helpful, sympathetic and concerned about others (Heilman and Blader, 2001). Not only are the conceptions of women and men different but they also often are oppositional with members of one sex seen as lacking what is thought to be the most prevalent in members of the opposite sex. In a study conducted by Willemsen (2002), one of their conclusions show that the results from both the inventory of typical



characteristics and open-answer question indicate that conceptualising a successful manager means thinking male rather than female.

2.4.2.2 Attitudes

Compared to attitudes held in the 1970s, female managers and female management students no longer gender type the managerial position (Schein, 2007). They see women and men as equally likely to possess characteristics necessary for managerial success. No longer influenced by stereotypical thinking, these managers would be expected to treat men and women equally in selection, placement, and promotion decisions. On the other hand, the male managers and male management students of today hold attitudes similar to those of male managers in the 1970s (Schein, 2007). Over the course of almost three decades males continue to perceive men as more likely than women to possess characteristics necessary for managerial success. Equally disconcerting is that male management students hold the same views as the male managers. As managers of the future, then, they would be expected to still view women as less qualified for entry into and advancement in management. Many people believe that as women move into management, managerial gender typing will diminish. And it has, among women.

2.4.3 Gender differences in management style and decision making

A basic premise regarding gender differences in managerial style distinguishes between male and female managerial styles on the basis of biological (Wilson, 1993) and socialisation processes (Xia and Whyte, 1997). Both approaches



relate managerial gender differences to dissimilarities in personality but the empirical evidence is not unanimous (Druskat, 1994, p.116). Experimental studies simulating gender effects on management styles tend to confirm that women differ from men in their being caring, collaborative and enhancing participative decision making whereas men tend to be rational and competitive (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Zafarullah, 2000). In this vein Eagly, Wood and Diekmann (2000) maintain that gender roles pertain to agentic and communal attributes. As stated previously, agentic traits are associated with men describing dominance, forcefulness, ambitiousness, self-confidence and competitiveness. Communal attributes pertain to women and include interpersonal sensitivity, affection, and kindness. However, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001, p.782) have suggested that gender differences in leadership behaviours are present but they tend to appear and disappear “with shifts in social contexts”.

The results from a study conducted by Wolfram and Mohr (2007) provide evidence that female leaders might have difficulties being accepted in organisational practice. Female leaders are confronted with conflicting expectations. The described role conflict for female leaders is due to prescriptive gender stereotypes. “The paradoxical conditions of organisational life make adopting an ‘appropriate’ female professional identity in organisational life difficult at best” (Trethewey, 1999, p. 144). For women in management, being simultaneously subordinates and managers further complicates paradox. Women managers can end up being exploited as peacemakers or as troubleshooters being called upon to resolve conflicts, make cuts and carry out



dismals as a result of the assumed connection between their gendered socialisation and their particular repertoire of management skills. Much debate around women managers has emphasised that they can be as good as male managers. There is a plea for equality of treatment on the grounds of there being no inherent gender based difference between men and women managers. This approach tends to downplay or deny the difference of experience between men and women. Wood and Conrad (1983) argue that women in management must identify and negotiate a narrow space where one can be both a professional and a woman.

2.5 Responses to Paradoxes

Previous research has outlined the ways in which members respond to organisational paradox. Such responses include: exit from the organisation (Stohl and Cheney, 2001; Wood and Conrad, 1983); voice or resistance that is not destructive, but partakes in the mechanisms for serious discussion (Putnam, 1986; Stohl and Cheney, 2001); loyalty, rededication, and adaptation to the organisation with paradoxes intact (Stohl and Cheney, 2001); muddling through or coping by not participating (Putnam, 1986; Stohl and Cheney, 2001, Wendt, 1998); and synthesis, reframing or living with the paradox (Putnam, 1986; Stohl and Cheney, 2001), similarly described as transcendence or “building new identifications by uniting elements of the old with previously unrecognised associations for a concept” (Wood and Conrad, 1983, p. 316).



The objective would be to develop the capacity for paradoxical thinking – the ability to comprehend the complicated interplay of opposites by picturing a paradox in its more complete surrounding, that is, recognising the historical, ideological, political and social context underlying perceptions (Dehler *et al*, 2001). Paradoxical thinking requires recognising that both perceptions may be equally valid. By polarising their perspectives, however, manager and workers are incapable of realising their shared interests in cultivating worker skills and creativity to foster high quality and exceptionally flexible organisations.

Organisational members may invoke paradox in attempts to make sense of their own, others' or their organisation's behaviour in a complex situation (Johnston and Selsky, 2005). *Acceptance of paradox* helps one avoid debates which might open Pandora's Box and spark vicious cycles. In *confronting paradox* one may discuss tensions to socially construct a more accommodating understanding or practice (Smith and Berg, 1987; Vince and Broussine, 1996). According to Ford and Ford (1994), by identifying and discussing their underlying logic one might subject one's way of thinking to critique, thereby raising their chances of escaping paralysis. Lastly, *transcendence* implies the capacity to think paradoxically. Critical self and social reflection might help one reframe their assumptions, learn from existing tensions and develop a more complicated repertoire of understandings and behaviours that better reflects organisational intricacies (Dension, Hooijberg and Quinn, 1995; Quinn, Khan and Mandl, 1994). Such reframing marks a dramatic change in the meaning attributed to a situation as paradoxical tensions become viewed as complementary and interwoven. Wendt (1998) suggests, however, that creative



reframing is not an easy skill for workers and managers to develop. On one level, women managers who cannot find a way to bend their values to those of the organisation may be reluctant to risk relatively secure and prosperous positions, thus rejecting the organisational exit option and turning instead to muddling through.

2.6 Conclusion

In the literature reviewed, scholars contribute valuable insights into paradoxes, the gendered organisation and women in management. Identifying paradox means recognising and interpreting tensions and representations signifies methods of conceptualising, mapping and theorising paradox. Much of contemporary organisational theory is still struggling to live with paradoxes. However, there is no single best way to address paradox. Paradoxes should not be eliminated nor can they ever be avoided. Arising out of feminist enquiry has been the developing appreciation that women's responses to the gendered dynamics of organisational life are not uniform, static or predictable. Yet despite the overwhelming evidence of the difficulties, tensions and contradictions confronting women in management, it remains the case that large numbers of women are carving out successful careers as managers, in the process investing some sense of identity in work practices and arenas long dominated by men.



3 Chapter 3 – Research Questions

1. **Research Question 1:** Do women in management experience paradoxes?
2. **Research Question 2:** What are the paradoxes that women managers experience?
3. **Research Question 3:** What are the sources of paradoxes experienced by women managers?
4. **Research Question 4:** How do women in management manage paradoxes?



4 Chapter 4 – Research Methodology

4.1 Proposed Research Method

4.1.1 Reasoning for proposed method

An exploratory research design was chosen to obtain an overall understanding of paradoxes faced and experienced by women currently in management positions as well as to acquire in-depth knowledge of specific issues that would emerge from the data.

Through a phenomenological study one is able to understand the behaviour from the participant's own subjective frame of reference. One of the implications of utilising a qualitative approach is that no claim can be made to generate "universal or scientific laws" but rather "there is a striving to build meaningful local knowledges" (McLeod, 1996, p144). In other words, phenomenological analysis does not aim to reveal any ultimate true meaning. Instead, the intention is to enable the researcher to open up an area of human experience, to produce an authentic and comprehensive description of the way in which something is experienced by an individual or group. At a fundamental level the outcome of qualitative research is therefore to understand rather than explain.

A phenomenological approach is thought to be particularly suited to accessing especially personal and highly complex subject matter. In the current study, it was deemed the most appropriate means of furnishing a deeper understanding of the holistic nature of the cognitions and behaviours involved (Smith, 1995).



Semi- structured interviews were used to elicit career “narratives” (Gabriel, 2000) from participants. Narratives are considered to be an illuminating way of understanding the “ways in which individuals make sense of their careers as they unfold through time and space, attending to both the holistic nature of career as well as to specific career transitions” (Cohen and Mallon, 2001, p. 48-9). These transitions and experiences were probed for times of paradox. Further, interview participants also had the opportunity to seek clarification and ask questions (Arksey and Knight, 1999). This approach is consistent with contextual action theory (Valach and Young, 2002). Rooted in the social constructivist paradigm, this theory perceives career action as an ongoing, ever-changing and holistic experience of contextual meaning making, involving a dynamic interaction between behaviour, internal processes and social meaning. Thus, a career narrative can be seen as a “moving perspective” on who we are, what we are able to do and how we are able to manage the experience (Hughes, 1958, p. 67). Similarly, Lewis also depicts narrative as a potentially valuable approach for identifying paradox (Lewis, 2000). A qualitative method is imperative in such studies as the complexity could be rendered inaccessible through the quantitative method.

4.1.2 Procedure

The approach was a qualitative, inductive approach to data gathering and analysis, using life story surveys, semi-structured face-to face interviewing and thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). An interview protocol was utilised that drew out the career stories of the women participating in the study, probing for times



when paradoxes occurred. As mentioned earlier, a narrative method is widely used as a potentially valuable approach for identifying paradox.

4.2 Proposed Population and Unit of Analysis

The population for this particular study will be South African women managers with the job designation ranking between senior executives to top managers, including executive board members as defined within the financial services institution. Their ages would range from 35 years and older. The target population comprised people who are permanently employed within the financial services institution. The population of interest for the research is the senior and executive management of the financial services institution. The size of the population was solicited from the financial services institution's Human Resources department and was established as an average of 300 female senior, executive and top managers. The population scope will be limited to South African female managers within the financial services institution who:

- Have a leadership and / or management role in the organisation,
- Have control over day-to-day operations, and
- Have decision-making powers (The Business Women's Association, 2006).

The unit of analysis will be the individual woman.



4.3 Size and Nature of Sample

The research was conducted within a selected financial services institution due to the accessibility of potential participants however, this may introduce auspices bias.

The study's aim was to investigate women managers' career path experiences of paradoxes. A list of the accessible population, whose office was based in Sandton, was created. A significant sub portion of the population was based in Gauteng. To obtain the sample of women, a list of qualifying participants was solicited from the financial services institution Human Resources department who could articulate their experiences regarding the study aim, during the period August 2007 to September 2007. According to Leedy and Ormrod, a sample size of between five and twenty-five individuals would be considered adequate (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001). Initially, a sample of 40 women was identified out of an average of 300 female senior, executive and top managers. Through non-probability, convenience sampling of these 40 women, 20 were interviewed.

4.4 Data Collection, Data Analysis and Data Management

4.4.1 Data Collection

As mentioned previously, the approach to data gathering was to use life story surveys, semi-structured face-to face interviewing (Boyatzis, 1998). The unstructured part of the interview elicited information about the retrospective



career path of the participants and the paradoxes faced and experienced. The interview style was conversational but covered the same questions for all participants. Probing questions were asked regarding paradoxes. An interview guideline was developed to guide the interviews. Demographic data was also collected as part of the interview process, which was the structured part of the interview.

E-mail invitations were sent to 40 potential participants explaining the study and inviting participation. An initial introductory meeting lasting approximately 15 minutes to 30 minutes was scheduled with the women who responded to the invitation to participate, which detailed the interview process and next steps. A follow up e-mail was sent to these women confirming the scheduled interview. Semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 1 to 1 1/2 hours were conducted with each female manager participant. The interview consisted of a lifelines discussion in which the participants were encouraged to talk through their career histories to “plot” her career from the time she first thought of herself as a “working person” to the present, making particular note of paradoxes experienced, the sources of the paradox and how they managed it. The respondent was prompted to “tell her story”. This approach proved to be highly effective when trying to obtain a significant understanding of a specific event (Kvale, 1996). All interviews were conducted in the participant’s own office environment or in a setting convenient for the interviewee. All interviewees were assured of the confidentiality of any information they provided. Permission was obtained from all participants to make notes during



the discussion to ensure that the accuracy and richness of the data gathered. Of these 40 women, 20 were interviewed.

The interviews allowed for reflecting more deeply on the actual experiences and perceptions of women managers in their workplace and permitted a wealth of pertinent information to be gathered. This method provided an in-depth investigation of extended experiences obtained from the descriptive data and helped in revealing open ended questions to disclose communication content, determined emotional and psychological state of the sample groups, described attitudes and behaviour responses and identified intentions and reflections on cultural patterns, within groups and societies (Weber, 1990).

4.4.2 Data Analysis

Lewis depicts narrative as a potentially valuable approach for identifying paradox (Lewis, 2000). The treatment of the data will closely follow the guidelines outlined below. Initially, each transcript was looked at separately, following an ideographic approach to analysis. Themes were drawn out and then clustered into master themes. This process was repeated across the transcripts and overarching master themes eventually reached. Note that “piecing together the overall picture will not simply be a question of aggregating patterns, but of weighing up the salience and dynamics of issues, and searching for a structure, rather than a multiplicity of evidence” (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994, p. 54).



The approach adopted allowed for accessing the experiences, stories and memories of the interviewees in addition to their interpretations and frustrations. Results were analysed through the use of the content analysis method, which is a useful explanatory tool when the data is used only in the descriptive sense, without reference to inferential statistics. Content analysis entails identifying recurring ideas or thought patterns (Jamali, Sidani and Safieddine, 2005). Themes are generally considered the most useful unit of content analysis (Horrigan, 2005). Accordingly, identification of the most commonly reported paradoxes would be encountered.

Categories for the content analysis:

The following categories were used for classifying interview questions for the content analysis.

Category one: *Demographics*. Questions were designed to obtain a profile of the sample group such as marital status and number of children.

Category two: *Paradoxes experienced*. Here the questions were designed to investigate whether paradoxes were experienced in the sample group.

Category three: *Paradoxes of structure*. Here the questions were designed to investigate the architecture of participation and democracy of the sample group.



Category four: *Paradoxes of agency.* Questions were designed to investigate whether an individual's (sense of) efficacy within the system was comfortable, satisfied and fulfilled in their current jobs.

Category five: *Paradoxes of identity.* Questions in this category were specifically designed to investigate whether any of the sample had a direct or indirect encounter with issues of membership, inclusion, and boundaries.

Category six: *Paradoxes of power.* Questions were designed to investigate the sample's views on locus, nature, and specific exercise of power in the organisation.

Category seven: *Management of paradox.* Questions were designed to investigate how the sample managed the paradoxes experienced. Thus, what meaning did they give it and how did they confront the paradox?

Category eight: *General.* These questions further probed the types of paradoxes existing in the financial services institution and the reasons for these barriers. It also probed their views on such events.

Patterns and commonalities were sought in the data and themes identified and coded into a hierarchical tree structure with branches for each dimension (Lofland and Lofland, 1995).



4.4.3 Data Management

The handwritten notes from the interviews were captured into written text in Microsoft Excel. The information gathered was then grouped for later retrieval and linking of data segments to form themes of relevant information. Thematic content analysis was then used to analyse all data collected from interviews.

Once analysed, the information was grouped by the research's main questions in a systematic and coherent manner in answer to the questions posed. This was achieved by graphically mapping all individual responses to questions to distil common words and thoughts expressed in the recorded transcripts. The graphic mapping was done in order to reveal patterns and provide plausible reasons for the responses given by the interviewees. Conclusions were then drawn using the maps to arrive at the findings of the study.

4.5 Data Validity and Reliability

Accuracy of the content was ensured through note taking during the sessions and then transcribing them. In analysis, the researcher attempted to remain grounded in the data by checking and re-checking to ensure that it is a comprehensive and accurate representation of what had been said. In addition, two participants will be asked for feedback on the aptness of the themes.



4.6 Potential Research Limitations

While a sample size of 20 is acceptable number for a qualitative study, this is a potential limitation on the study. The research sample was limited to a financial services institution and this aspect was also a limitation on the study. Another aspect that further limited the study was that only corporate women were included. The behaviours exhibited by these women managers within the financial services institution cannot be assumed to apply to all women, who may face entirely different forms of organisational paradox. The research was qualitative hence the extent of the issues the study identified were not explored or ascertained in wider corporate banks or even the financial services institution. Thus the study remains confined to a small group of women managers in one institution.

In addition, paradox involves interpreting contradictory and opposing elements and it may be possible that individual levels of tolerance for tensions may influence the likelihood of paradox identification. Individuals with higher tolerance for contradictions may identify a greater number of paradoxes than those with a lower tolerance.



5 Chapter 5 – Results

5.1 Introduction

The study attempted to gain a deeper understanding into paradoxes experienced by women managers, how they have managed these (paradoxical situations) and the factors that could contribute to these situations. The women provided their career stories and probing questions were asked in order to establish if the women interviewed experienced paradoxes as defined in Chapter 2.

This chapter details the results of the research from the interviews held with the 20 respondents. The demographic profile and overview of the women interviewed is provided first. The results of the research are then grouped and discussed under each research question posed.

5.2 Results

5.2.1 Demographics

From Table 1 it is evident that the majority of the women interviewed were married. In addition, the majority of the women had one child. The women interviewed are from differing age groups with most of them falling into the 40 - 49 and fifty and older age groups. Similarly, the women occupied varying levels within the organisation. The majority occupied Head and Senior Manager positions.



The participants displayed several similar characteristics. Their strong need for freedom and autonomy was evident; they had great team-building expertise and most were loyalty-inspiring individuals. Nearly all respondents revealed strong family ties, and in certain instances highlighted the positive role their parents played in their upbringing. A need to make a difference not only in their organisations, but also in their country or industry, was strongly reiterated by the majority of respondents. However, some respondents displayed angst of trying to balance home and family. Although they had strong support systems, some had not conquered that internal conflict. The table below illustrates the demographical details of the participants.

Table 1 – Demographics of Participants

Item	Category	No.	%	Item	Category	No.	%
Marital Status	Married	16	80%	No. of children	None	9	45%
	Single	4	20%		1 child	5	25%
					2 children	5	25%
			3 or more children		1	5%	
Age	30 - 39	3	15%	Level in org.	General Manager	3	15%
	40 - 49	12	60%		Senior Manager	6	30%
	> 50	5	25%		Head	6	30%
			Divisional Director		3	15%	
			Executive		2	10%	

The following words from one of the respondents summarises the profile of most of the women interviewed: *“I choose my battles and I take responsibility for my own career.”*



5.2.2 Research Question 1

Do women in management experience paradoxes?

The majority of the participants provided frank accounts of their career experiences. Evaluating whether the women interviewed experienced paradoxes entailed identifying situations or instances where tension or contradictions occurred. During the interviews, the women were asked to recall situations where they experienced tensions and or contradictions. In addition, probing questions were asked if the respondent mentioned key words such as structure, choice, power, and identity.

Six respondents referred to the degree to which decision-making is either centrally controlled or delegated. In addition, comments were made regarding the need to maintain consistency and predictability of management versus demonstrating creativity and flexibility. Another contradiction mentioned by 14 of the respondents was the needs of individuals versus the organisation. Individuals felt torn between wanting to operate independently while at the same time seeking affiliation or connection with the broader team. Another contradictory situation mentioned was the need to demonstrate their ability to trust others before others were willing to trust them. In addition, the women spoke of the contradictory situations when there was no consistency of actions and words by management, co-workers or subordinates. The women also remarked that they felt they needed to balance differing styles of decision-making ability such as “soft” (referred to intuitive and gut-feel decisions) and “hard” (referred to fact and data based decisions).



5.2.2.1 Summary

All the women indicated that they experienced tensions and contradictory situations at some point in their career. The process of analysing the interview data revealed several contradictions. The key themes identified were “participative versus unilateral”; “identify outcomes and solutions versus given outcomes and solutions” and “inconsistencies between what is said and done versus consistency between what is said and done”. These key themes were then refined into the following tensions: “control versus flexibility”, “individual versus collective”, “self versus others”, “direction versus autonomy” and “old versus new”. The process of analysing the interview data resulted in five broad categories of paradoxes based on the underlying tensions identified. The findings, as demonstrated in the Research Questions that follow, provides support that women in management do experience paradoxes.

5.2.3 Research Question 2

What are the paradoxes that women managers experience?

The categories of paradoxes of structure, paradoxes of agency, paradoxes of identity and paradoxes of power were developed during the literature review in Chapter 2 and were used for classifying interview questions for the content analysis. The responses were categorised into each paradox category based on key words. The results offer evidence that organisational paradoxes (that is, structure, agency, identity and power) are also gendered paradoxes.



5.2.3.1 *Paradoxes of structure*

Structure is composed of rules, regulations, resources, guidelines and procedures. Structures in an organisation are set up to establish rules that define and limit interaction. Paradoxes of structure denote the ongoing process of balancing the opposing forces that encourage commitment, trust and creativity while maintaining efficiency, discipline and order.

Of the women interviewed, 14 out of the 20 did not mention any contradictory situations arising in their current position with regards to structure. As one respondent commented, *"I have always been allowed to question if there is a better way."*

The remaining 6 respondents experienced paradoxes of structure. The following comment highlighted the gendered nature of the organisation and its structural impact. *"The financial services environment is a highly regulated environment. The impact of males accepting female leaders is being underestimated in the work environment. There appears to be double standards within the organisation."*

5.2.3.2 *Paradoxes of agency*

The notion of agency helps us to examine the relationship of the individual to the group within a frame of interpretation and action that calls for substantial individual expression and involvement. Sixteen out of the 20 women interviewed did not mention any contradictory situations relating to agency in their



current position. *“I am allowed to put my personal touch on what I do. However, the expected outcome is communicated but I could determine my own how.”*

The remaining 4 respondents did experience paradoxes of agency. *“I feel that there is a lack of understanding of the value I bring to the team.”*

5.2.3.3 Paradoxes of identity

Paradoxes of identity address issues of boundaries, space, and the divide between the in-group, or clique, and the out-group, or all others. These are the fundamental challenges of establishing selfhood and individuality while being part of groups. The question of identity thus links individual concerns to group concerns and to organisational concerns, especially to the extent that distinctiveness arises as an issue on multiple levels. The paradox of identity is the tenuous and often seemingly absurd nature of membership.

Fourteen out of the 20 women interviewed mentioned situations where they experienced paradoxes of identity. As one respondent commented, *“Exclusiveness or inclusiveness depends on the level of maturity of the individuals. However, there are behavioural issues and perceptions that need to be changed.”*

The remaining 6 women noted no experiences of paradoxes of identity. These women developed ways to include themselves. Once they were included, they then assisted in making it easier for other women to be included. One woman



noted that issues of membership were not a concern for her as her work environment was predominately female.

5.2.3.4 *Paradoxes of power*

Power is associated with influence, the allocation and mobilisation of resources, the ability to manipulate situations, the capacity to affect interpretive processes, the fulfilment of needs and the attainment of goals and overcoming of resistance. The balance of power in the organisation, as in most organisations, still remains weighted at the level of upper management.

Fifteen out of the 20 respondents experienced paradoxes of power. A comment by one respondent summarised it as follows, *“There is one person who is feared because they appear to have all the power.”*

The remaining 5 women did not experience paradoxes of power. As one woman commented, *“This does not happen easily at this level. The level of the position is respected.”*

5.2.3.5 *Emerging Paradox – Paradox of transformation*

Eight respondents mentioned that transformation seemed to be an organisational priority but there did not seem to be any visible changes or it was not happening fast enough within the organisation. *“The boardroom is still dominated by white men.”* In addition, 10 respondents highlighted the changing or differing management styles within the organisation. *“There are different*



generations in the workplace. The 'Baby boomers' are firm and draw the line. The ways to get things done are different."

Transformation can be seen as a paradox of structure as it involves aligning the current organisational profile to the demographical profile of the country. However, transformation and changing management styles, requires using, critiquing and often destroying past understandings and practices to construct new and more complicated frames of reference. In other words, new learning is required on the part of the individual and the organisation in order to transform.

5.2.3.6 Summary

It is evident from Table 2 below that the majority of the women interviewed did experience paradoxes. However, each woman did not experience all paradoxes. In addition, not one of the respondents experienced all the paradoxes and there was only 1 woman noted who did not experience any of the paradoxes in her current position. Five of the 20 women experienced three paradoxes and 10 of the women experienced only two paradoxes. Paradoxes of identity and paradoxes of power are the most experienced paradoxes, whereas paradoxes of structure and paradoxes of agency are substantially less experienced paradoxes. In summary, the table below illustrates the frequencies for each category of paradox.



Table 2 – Paradoxes

Categories	Frequency
Paradox of structure	6
Paradox of agency	4
Paradox of identity	14
Paradox of power	15

The table below provides a different perspective on the paradoxes experienced by illustrating the frequencies for each category of paradox per organisational level.

Table 3 – Paradoxes per organisational level

Category	Role	Frequency
Paradox of structure	General Manager	1
	Senior Manager	1
	Head	1
	Divisional Director	1
	Executive	2
Paradox of agency	General Manager	1
	Senior Manager	1
	Head	1
	Divisional Director	1
	Executive	1
Paradox of identity	General Manager	3
	Senior Manager	2
	Head	5
	Divisional Director	2
	Executive	2
Paradox of power	General Manager	3
	Senior Manager	5
	Head	4
	Divisional Director	1
	Executive	2

Paradoxes of agency were mainly experienced at lower levels of management, whereas paradoxes of structure were more or less equally experienced across



organisational roles. Both paradoxes of identity and paradoxes of power were predominately experienced at lower organisational roles.

5.2.4 Research Question 3

What are the sources of paradoxes experienced by women managers?

In Chapter 2 tensions are defined as the underlying sources of paradox. For each type of paradox experienced by the respondent, differing tensions were noted.

5.2.4.1 Paradox of structure - Tensions

An organisation's very design may prevent individuals having a say in how they might get involved. If individuals have no say in the implementation of a decision, they may feel it to be controlled by management. At the same time, management may feel threatened if there is more involvement in decision-making by individuals. If individuals feel that particular procedures that are designed to make them more efficient actually make them less efficient, the individuals are less likely to follow those procedures.

However, 14 out of the 20 women interviewed did not express any discomfort or tension in their current positions with regard to structure. A respondent verbalised it as follows: *"I have always been allowed to participate in the decision making process versus having decisions imposed."*



On the other hand, 6 out of the 20 respondents experienced tensions between control and flexibility. Paradoxes of structure underscore the difficulty of negotiating the conflicting commands of formalisation and spontaneity creatively. Conflicting performance rules surround the pivotal role of managers and are particularly precarious for women. These women did not feel that they were empowered. These tensions were typically manifested as mixed messages and system contradictions.

“I experience constant tension between the client facing management and my support area. When I provide unwelcome news, they block me out. It’s their own view that counts and not reality. I’ve often been told not to get involved.”

Of these respondents, some felt that their ability to participate was hampered by the organisational culture: *“The environment had age barriers, racial and gender stereotypes and language barriers. This made it difficult to participate in decision making.”*

5.2.4.2 Paradoxes of agency - Tensions

The idea is that individual workers can make a difference and that their unique work experiences and knowledge are fundamental to improving organisational processes. Sixteen out of the 20 women interviewed did not express any individual/ collective tensions in their current positions with regard to agency.

A few respondents verbalised it as follows:



“I’m allowed to be creative. One is given the opportunity to make a rational considered approach, clear the air and move on. I always clarify requirements, as I hate wasting time. Quality of delivery is important.”

“I engage with all stakeholders to understand requirements. I put issues on the table and I am solution driven. I’m in control of own destiny. I see myself as driven, hard, diligent and thorough.”

“I am allowed to put my personal touch on what I do. However, the expected outcome is communicated but I could determine my own how.”

“Free expression, independent thinking and participation were encouraged in all the positions I have had throughout my career.”

“I always felt comfortable to voice my views and participate and this was encouraged by my managers.”

“I am involved in pioneering, creative and innovative work. As such, I am expected to be participative.”

However, 4 out of the 20 respondents experienced individual/ collective tensions. These women managers found their agency was limited and often contested, especially among their managerial peers. *“My input is discounted. I am never recognised for my views or experience.”* In addition, they felt that their efficacy as a woman was often limited by gender constraints. *“One has to prove*



yourself as capable but this is difficult as a young woman and one is often not taken seriously.”

5.2.4.3 Paradoxes of identity - Tensions

Paradoxical tensions arise because individuals strive for both self-expression and collective affiliation. In the study, tensions between self and others were found to be the crux of paradoxes of identity. Fourteen out of the 20 respondents experienced tensions between self and others. These self/ other tensions were typically manifested as a self-referential cycle where groups become strong and resourceful only if the individuality of their members is expressed. On the other hand, by stressing the importance of the individual, it led to group conflict. Individuals are members of the organisation and of varied occupations and subcultures within and outside the organisation and this provokes feelings of inclusion and exclusion simultaneously.

As one respondent commented, *“Exclusiveness or inclusiveness depends on the level of maturity of the individuals. However, there are behavioural issues and perceptions that need to be changed.”*

A group is defined by boundaries, that is, who are inside and not inside the group. In this sense, groups are defined by their inclusion and exclusion. Boundaries may also foster a sense of anxiety and potential conflict.



“There are organisational inconsistencies, there are two sets of rules. At the higher levels it becomes very exclusive. However, I’ve been very vocal about it and I’m hoping it will change and become more inclusive.”

In the study, managers stressed tensions between wanting to establish close contact with their subordinates, while retaining an appropriate distance. For example, one manager was concerned with how to remain close enough to accept members’ feelings and to know when adjustments were needed, but distant enough to reflect on the process, during an emotion-laden meeting.

“Previously I was less emotionally involved as a manager. As I’ve matured as a manager, I’ve had to find a balance between how much I share.”

“I was more detached, less emotional before. I find being a manager very stressful now as I consider the individuals more.”

“The staff are like my own children. They are draining and sap my energy. I find that women are better managers because of the emotional connection and interaction they have.”

5.2.4.4 Paradoxes of power - Tensions

In the study, the women interviewed frequently identified key words such as power. As stated previously, 15 out of the 20 respondents mentioned situations where they experienced paradoxes of power. Similarly, 15 out of the 20



respondents experienced tensions between direction and autonomy. The tensions were typically manifested as mixed messages and system contradictions. The women referred to the value of positional power and how personal power was influenced by positional power. A few respondents were very pragmatic about the role of a powerful position, as one pointed out: *“Positional power is twofold, it can be either used positively or negatively.”*

5.2.4.5 Emerging paradoxes - Tensions

The key tension identified for both transformation and the changing or differing management styles within the organisation was between old and new. This signified a struggle between the comfort of the past and the uncertainty of the future. One respondent articulated as follows, *“The organisation finds itself in a situation where it faces the loss of wisdom in the workplace versus the dynamism that youth brings.”*

Individuals portray actions, routines and skills following a similar pattern. The more individuals stress their core capabilities or strengths, the more they highlight their weaknesses. Similarly, as the organisation becomes more diverse and complicated, it may lose the ability to transform. One respondent clarified it as follows, *“It doesn’t appear that everyone has bought into transformation. We are part of a food chain. Each of us has an impact on the ecosystem and we need to understand our place in the system. We all need to be aligned and carry out our bit. We create what not to do instead of role models.”*



Perceptions and actions are self-referential, relying and building upon themselves as individuals attempt to change. Fear is holding many managers back from making that change. *“Managers need to be more willing to have more ‘hard’ conversations with their staff. There seems to be a fear of failure, managers are scared of making mistakes.”*

5.2.4.6 Summary

Tensions between control and flexibility were noted by 6 of the 20 respondents whereas 14 out of the 20 women interviewed did not express any discomfort or tension in their current positions with regard to structure. Where these control/flexibility tensions were experienced, it was typically manifested as mixed messages and system contradictions.

Individual/ collective tensions were experienced by 4 out of the 20 respondents and 16 out of the 20 women interviewed did not express any individual/collective tensions in their current positions with regard to agency. These were the least experienced tensions amongst the women interviewed.

Fourteen out of the 20 respondents experienced tensions between self and others and the women cited numerous examples of these tensions. These self/other tensions were typically manifested as a self-referential cycle.



Fifteen out of the 20 respondents experienced tensions between direction and autonomy. These tensions were typically manifested as mixed messages and system contradictions.

Tensions between old and new were identified by 18 of the 20 respondents for both transformation and the changing or differing management styles within the organisation. These tensions were manifested as a self-referential cycle where perceptions and actions, rely and build upon themselves as individuals attempt to change.

5.2.5 Research Question 4

How do women in management manage paradoxes?

Lewis explains that as one seeks to resolve paradoxical tensions, they may become trapped within reinforcing cycles that perpetuate and exacerbate the tension (Lewis, 2000). For each paradox identified, differing reinforcing cycles were also noted. All respondents managed paradox through acceptance, confrontation or transcendence.

5.2.5.1 Paradox of structure - Reinforcing cycles

Paradoxes of structure surface as managers grapple with the need for structure and order, as well as flexibility and improvisation. The defensive reaction of women who experienced control/ flexibility tensions of empowerment was found to be that of reaction formation. Individuals overreacted to tensions of flexibility and control by focussing on one pole, namely control, thereby sparking a



stronger pull from its opposite. The comment below indicates the respondent's frustration and difficulty she experienced in trying to manage her team while reporting to an autocratic manager.

"My previous manager was autocratic and did not tolerate being questioned. In addition, my previous manager was suspended for irregularities and this made the situation difficult to deal with especially with subordinates and stakeholders."

5.2.5.2 Paradoxes of agency - Reinforcing cycles

Top management celebrates the idea of teamwork because it encapsulates both group-level achievement and the notion of the entire organisation working together. However, organisations still maintain appraisal and reward systems aimed at the individual level. Rarely is there a balance between individual and group rewards.

The women who experienced paradoxes of agency resented and rebelled against what they saw as constraining visions and forms of teamwork. *"I rely on other areas to get my job done. There are layers of people to work with in order to get the job done and some of these people cause problems for me."* In turn, these women contemplated and exercised various forms of resistance. *"I circumvent obstacles and go straight to the source as a result I'm not seen as a team player. My reputation is always at risk."*



From some of the comments made during the interviews, it shows that their defensive reaction to paradoxes of agency was to project their frustrations by blaming other members of the team. For example, *“I’m currently frustrated, overspecialised and there are no prospects. Previously, my development was the responsibility of my manager, now it’s my own responsibility.”*

5.2.5.3 Paradoxes of identity - Reinforcing cycles

Paradoxes of identity raised individual’s defences thereby intensifying conflict. Defences of ambivalence and projection fuelled destructive conflict, as people sought to express their differences yet remain valued members of a group. By stressing their distinctions, less powerful and marginalised groups sought to retain a sense of identity often subverting organisational performance in the process. Women interviewed referred to the existence of male social networks and how these negatively impacted on their experience in the workplace.

“I don’t tolerate sexist or stereotypical comments made. For example, a ‘boy’s’ weekend team building was held without the female team members. I immediately addressed this with the individuals concerned. There appears to be a lack of consequence management within the organisation and it has two sets of values, where one only applies to certain individuals.”

Paradoxes of identity refer to issues of boundaries, space, and the divide between the in-group, or clique, and the out-group, or all others. The women related stories of intimidation and double standards that they had experienced.



“One is required to understand the nature of the environment and act accordingly. For example in the Home loans environment, here I faced intimidation from other consultants and clients who were predominately male.”

5.2.5.4 Paradoxes of power - Reinforcing cycles

Of the women who experienced direction/ autonomy tensions, their defensive reaction was found to be that of reaction formation. As mentioned earlier, power is associated with influence, the allocation and mobilisation of resources, the ability to manipulate situations, the capacity to affect interpretive processes, the fulfilment of needs and the attainment of goals and overcoming of resistance. The women felt that although their work may be enriched in terms of task variety, it also may be monitored more closely from above than ever before. The individual's range of freedom is diminished in certain respects even as it is widening in other ways.

“Previously the division had a legacy of non-delivery. Once this changed, expectations tripled. We were expected to produce more with fewer resources. In addition, certain individuals within the organisation felt threatened by this. I think they felt that I was ‘showing them up’ or I that was after their position. This made it difficult to get the job done.”

5.2.5.5 Emerging Paradoxes - Reinforcing cycles

It was felt that individuals within the organisation chose situations that supported rather than challenged their frames, inhibiting critical self and social



reflection and reframing. Regression serves to protect individuals temporarily from recognising that existing skills, routines, behaviours and understandings may be obsolete. One respondent commented, *“In terms of transformation, the evidence is not there to support the intention. The system still protects the status quo.”*

Further, it was felt that within the organisation, to bolster individual confidence, success was attributed to existing skills and practices and problems were attributed to elements beyond the individual’s control. There is a recognition that change is taking place, *“There’s been a paradigm change regarding management. We still need to make more progress but the intention is there.”*

Some were encouraged by the changes they had seen in management styles while others felt it was too little too late. *“Some managers never learned how to be a manager. Introducing a management development programme may be too late.”*

“In my previous position, the executive was indecisive. There was no clear vision, he ridiculed people and was very immature.”

Projecting blame across organisational levels limits discussion of disparate understandings and social reframing. Individuals are expecting action from top-level management to rectify the situation and bring about transformation however, no one spoke of how they could assist in bringing about this change. This response provides an example of how blame is projected, *“No space*



creation is happening within the organisation. No mentorship is taking place and we are losing talent. A cultural change is needed.”

5.2.5.6 Acceptance

All of the individuals interviewed were aware of the tensions regarding paradoxes of structure however, some chose to accept these. Finding their appropriate role in the face of structural paradoxes was reflected in the women’s self-perceptions. Through social reflection, managers determined that in their turbulent, complex setting the search for commonality and diversity must be an ongoing, collaborative process. For some, exit was not an option. Their means of relating to the organisation, its policies and its practices are to ‘work within and with them’.

“I work within the constraints or system.”

“I would never leave the organisation because of paradoxes.”

“You need to be intuitive in these situations. I often use humour to lighten the situation.”

5.2.5.7 Confrontation

The immediate goal of confronting is to bring about a wider recognition of the paradox itself. It is critical that dissent is not immediately cast as destructive and disloyal and that mechanisms are in place for the discussion of serious



concerns. *“I believe that paradoxes or situations are created by people. There are two sides to each situation.”* The development of trust is fundamental. Only with understanding that conflicts and the voicing of problems represent honest differences among peers, can destructive paradoxical cycles be resolved or transcended. *“I say it like it is but it’s nerve-wrecking. I believe in nipping a situation in the bud even if it means hurting someone’s feelings.”*

5.2.5.8 Transcendence

Gender and the constrained positional power of women in management underscore the multiplicity and complexity of organisational paradox. An ideal of consensus is transformed into a modified working consensus, whereby the imperfect realisation of ideals, the imbalances of power and the limitations to planning are explicitly acknowledged.

“My approach is always to address and confront.”

“I always address and challenge these situations in order to resolve them. However, it needs to be done in the right space, with respect and integrity. Sometimes a situation gets worse before it gets better. You need to walk the talk.”

The respondents suggest that subtle means of confrontation may open communication, fostering discussion among individuals with varied frames of reference. Similarly, forums also provide a means of addressing these concerns



openly. It was felt that this would assist in preparing people for the changes needed within the organisation. One of the respondents verbalised it as follows: *“Time is needed for people to prepare for transformation however, some people are ready now.”*

Change can also be brought about through the younger generation moving up within the organisation and bringing new forms of leadership. *“There is more of an effort made by leadership and I can see a definite culture shift.”*

Transformation begins with the individual. Everyone learns skills throughout one’s career. How one applies those skills to situations develops over time and with experience. Transitioning from relying on one skill that you feel more comfortable with to a newer unused skill is daunting. One respondent aptly described this phenomenon of old versus new with the use of a metaphor: *“We all manage a pot of skills, such as life skills and emotional skills. Sometimes you just happen to take the wrong skills out.”*

Exemplars demonstrate the stronger the push towards cohesion and consensus.

“In those situations, I take time out before I react, breathe, reflect, and then respond. My aim is to reach mutual agreement and hear the other side.”

“It takes courage to address. Don’t hide. You need to be willing to acknowledge your contribution to the situation.”



5.2.5.9 Summary

When the respondents were asked how they would manage contradictory situations in general, their responses were slightly different. The table below illustrates the frequencies for each category of the management of paradox. It is evident from the table that the majority of the respondents managed paradox through transcendence, closely followed by confrontation. Only a small minority of the respondents managed paradoxes through acceptance.

Table 4 – Management of Paradoxes

Management of Paradox	Frequency
Acceptance	3
Confrontation	7
Transcendence	10

Of those women who experienced paradoxes of agency half (2 out of 4) confronted the paradox while the other half (2 out of 4) managed it through transcendence.

Of those women who experienced paradoxes of identity, 3 confronted the paradox, 2 accepted the paradox while 9 managed it through transcendence. Maintaining a task focus and valuing difference appear to help individuals manage paradoxes of identity. From a paradoxical perspective, valuing difference means appreciating varied perspectives and capabilities rather than accentuating personal or ethnic distinctions. *“I accept some blame, confront the situation and try to reach mutual agreement and meeting of minds. I believe in having courageous conversations, honesty and working through issues.”*



Living with or within paradox is perhaps the most difficult option to conceive because it signals a departure from our usual stance of 'getting over it'. Of the women who experienced paradoxes of power, 5 out of 15 confronted the paradox while 9 out of 15 managed it through transcendence and 1 out of 15 accepted the paradox.

The table below summaries the frequencies for each category of management per paradox category. It is evident from the table that the all the respondents managed paradoxes of structure through acceptance. The respondents managed paradoxes of agency equally through acceptance and transcendence. The majority of the respondents managed paradoxes of identity and paradoxes of power through transcendence, closely followed by confrontation. Only a small minority of the respondents managed paradoxes of identity and paradoxes of power through acceptance.

Table 5 – Management of Paradoxes per Category

Management of Paradox		Frequency
Paradox of structure	Accept	6
	Confront	0
	Transcend	0
Paradox of agency	Accept	0
	Confront	2
	Transcend	2
Paradox of identity	Accept	2
	Confront	3
	Transcend	9
Paradox of power	Accept	1
	Confront	5
	Transcend	9



5.3 Conclusion

It is evident that paradoxes of identity and paradoxes of power are the most experienced paradoxes, whereas paradoxes of structure and paradoxes of agency are substantially less experienced paradoxes. In summary, the majority of respondents felt that they were allowed to be spontaneous, creative, vocal, and assertive. This suggests that the women interviewed largely accommodated paradoxes of structure. The majority of respondents felt that they were allowed to do things in a way that was still distinctively their own. The evidence of paradoxes of agency was limited. From the responses it appears that the predominant paradox experienced were paradoxes of identity. Although paradoxes of power were the most experienced paradox, there are mixed responses and views on this paradox. Transformation and changes in management styles (paradoxes of transformation) emerged as important concerns for the women interviewed.

In the management of paradox, the majority of the respondents managed paradox through transcendence, closely followed by confrontation. Only a small minority of the respondents managed paradoxes through acceptance. Yet despite the evidence of the difficulties, tensions and contradictions confronting women in management, it remains the case that these women are carving out successful careers as managers, in the process investing some sense of identity in work practices and arenas long dominated by men.



6 Chapter 6 – Discussion of Results

6.1 Introduction

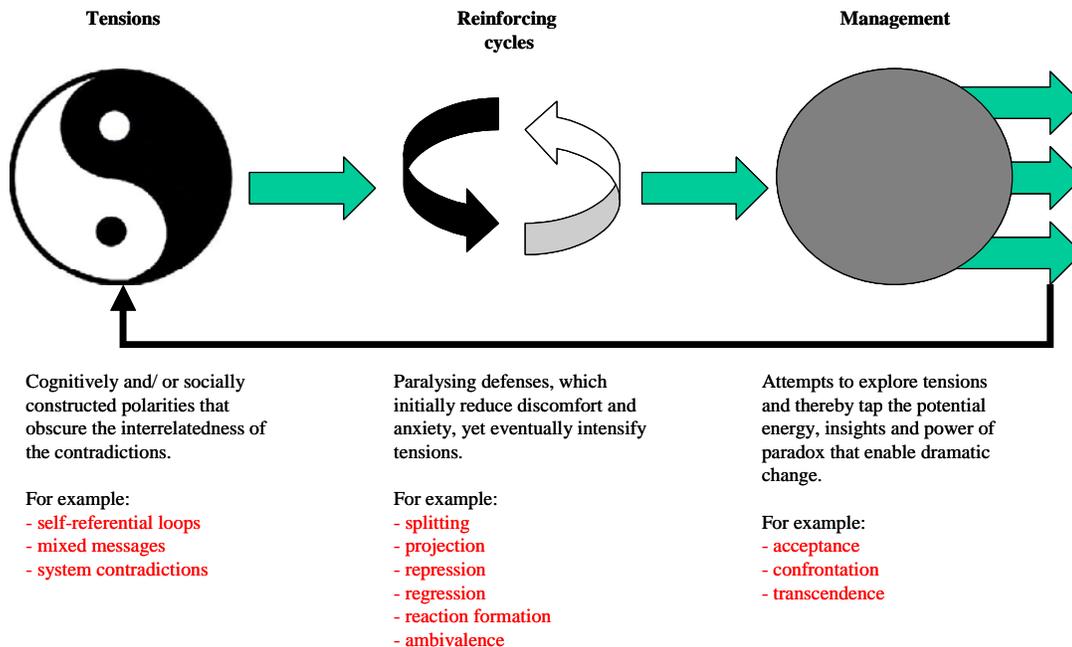
The results contribute valuable insights into paradoxes, the gendered organisation and women in management. The results of the research show that many women in management within the financial services institution still face and experience paradoxes. In addition, the results show that there is no single best way to address paradox. It was clear from the results that paradoxes could not be eliminated nor could they be avoided. Arising out of the study, it was found that women's responses to paradoxes in organisational life are not uniform, static or predictable.

6.2 Reviewing the Paradox Framework

The Paradox Framework presented by Lewis serves as a lens for examining the findings and aspects of organisational life. This framework provides a means of addressing *what* tensions exist, *why* they may fuel reinforcing cycles and *how* individuals may manage paradoxes to foster change and understanding (Lewis, 2000). The Paradox Framework assists by staying with that complexity to explore its dynamics and possible implications. By viewing the results using the framework, it simultaneously addressed existing or emerging paradoxes and factors or strategies for overcoming negative consequences of paradox. In this section, the usefulness of the framework in the investigation of strategies to identify and manage paradox in the organisation is illustrated, using the results

of the current study. Researchers can use the conceptual framework to guide their future work.

Figure 2 – Reviewing the Paradox Framework



Source: Lewis (2000)

6.2.1 Research Question 1

Do women in management experience paradoxes?

6.2.1.1 Identifying paradoxes

Lewis depicts the use of narrative as an approach that focuses on everyday organisational life and a search for contradictions (Lewis, 2000). This strategy relies on the principle that paradoxes are socially constructed and therefore easily identifiable. Argyris (1993) detailed a method of mapping conversations that by documenting the context, behaviour and consequence of successive



statements one is able to identify if paradoxes were experienced. In another method, Hatch and Erlich (1993) sought to identify instances of humour as demonstrations of paradox in organisations. The breadth of methods of identifying paradoxes in literature reinforces the complex and systematic nature of organisations (Tetenbaum, 1998) and highlights the cognitive challenges associated with making sense of contradictions inherent within organisations.

In the literature, there appears to be three major processes developed to identify paradoxes (Horrigan, 2005). These are *understanding*, *identifying* and *visual representation*. The method applied to identify paradoxes in this study is consistent with the literature. Similar to the approach by English (2001), paradox was introduced to the women interviewed as a concept of contradictions, oppositions and tensions. These contradictions, oppositions and tensions were then discussed with reference to specific situations the women found themselves in.

Paradoxes contain two apparently opposing polarities. Therefore, statements were used to define polarities of each paradox and included statements such as “question ways”, “differing perspectives”, “ways to get things done” and “prove yourself”. The key themes identified were “participative versus unilateral”; “identify outcomes and solutions versus given outcomes and solutions” and “inconsistencies between what is said and done versus consistency between what is said and done”. These polarities are consistent with 4 out the 16 sets of polarities identified by Horrigan (2005). These polarities were refined into 5 sets



of tensions namely, “control versus flexibility”, “individual versus collective”, “self versus others”, “direction versus autonomy” and “old versus new”.

Paradoxes were identified through the tensions identified. One paradox identified acknowledged that a potential resistance to change is in retaining “old ways” of operating rather than adopting the “new ways” of operating. Paradoxes of structure were identified in the results through the emphasis of the aspects of control and flexibility. Paradoxes of agency were identified through the aspects of individual and collective whereas paradoxes of identity were identified through aspects of self and others. Lastly, paradoxes of power were identified through aspects of direction and autonomy.

Although Johnson (1996) used a “polarity map” to visually represent paradoxes identified, in this study, a “polarity map” was not created. A visual representation of the polarities, tensions and paradoxes identified was created though.

6.2.1.2 Implications

Similar to the finding of Horrigan, participants were better able to identify paradoxes when these situations were referred to as something other than paradox such as contradictions, oppositions or tensions (Horrigan, 2005). The results revealed several contradictions. Identifying the polarities and tensions led to identifying paradoxes. The Paradox Framework also provided a means of identifying the types of tensions the respondents experienced. Many of the paradoxes identified in the results reflect the human dynamics within the



organisation. By using a narrative approach, the results of the research show that women in management do experience paradoxes in particular paradoxes of identity and paradoxes of power as seen in Table 2 of Chapter 5. Evidence of the paradoxes the women identified and experienced are outlined in Chapter 5 and is further discussed in the next section on Research Question 2.

6.2.2 Research Question 2

What are the paradoxes that women managers experience?

Research has identified various types of paradoxes. Lewis (2000) identified paradoxes of learning, paradoxes of organising and paradoxes of belonging. In a later study by Luscher, Lewis and Ingram (2006), these paradoxes were revised to paradoxes of performing, paradoxes of organisation and paradoxes of belonging. Stohl and Cheney (2001), on the other hand, identified four broad categories of paradoxes namely paradoxes of structure, paradoxes of agency and paradoxes of power. Although the paradoxes identified have been named differently by the researchers, there are overlaps in their definition. For example, paradoxes of organising and paradoxes of structure refer to paradoxes of participation/ empowerment versus control. In the same way, paradoxes of belonging and paradoxes of identity refer to paradoxes of individual versus organisation.

Horrigan distinguishes between organisational level and individual level paradoxes. Paradoxes at an organisational level are defined as those paradoxes concerned with the organisational approach or strategy (Horrigan,



2005). Whereas individual level paradoxes are defined as paradoxes concerned with behaviours, cognitions and decision-making approach of the individual operating within the organisation (Horrigan, 2005). Using these distinctions, paradoxes of structure can be viewed as an organisational level paradox whereas paradoxes of agency, paradoxes of identity and paradoxes of power can be considered individual level paradoxes. Given these distinctions, it can be noted that individual level paradoxes were the most experienced paradoxes. However, it is accepted that individual level paradoxes may also occur at the organisational level and vice versa (Horrigan, 2005).

6.2.2.1 Paradoxes of structure

Structure, which refers to the structure within an organisation, imposes constraints on individual actions and shapes desired behaviours. As such individuals can look after both themselves and the organisation by creating and maintaining it. At the same time, the organisation is a powerful force in itself, which can control and outlast the individual. Acker (1990) exposed the gendered nature of organisational structure where everyday practice may create conditions such that paradox and other irrationalities become a normal, routine part of organisational life for women. In the study, one example cited by the women interviewed was around dress code. Women who embraced masculine values and ways of dressing appeared to be more respected within the organisation than those women who embraced their femininity.



The women interviewed were comfortable with “being in charge” while letting their subordinates make decisions. Lewis (2000) refers to the need to balance control and flexibility as a critical aspect of organisational design. As women managers, they were able to maintain a balance between consistency on the one hand, and flexibility on the other. In addition, the women felt that their managers did not feel any strain as their managers retained their authority and promoted employee participation.

The results from this study indicate that paradoxes of structure did not present a concern to the women. This could be due to the anticipated changes as a result of the Department of Labour Codes. These legislative changes would signal dramatic structural to the organisation over the next eight years as the organisation aligns itself to the demographic profile of the country. However, those women who did experience paradoxes of structure highlighted issues around the gendered nature of the organisation.

6.2.2.2 Paradoxes of agency

The paradox of individual/ collective is well represented in theoretical literature (Horrigan, 2005). The paradox of agency generally relates to a sense of efficacy (Stohl and Cheney, 2001). Wood and Conrad (1983) argue that a woman’s efficacy is limited and she is marginalised and her “good performance is attributed to luck, ease of task, or perseverance rather than competence” (Wood and Conrad, 1983, p. 309).



The results from this study contradict the literature in that it indicates that paradoxes of agency did not present a concern to the women, as this was the least experienced paradox. This could be attributed to the fact that many of the women felt a strong sense of self worth. Many respondents commented that they would “find means and opportunities” to express their individuality. In addition, many women felt that they could “be a success on their own terms”. This comment summarises their view, *“I choose my battles and I take responsibility for my own career.”*

6.2.2.3 Paradoxes of identity

Johnson (1996) acknowledges the self/ other paradox as a personal tension for all individuals throughout the organisation. This is due to the fact that individuals are constantly making decisions about the extent to which their individual input contributes to the organisation’s interest and in turn, the extent to which achieving the organisational goals will result in individual achievement. The women interviewed strongly related to this paradox, as it is closely linked to the individual and therefore more easily identifiable.

Research undertaken by O’ Connor (1995), Hatch and Erlich (1993) and Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) provides empirical support for the challenge that individuals face in seeking to both look after the organisation’s needs and their own. These empirical studies focus on paradox from a management perspective. In addition, the results of the empirical studies support that fact that managers in particular struggle with the challenge of self/ other paradoxes. This



is confirmed by the results of the present study, as paradoxes of identity are the second most experienced paradox.

Sub groups can be based on various factors such as background or role within the organisation. Women in this study did not feel part of the in-group, which, according to Kleiner (2003), is an inner circle of employees who control the organisation. This core group has nothing to do with the organisational structure and women are often not part of this network. The reason for this occurrence could be that the current incumbents are threatened by their presence. This was confirmed by the comments made by one of the respondents.

“Previously the division had a legacy of non-delivery. Once this changed, expectations tripled. We were expected to produce more with fewer resources. In addition, certain individuals within the organisation felt threatened by this. I think they felt that I was ‘showing them up’ or I that was after their position. This made it difficult to get the job done.”

The remaining 6 women noted no experiences of paradoxes of identity. These women developed ways to include themselves. Once they were included, they then assisted in making it easier for other women to be included. One woman noted that issues of membership were not a concern as the environment was predominately female.

South Africa was a patriarchal, white male dominated society, with stereotyped gender roles and racism, restricting women’s professional and social growth



and development (Mathur-Helm, 2005). Similarly, women commented on the pockets of male dominated environments that still existed within the organisation. Social biases and stereotypes still exist in the organisational environment and work against women. One woman noted that humour assisted her as a women manager in blurring and transcending artificial boundaries between the feminine and the managerial.

6.2.2.4 Paradoxes of power

Gherardi (1995) notes that it is not the asymmetry of power itself that creates problems for women in management but that the asymmetry is based on the social power of males. In addition, individual behaviour is shaped by the organisational roles that people play (Beer, Eisenstat and Spector, 1990). It could be argued that the management style experienced by the women interviewed may have play a role in how they identified paradoxes of power. For example, a woman who has an autocratic manager is more likely to recognise and identify paradoxes of power. Role identification is also influenced by social dynamics (Smith and Mackie, 2000). Roles and identities can also shift according to beliefs about what it means to hold a position and beliefs linked to a person's professional discipline (Rosseau, 2001).

It is interesting to note that of the 15 women who experienced paradoxes of power, 12 also experienced paradoxes of identity. Although the women indicated situations where they experienced paradoxes of power, the evidence did not support this. This could be as a result of the sample of women



interviewed or the unwillingness to provide evidence of this. In addition, the literature provides little support for paradoxes of power.

6.2.2.5 Paradoxes of transformation

For the purposes of this discussion, the issues of transformation and changing management styles have been grouped together as paradoxes of transformation. Given their multiple constituents, organisations denote social spaces continuously pulled in opposing directions (Bouchikhi, 1998). The paradox of transformation refers to tensions of change on an individual level and an organisational level.

In the South African context, transformation translates into redressing the historical inequalities that were built under apartheid and promoting commitment to a new social order that reflects the social structure more accurately. There is numerous legislation that governs transformation. Therefore, the need to redress gender and racial imbalances within the organisation does and will continue to cause tensions within the individual and the organisation. It appears that transformation merely raised awareness about gender inequality instead of causing drastic change to take place within the organisation. A key question that emerges from the discussion is whether transformation in South Africa's finance sector can be achieved on the Financial Sector Charter framework of self-regulation and volunteerism. The South African government clearly expressed their view on this matter with the introduction of the DTI Codes.



On an individual level, the changing market environments demand that one keeps up to date with trends. This requires the individual to adopt a continuous learning paradigm, and some people may not be comfortable with this.

6.2.2.6 Implications

The results of the study provides support that woman in management do experience paradoxes. The identified paradoxes were consistent with the types of paradoxes identified in the literature for 4 out of the 5 categories identified. Therefore, as shown in the literature and the results of this study, women in management still experience and face paradoxes albeit in differing forms.

Wood and Conrad (1983) suggest that suspicion may be aroused as to women's right to management positions in the first place, their performance in those positions and their ability to pull off the management role. Many of the women interviewed highlighted the fact that they were in the minority in their work environments. One woman mentioned that she used this to her advantage, in that being in the minority, she usually had the swing vote. Some indicated that gender stereotypes still existed regarding management roles and that transformation was taking place very slowly. When questioned about their teams, all the women agreed that their teams were either on par or out-performing teams managed by men. In addition, the women felt that once they had proved their abilities, they were not questioned as managers.



The findings of the study support the literature that the nature of the organisation is gendered. Those women who experienced paradoxes of structure and paradoxes of identity demonstrated evidence of the gendered nature of the organisation. The predominant paradoxes were found to be paradoxes of identity, which could also be attributed to the gendered nature of the organisation and gender stereotypes regarding women managers. The differences in paradoxes experienced by the women could be as a result of the differing positions and roles the women held in the organisation.

6.2.3 Research Question 3

What are the sources of paradoxes experienced by women managers?

Attempting to make sense of both polarities of paradoxes simultaneously may create confusion, as it may be difficult to engage two seemingly opposing concepts simultaneously (Horrigan, 2005). In some cases, specific tensions seem inherent in organisations, while in other studies, emergent paradoxes seem to be a function of a particular design, set of procedures, or configuration of social forces (Stohl and Cheney, 2001). The sources of paradoxes differed for each paradox experienced by the respondents. The polarities initially identified in the study were refined to tensions of “control versus flexibility”, “individual versus collective”, “self versus others”, “direction versus autonomy” and “old versus new”.



6.2.3.1 Control versus flexibility

Decentralised, participative, and democratic systems of control are believed to offer the most viable alternatives to bureaucracy's confining routines and rules (Horrigan, 2005). Due to the fact that tensions between control and flexibility were only noted by 6 of the 20 respondents it has been assumed that the structure of the organisation as experienced by the women interviewed is decentralised and participative.

6.2.3.2 Individual versus collective

An individual's level of personal self-awareness is likely to alter their perceptions of paradoxes, thereby reducing the level of tension experienced with regard to the paradox. In addition, an individual's self-efficacy influences motivation or their perception of how likely they are to succeed at a specific endeavour (Bandura, 1977). Individual/ collective tensions were experienced by only 4 out of the 20 respondents and this confirms the literature that the individual's self perception play a major role in whether they experience individual/ collective tensions. This is further confirmed by the study, as these were the least experienced tensions amongst the women interviewed.

6.2.3.3 Self versus others

People self categorise as members of particular social or work groups based on their social identity (Smith and Mackie, 2000). Tensions that underlie paradoxes of identity revolve around involvement as individuals grapple with how much of themselves to invest in the group. These tensions arise as individuals struggle



to realise the benefits of group membership, while expressing their personal, and possibly deviant, views (Luscher *et al.*, 2006). According to Smith and Berg (1987), a group thrives as its members become immersed within group dynamics, but also remain capable of extricating themselves to remain critical of group processes and outcomes.

These tensions represented a particular challenge to the women interviewed as 14 out of the 20 respondents experienced tensions between self and others. In addition, the women cited numerous examples of these tensions. Therefore the findings of this study confirm the literature paradoxes of identity and therefore the tensions of self/ other confront individuals within an organisation continuously.

6.2.3.4 Direction versus autonomy

Although managerial women are powerful via their formal organisational positions, they may be powerless via societal assumptions and informal organisational dynamics (Martin, 2004). The findings demonstrate that 15 out of the 20 respondents experienced tensions between direction and autonomy. These tensions were typically manifested as mixed messages and system contradictions. According to Putnam (1986), individuals often react to the absurdity of mixed messages by choosing to comply with only one side of the message. This choice temporarily reduces tension, providing sufficient clarity for action. Yet such a response also signifies disobedience, as the individual neglects one imperative for the other. The reviewed studies also suggest



alternative responses, such as rising antagonism with top management (Apker, 2003), feelings of doubt (Beech and Huxham, 2003), and a sense of confusion and paralysis (Lu"schler, 2002).

Although the women identified these tensions, there was very little evidence to support this. For example, no incidences of insubordination, antagonism with top management or feelings of doubt were mentioned. The lack of evidence could also be attributed to the reluctance of the women to disclose these incidents.

6.2.3.5 Old versus new

It is often noted that organisational cultures are very slow to change. Values that are deeply entrenched are not easily displaced, and practices that benefit the dominant coalition are not readily given up (Stohl and Cheney, 2001). Tensions may arise as a result of the different value orientation of the individual versus the organisation. Moreover, many organisational values, decision premises, and ideological principles are rooted primarily in the larger cultural context of society. This highlights the tensions raised by social and gender related issues and the changes currently happening within South Africa.

The individuals face transformation from different perspectives. Firstly, the country is undergoing many changes. Secondly, organisations are undergoing changes in terms of their structures and market changes. As a result of both, the individual is continuously exposed to situations of change. The fact that so



many women highlighted transformation is a direct result of the environment the women find themselves in. The results indicate that 18 out of the 20 respondents noted the tensions old versus new (for both transformation and the changing or differing management styles within the organisation). These tensions were manifested as a self-referential cycle where perceptions and actions, rely and build upon themselves as individuals attempt to change.

6.2.3.6 Implications

Improved understanding and engagement may enhance feelings of self-confidence and personal control on the part of the individual in relation to the tensions experienced. Enhancing the individual's understanding of tensions is likely to enhance their effectiveness through increasing their individual ability to engage in appropriate responses. As such it can be argued that helping individual recognise and deal with the paradoxical nature of organisations will be useful. Balancing self-interest with organisational interest is also a tension for all organisational members to manage. Enhancing individual's understanding of tensions may also improve their confidence and self-efficacy in being able to successfully navigate paradoxes. This is particularly helpful in a South African context where change and the accompanying tensions are a daily part of an individual's life.



6.2.4 Research Question 4

How do women in management manage paradoxes?

Individual cognitions shape the way in which individuals interpret situations and their resultant behaviours. In other words, the way in which people make sense of events has an impact on their interpretation of those events. For most, making sense of paradox seems to be a cognitive. By first understanding and identifying paradoxes, the individual can move to exploring and resolving paradoxes. Therefore, by understanding the underlying sources of paradoxes, the women are better placed to manage these tensions. This can be achieved by recognising the positive dynamics of the tension while minimising the negative aspects.

Through the conversational process, an exploratory model of how defences reinforce patterns of behaviour can be developed. Such models might illustrate how vicious cycles ensue when one clings to existing frames of reference and avoid critical self-reflection and more open discourse (Lewis, 2000). These models are then testable by seeing if one's pattern persists in differing conversations or situations. The result is a rich image of the nature and dynamics of mixed messages.

6.2.4.1 Acceptance

In psychotherapy, exposure to what is threatening has long been known as a logical solution to the working through process, thereby playing out alternative emotions (Luscher *et al.*, 2006). Likewise, the understanding of paradox as a



natural feature of intricate and dynamic systems suggests that certain paradoxes may benefit from acceptance (Luscher *et al.*, 2006). To accept a paradox is a positive stance. For those who experienced paradoxes of structure, their first response is to accept the paradox and learn to live with it.

6.2.4.2 Confrontation

Westenholz (1993) notes that a reinforcing feedback loop is fuelled by defensiveness. In her study, O'Connor (1995) details how individuals who questioned contradictions between new norms of control were quickly labelled as resistant to change. Such labelling signified “insiders” and “outsiders”. In addition, emotions inhibit both parties from confronting the tension because there is a high risk that it will threaten the relationship (Luscher *et al.*, 2006). Thus, neither party is willing to jeopardize existing relations, rendering a discussion of the paradox undiscussable (Argyris, 1988).

Emotional tensions that pervade paradoxes of identity may benefit from confrontation as an emotional approach to working through (Luscher *et al.*, 2006). The theory of transformational leadership marked the shift to the recognition of women in management and their feminine characteristics which were clearly acknowledged and valued. Suliman and Al-Shaikh suggest that intelligence alone will not explain achievement at work or life and that emotion plays a key role in organisational success (Suliman and Al-Shaikh, 2007). Similarly, Brown and Brooks state that “an understanding of emotion, both our own and those of other people, plays an important part in organisational life”



(Brown and Brooks, 2002, p. 327). Experimental studies simulating gender effects on management styles tend to confirm that women differ from men in their being caring, collaborative and enhancing participative decision making whereas men tend to be rational and competitive (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Zafarullah, 2000). In this vein Eagly *et al* (2000) maintain that gender roles pertain to agentic and communal attributes.

6.2.4.3 *Transcendence*

Research emphasises the role of individual cognition in making sense of the paradoxes in organisations (Horrigan, 2005). Stacy (1992) argues that individuals need to develop new mental models in order to deal with the conflict and tensions of paradoxes. Transcendence implies the ability to question assumptions in order to go beyond apparent contradictions.

Certain paradoxes may be universally identified, while there may be particular paradoxes linked to a role such as manager. Wendt (1998) extends Wood and Conrad's (1983) forced choice between being a woman who happens to be a manager, or a manager who happens to be a woman. He argues that when faced with paradox, "the woman spontaneously deconstructs both intuitive and rational responses to blame, acceptance or rejection, and subtly promotes a third option, one that benefits the group as a whole" (Wendt, 1998, p. 342). In other words, women managers find a compromise solution to paradox.



The paradox of power arises in a variety of ways and in many different organisational settings. To address it productively, some would call for redressing the imbalance of power between individual and organisation while not violating organisational power to the point that collective efficacy is lost. Synthesis refers to a creative combination of the conflicting aspects of the status quo (Stohl and Cheney, 2001). Synergy seeks to reconcile and harmonise the tensions created by oppositions (Mason and Mistroff, 1981) and achieves something more than a combination of compromise of the two sides of a paradox (Hampden-Turner, 1994). The search for synthesis of the two arguments is an attempt to reconcile and harmonise the tensions created by opposition.

Paradoxes of power are related to actors' self-understanding and may need reframing as cognitive conflict (for example, roles, expectations and demands) may call for cognitive responses. Reframing requires movement to a different level of analysis or to a new attitude toward the paradox that is perceived to be a problem (Stohl and Cheney, 2001). It has been argued that cognitive conflict enhances decision quality and overall group performance (Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1994, 1995; Turner and Pratkanis, 1994).

6.2.4.4 Implications

An approach by Johnson (1996) provides guidelines which help the individual self-select between problems to solve or paradoxes to manage. This approach



suggests that problems to solve have an end point, whereas paradoxes to manage are ongoing.

The women in this study managed paradoxes through confrontation and transcendence. This can be attributed the profile of the women interviewed and may not be representative of women in general. In addition, the organisational role of the women interviewed may have played a part in creating an environment where women could confront and transcend paradoxes. Many of the women interviewed described themselves as transformational managers and could contribute to the manner in which they addressed paradoxes.

6.3 Conclusion

By naming, explaining and illustrating various paradoxes, the intention is to encourage greater sensitivity to these challenges. Organisational life expresses itself in polarities and every situation has a polar opposite. Polarities can occur at both ends of the relativity scale. By attempting to reduce the frustrations and discomfort of tensions, one's defensive behaviours initially produce positive effects but eventually foster opposite, unintended consequences that intensify the underlying tensions. Some of these tensions may be classified as irony, others as contradictions, and still others as paradoxes. An example was highlighted in the study where the dominance of an authoritarian leader is experienced in a democratic organisation.



The Paradox Framework provided a means of identifying *what* tensions exist for each of the women interviewed. In addition, the framework assisted in identifying the type of tension experienced by the respondent. For each paradox experienced a differing tension and type was identified. The next element of the framework addressed reinforcing cycles as the women attempted to resolve the paradoxes. Again, for each paradox experienced a differing reinforcing cycle and defensive reactions was identified. Lastly, the framework provides individuals with methods of managing paradoxes to foster change and understanding.

To summarise, the results identified five categories of paradoxes. Four of these categories had been previously identified in the literature. While one category emerged during the study. The women did not experience all the paradoxes. Paradoxes of identity and paradoxes of power were the most experienced paradoxes. For each paradox identified the tensions, reinforcing cycles and management was captured. The table below summarises the findings of this study.

Table 6 – Summary of Paradoxes identified

Paradoxes of structure		
Tensions	Reinforcing Cycles	Management
Control/Flexibility	Defences – Reaction Formation	Dynamic Equilibrium
Empowerment Formalisation	Intense distrust Extreme chaos or rigidity	Superordinate goals Humour
Paradoxes of agency		
Tensions	Reinforcing Cycles	Management
Individual/ Collective	Defences – Projection	Social Acceptance
Individuality	Destructive conflict	Valuing difference
Paradoxes of identity		
Tensions	Reinforcing Cycles	Management
Self/ Other	Defences - Ambivalence and Projection	Social Acceptance
Individuality Group Boundaries	Destructive conflict	Task focus Valuing difference
Paradoxes of power		
Tensions	Reinforcing Cycles	Management
Direction/ Autonomy	Defences – Reaction Formation	Dynamic Equilibrium
Performance Formalisation	Escalating resistance and alienation Extreme chaos or rigidity	Superordinate goals Behavioural complexity
Paradoxes of Transformation		
Tensions	Reinforcing Cycles	Management
Old/ New	Defences – Regression and Projection	Social Reframing
Transformation	Cognitive self-reference	Open communication and experimentation

Adapted from Lewis (2000)



7 Chapter 7 – Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In South Africa, women compose 52.1% of the total population and 41.4% of the total workforce (The Business Women's Association, 2006). However, it has been found that women constitute only 16,8% of all executive managers, 11,5% as Women Directors and 6,4% are CEOs and Board Chairs (The Business Women's Association, 2006). There is a growing realisation that women are playing an increasingly important role in organisations. Despite this realisation, the statistics indicate an imbalance in the representation of women in management.

In addition to this imbalance, women face other challenges within the organisation. Literature shows that organisational life is paradoxical and as such women managers are expected to be able to manage paradoxes. The aim of this research was to investigate and explore the links between paradoxes and women. The results of the research show that many women in management within the financial services institution still face and experience paradoxes. In addition, the results show that there is no single best way to address paradox.

7.2 Findings Summary

7.2.1 Paradoxes

Cameron and Quinn (1998) suggest that the key to organisational self-renewal and transformation is understanding and working with paradox inherent in



organisations. For the purposes of this paper, a paradox is defined as the simultaneous presence of opposites, and the research is interested in paradox in the sense of “the interesting tensions, oppositions, and contradictions” (Scott and Van de Ven, 1989, p. 564) as experienced by women managers.

Paradoxes identified in this study were specifically organisational paradoxes. Most of the paradoxes identified demonstrated some similarities in the sources of paradoxes or tensions. In this study, 5 broad categories of paradoxes have been identified that arise as the women managers strive to enact what they believe are the basic goals of the organisation. The results also found that the paradoxes identified were consistent with the 4 broad categories of paradoxes identified from the literature review. An additional paradox, paradox of transformation, emerged from the results that had not been noted in the literature review. It has been argued that as command and control structures are replaced or at least modified, this push produces paradoxes related to issues of structure, agency, identity, and power.

Organisations need to recognise and better manage the tension between self/ others. In so doing, individuals will be able to identify strategies that simultaneously meet the needs of both the organisation and the people that make up the organisations.

While previous studies have described and used methods to improve the identification and resolution of paradox, to date none have focussed on demonstrating empirically whether these methods do improve identification and



resolution of paradox (Horrigan, 2005). The majority of the women who experienced paradox managed it through confrontation and transcendence. The process of synthesis requires participants to identify the positive and negative aspects of both sides of paradox and then develop new ways of thinking about that paradox, which would maximise the positive aspects and minimise its negative aspects (Horrigan, 2005). The findings of this study are inconsistent with the cognitive psychology literature which suggests that people's information processing abilities mean that they struggle to make sense of contradictory or complex information preferring instead to resolve challenging situations using one sided or linear thinking (Bateson, 1973; Smith and Berg, 1987; Van de Ven and Poole, 1988).

The Paradox Framework provides a basis for a fresh perspective on paradoxes. By understanding the polarities that make up a particular tension, individuals are better placed to identify strategies to resolve or address the tension. This can be achieved by maximising the positive aspects, and minimise the negative aspects of both polarities within the tension.

7.2.2 Women in Management

All the women interviewed did not experience all the paradoxes identified. These results suggest that there may not be a broader conceptualisation of paradoxes across all individuals. Alternatively, it is possible that each individual focused exclusively on certain paradoxes depending on their organisational role. Interestingly, the study provided some support for the relevance of



organisational role in identifying paradoxes. The identification of the paradoxes seemed to be linked to the specific organisational roles undertaken by the women. While some women (7 out of 20) exclusively identified paradoxes of power and paradoxes of identity, the majority of the women identified varying combinations of the paradoxes. The predominant paradoxes were found to be paradoxes of identity, which could also be attributed to the gendered nature of the organisation and gender stereotypes regarding women managers.

The women managers were able to maintain a balance between consistency on the one hand, and flexibility on the other. One woman found that humour assisted her as a women manager in blurring and transcending artificial boundaries between the feminine and the managerial. Many of the women interviewed described themselves as transformational managers and could contribute to the manner in which they addressed paradoxes.

7.3 Recommendations

From a practical perspective, identifying paradoxes can assist organisational practitioners and decision makers to work more effectively with paradox. The paradoxes identified show linkages with sources of resistance or tensions and coping with paradoxes. As such, the presence of certain paradoxes can be used to target specific strategies that minimise sources of resistance and tensions in order to enhance the management of paradoxes.



These paradoxes can also feature in training programs for organisational members, decision makers and practitioners as a means of identifying the major areas of challenge. Training programs featuring these paradoxes can also emphasise that different organisational roles may have differing experiences of paradoxes.

The Paradox Framework can be used as part of a training program to expand the individual's perception of paradoxes and help them to recognise and understand contradictions and complexities inherent in organisations. Each paradoxical tension and its effect can take place via processes designed to identify the relative advantages and disadvantages of each side of the paradox. Paradoxical tensions could be used by individuals to self identify paradoxes and manage it accordingly.

7.4 Future Research

The present study should be regarded as indicative only and serves as an illustration of the extent of four broad based paradoxes experienced by women managers, how they have managed these and the factors that could contribute to this. While in the present study the research sample was limited to a financial services institution, it can nevertheless function as a point of departure by pointing out the way ahead for increasing our understanding of paradox through further research. This paper contributes with a mere first step in this direction.



Specifically, further research could preferably aim at exploring paradox in wider corporate banks and other financial services institutions and also organisations in other sectors. Similarly, the behaviours exhibited by these women managers within the financial services institution cannot be assumed to apply to all women, who may face entirely different forms of organisational paradox. A replication of this research with a greater number of participants from a wider range of organisational roles and contexts would enhance the findings.

Finally, future research could investigate possible relationships between the level of emotional investment in a particular paradox and the ability to identify and resolve paradox (Goleman, 1995).

7.5 Conclusion

Even as one notes links between paradoxes, one is faced with the awareness that paradoxes are slippery. They are likely to elude simplistic conclusions. What creates a paradox to one person may suggest straight logic to another. Exploring paradoxes often creates circles of reflection. Managers, in particular, are challenged to act, to impose some kind of order on surrounding complexity and to decide what is best for themselves and their organisation. In particular, this study found that women in management face predominately paradoxes of identity and paradoxes of power arising from their gendered locations that add to the uncertainty of negotiating organisational life (Martin, 2004). Investigating the lived experiences of women managers illuminated the constraints and



paradoxes endemic to organisations, for such experiences precede tensions at the intersection of structure, identity, agency, and power.

This work is just the beginning of an attempt to better understand these paradoxes and uncover ways to work with, through, and beyond them. The goal is to explore further how the identified paradoxes are produced, reproduced, and managed interactively in contemporary organisations. This study was intended to enhance the individual's ability to recognise, explore and resolve paradoxes that they experience as managers.



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9 Appendix 1 – Consistency Matrix

Title: Paradoxes experienced by women in management within a Financial Services Institution

PROPOSITIONS/ QUESTIONS / HYPOTHESES	LITERATURE REVIEW	DATA COLLECTION TOOL	ANALYSIS
<p>Research Question 1: Do women in management experience paradoxes?</p>	<p>Wendt, 2001 Marshall, 1993 Murphy and Zorn, 1996 Trethewey, 1999</p>	<p>Interview Guide: Step 3</p>	<p>Content analysis to determine whether paradoxes experienced.</p>
<p>Research Question 2: What are the paradoxes experienced by women managers?</p>	<p>Medved, Morrison, Dearing, Larson, Cline, and Brummans, 2001,</p>	<p>Interview Guide: Step 3</p>	<p>Content analysis to determine what type of paradoxes experienced.</p>



	Meyerson, 1991 Wendt, 1998 Stohl and Cheney, 2001		
Research Question 3: What are the sources of paradoxes experienced by women managers?	Wendt, 2001 Marshall, 1993 Murphy and Zorn, 1996 Trethewey, 1999	Interview Guide: Step 3	Content Analysis to determine how many women identified similar paradoxes and what the sources were.
Research Question 4: How do women in management manage paradoxes?	Stohl and Cheney, 2001; Wood and Conrad, 1983; Putnam, 1986; Wendt, 1998	Interview Guide: Step 3	Content analysis to determine how the paradoxes experienced were managed or what the responses to it were.



10 Appendix 2 – Interview Guide

Step 1: Introduction

- Leigh-Anne Fortuin - GIBS MBA Research Report
- *Purpose* : The study will attempt to gain a deeper understanding into paradoxes (tensions, contradictions) experienced by women managers, how they have managed these (situations) and the factors that could contribute to this.
- *Anonymity* : Restate that the anonymity of the participated will be protected and how the data from the interview will be used (commonalities/ themes)
- *Process* : Explain the process of Data collection and analysis and provide an indication of how many people have been interviewed. (20 people)

Step 2: Demographic Information

- Name
- Age
- Marital Status
- Children and Ages (if applicable)

Category one: *Demographics*. Questions will be designed to obtain a profile of the sample group such as education and training.



Step 3: “Career story”

Category two: *Paradoxes experienced.* Here the questions will be designed to investigate whether paradoxes were experienced in the sample group.

Category three: *Paradoxes of structure.* Here the questions will be designed to investigate the architecture of **participation and democracy** of the sample group. **Imposing participation, Adaptation, Short-circuit process, too Fomalised.** For example, “Be spontaneous, creative, vocal, and assertive in the way we have planned!”

Category four: *Paradoxes of agency.* Questions will be designed to investigate whether an **individual’s (sense of) efficacy** within the system is comfortable, satisfied and fulfilled in their current jobs. **Non-participation, socialising.** For example, “Do things our way but in a way that is still distinctively your own!”

Category five: *Paradoxes of identity.* Therefore, questions in this category will be specifically designed to investigate whether any of the sample had a direct or indirect encounter with **issues of membership, inclusion, and boundaries.** Thus, what meaning did they give it and how did they confront the paradox? **Become part of the crowd.** For example, “Be self-managing to meet organisational goals!”

Category six: *Paradoxes of power.* Questions will be designed to investigate the sample’s views on **locus, nature, and specific exercise of power** in the



organisation. Level of control, leadership, dissent. For example, “Be independent, just as I have commanded you!”

Category seven: *Management of paradox.* Questions will be designed to investigate how the sample managed the paradoxes experienced.

Category eight: *General.* The questions will further probe the types of paradoxes existing in the banking career and the reasons for these barriers. It also probed their views on such events.

Step 4: Notes

- Body Language
- Emotional state
- Language usage
- Post interview impressions

Step 5: Closing Comments

- Ask participant if they have any other comments they would like to add

Step 6: Thank Participant

- Time
- Provide opportunity for participant to contact me at a later stage if they would like to provide additional information