

**The influence of organisational culture stereotypes in promoting women
leaders to senior leadership positions**

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ABSTRACT

In this age of changing business environment and complexity, diversity and inclusiveness are imperative. The organisations' ability to shift from the traditional perceptions and cultural stereotypes to a more inclusive behaviour and inclusive culture will help the entity stay competitive. Research on the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles has been extensively researched. However, women continue to be underrepresented in the upper echelons of power. Even though investigation associating women, performance and barriers have been researched, there seems to be some gaps in how the culture of an organisation influences the uptake of women leaders into senior leadership roles. This research, therefore, attempts to explore the stereotypes experienced by women leaders in organisations and how these influence their career progression.

The study adopted a qualitative method with sixteen semi-structured, open – ended interviews conducted with women leaders who work in middle and senior management level. The female leaders' experiences were analysed through a thematic data analysis which was conducted to determine and identify key themes from the data collected from the interviews. The study identified eleven themes aimed at answering the research questions. These themes include family, respect, work environment, perception of performance, resource support, career planning, personal characteristics, trust, policies, flexibility and mentorship.

The findings contribute to literature by introducing new insights that contribute to the limited uptake of female leaders and combining with recommendations to improve the uptake of female leaders. The outcome of the study resulted in a proposed framework model that can be applied to increase the progression of female leaders into senior leadership roles. Recommendations for future studies and limitations of the study are presented. Practical implications of the study are stated.

KEYWORDS

Barriers; gender stereotypes; leadership; organisational culture; women leader.

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 degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Background

An organisation's culture is made up of the signs and symbols, shared practices, and underlying assumptions of the organisation (Spicer, 2020), whereas Elsbach and Stigliani (2018) define organisational culture as a composition of underlying norms, values, and assumptions that outline the "right way" to conduct oneself in an organisation. These definitions are in line with Schein (2010) who define organisational culture as where a deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs are shared by employees of an organization and that operate unconsciously.

Since organisational culture refers to certain organisational beliefs and principles that deeply influence the relationship between the group and its employees and management or other employees, each organisation has its own culture that differentiates it from the others. Organisational culture plays a role in determining behavioural boundaries and first increases awareness of the organisation's identity, increases participation, and acts as a mechanism of sense-making. Organisational culture plays an important role in regulating the behaviour of employees within an organisation and in bringing the organisation together.

Organisations today face a turbulent environment characterized by uncertainty and complexity. To survive in these conditions, organisations must adapt to a changing environment and develop a culture that provides a competitive advantage. In this study, the concept of organisational culture is one of the main topics that attract researchers' attention.

The purpose of the study is to go deeper into organisational culture by approaching a relevant gap, the influence that may be exerted by cultural stereotypes in promoting women into senior leadership roles. This study aims to explore organisational culture elements and women leadership and the role it plays in the promotion of women into leadership positions.

Since the 1990s, there has been a growing body of research that attempts to quantify the representation of women in leadership positions Hoobler et al. (2018). There is evidence that women are lagging men in reaching leadership positions in organisations, and the promotion of women has seen a general slowdown, with women accounting for one in four (24%) senior management positions globally,

argues Hoobler et al. (2018). In concurrence, Kunze and Miller (2017) state that women comprise of about half of the labour force but remain underrepresented among business leaders where women hold five percent of CEO (Chief Executive Officer) positions in Fortune 1000 companies.

Despite meta-analytic evidence that women are rated better leaders than men, the status and power gap between men and women persists, despite the fact that performance evaluation gaps ignore salient positions and power differentials in organisations (Hekman et al., 2017).

1.2 Problem Statement

There have been studies which broadly research on organisational culture and leadership yet studies pertaining to organisational culture and promoting women leaders are rare. Thus, the current study attempts to explore the effects of various organisational culture stereotypes on promoting women leaders into senior leadership roles.

An in-depth understanding of which organisational culture elements that affect the promotion of women into leadership positions seems to be lacking, hence the need to address this problem. According to Fernandez-Mateo and Kaplan (2019) indicated from their research findings that there is still work to be done to better understand how organisations shape their practices to foster women's perceptions on how they will be treated as valued members of a group in the organisation. This triggered the interest of the researcher to thus find out the influences of an organisation on women leaders' career progression.

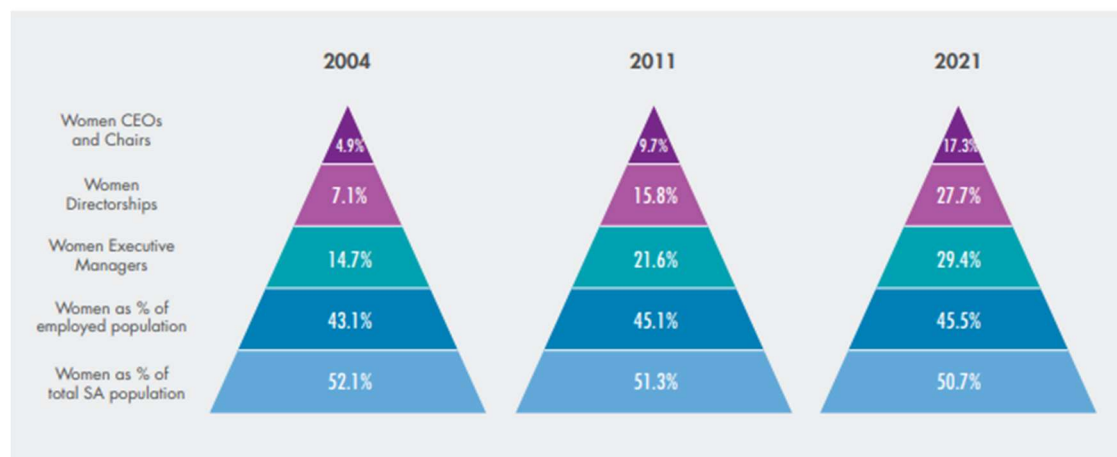
Studies have set to address gender neutrality in organisations in regards to gender in relation to power therefore allowing masculinity to be implicitly can be seen as the norm, especially in management (Carvalho et al., 2019). This masculinity is thus entrenched in organisations becoming the culture of the workplace, which is an area where the visibility of the links between the organisation and society are most prevalent. Therefore, the gender inequalities are replicated through invisible and gendering process.

Although women have gained some traction and power in the workplace, there is still a low percentage of women who are in top leadership and management positions. Women make up 51% of the South African population, according to StatsSA (2017). However, they are still underrepresented in positions of power and influence. Despite

the fact that the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill mandates 50% female representation in decision-making positions, the inequality still persists. Looking at South Africa's total workforce, women make up 44% of skilled positions. This statistic has remained unchanged since 2002 (StatsSA, 2019).

Figure 1.1

Women in Leadership Positions in South Africa



Note: From “South African Women in Leadership Census, 2021: Comparative Census Pyramid, 2004 - 2021” by Business Women’s Association of South Africa, 2021, p 12.

Globally, women hold less than a quarter of senior leadership positions in organisations and a third of organisations have no women in senior (Gipson et al., 2017). Supported by South African Women in Business Census (2021) stating that the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report reported that 27% of all global managerial positions are represented by women thus reinforcing the lack of women in leadership positions. Various interventions exist in South Africa and globally. However, it is not clear whether these interventions are yielding the intended results. From studies by (Kossek et al., 2017) suggest that there is factor create a gender supportive organisational culture, work environment and job design to assist in enhancing the perception of person-environment fit and career outcomes for women. However, organisations put the responsibility on women to “fit in” instead of creating a fit for women in the organisation. This is implicated in policies that are adopted to support women, Kossek et al., (2017) suggest that they seem to accommodate women within cultural assumptions that exist rather than redesigning work for gender equality.

There is limited work done on women leadership and studies to help understand women's experiences in the workplace. According to (Kossek et al., 2017) there is a need to investigate the effectiveness of different types of interventions across individual and organisational contexts which may compare career efficacy of organisational-focused, individual focused or multilevel change approaches and the degree to which an organisation is experienced as supportive, controlling, inclusive or marginalising. Therefore, this presents a gap that the current study aims to explore.

This lack of an in-depth understanding of the impact of organisational culture and stereotyping on women representation in senior leadership positions deprives policy makers information on which decisions can be made. It is possible that decisions are not based on up to date or empirical information. In addition, women employees continue to be disadvantaged in that correct policies and procedures do not get developed or applied to address this imbalance. Organisations continue to be deprived of the necessary contribution which would otherwise come from women leaders. Added responsibilities and promotion are factors in motivation and job satisfaction, furthermore gender identity viewed positively decreases conflict of identity within female leaders, in turn increases satisfaction and the motivation to lead (Barkhuizen et al., 2022). Women do not get the opportunities for this as they are underrepresented in senior roles. These and other hinderances need to be fully explored and understood for organisations and policy makers to formulate appropriate interventions to change the status quo.

Globally, women are, on average better educated than men but face challenges in reaching top management. However, women are 28% likely to be promoted to leadership positions as men. Gender-based organisational and contextual structures, practices and behaviours can lead to different career outcomes for men and women (Fernandez-Mateo & Kaplan, 2019).

Hoobler et al., (2018) suggest that progress should be monitored and discussed to ensure that specific strategic initiatives are developed and implemented in organisations, industries, sectors, communities, countries and regions around the

world. These facts suggest the importance of studying the influence of organisational culture stereotypes in promoting women leaders to senior leadership positions.

1.3 Purpose Statement

The aim of the study is to explore organisational culture pertaining to stereotypes as an influence on the career advancement of women, particularly women who aspire to be in leadership roles and those who want to advance to more senior leadership roles within an organisation. The focus will be on selected female leaders at the middle management level.

The study will contribute to the body of knowledge addressing the experiences of women in leadership roles by identifying several areas where progress can be made in improving the cultural climate for them.

The intent of the proposed study is to learn about women leaders, their circumstances, experiences, and the nature of their work environment. The focus will be on selected women leaders who are in full time employment at South African organisations.

1.4 Significance of the study

Schein (2010) emphasizes the role that organisational culture and leadership plays in creating, sustaining and modifying the content of the organisation. This study will provide comment on and exploration of the culture and stereotypes experienced by women leaders. This research will therefore benefit South African organisations, women leaders and policy makers, as it could encourage industry to take up more women leaders, as well as increasing awareness of biases that exist in organisations and therefore, work towards removing them.

It is anticipated that the research to be conducted may contribute to the fields of women empowerment, organisational culture and the ongoing conversation about the extent to which women face gender bias at work (Gupta et al., 2017). It may also lead to future research.

This study will contribute to South African industry because race and gender have been established to be the two most imperative demographic indicators leaders use to establish the degree to which co-worker leaders are different from themselves (Hekman et al., 2017). Increasing women representation at senior management level

could improve promotion rates for lower management women by weakening the association of leadership with masculinity. More women leaders can be seen in a positive light because they can serve as mentors, role models and advocates for aspiring female leaders (Kunze & Miller, 2017).

Even though having more female leaders can be seen as positive, this may convey a negative result if women in senior positions exercise the “queen bee” phenomenon. Kunze & Miller (2017) define the “queen bee” phenomenon as when a woman who has achieved career success in a male dominated environment blocks other women from advancing.

1.5 Limitations

Limitations can be defined as those potential weaknesses of the research identified by the researcher (Creswell, 2018).

There are several limitations that the study is subjected to, a purposive sampling of the study may create a bias as participants are chosen by the researcher. This method of collecting data is subject to bias because the interviews are semi-structured and questions may be leading to participants. Honest responses from participants may be difficult to gauge thus leaving space for misleading responses. The purposive nature of the sampling of the study may limit generalisability of the findings and may not be generalisable in all areas of leadership (Creswell, 2018), organisations and female leader advancement.

The research method adopted is qualitative and exploratory nature approach. The sample size may not want to participate and participants who first agree to be interviewed may retract their decision to be interviewed. Findings of the qualitative study may be subjected to other interpretations. Transcription and translation of recordings may affect the validity of the research as validity is about whether the findings are actually about what they appear to be about (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

This study was limited by the availability of resources such as finance and time. These limitations indicated that a limited sample was used. The location of the study was limited to a single province in South Africa, which was Gauteng. Senior and middle level women leaders were eligible to participate, thus the findings of the study were not generalisable to other locations and regions. Using qualitative data limited the findings to qualitative analysis, no quantitative methods were used to collect data.

1.6 Delimitations

Delimitations are parameters used to narrow the study undertaken by the researcher (Creswell, 2018).

The boundaries of the study will not go beyond women leader in middle and senior management level. The choice to narrow the study to women in middle and senior level management was based on limited time, financial resources and availability. The study will only interview women managers and because the study focused on the influence of organisational culture and women leaders, only leaders volunteering to participate were included in this study.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Leadership – According to (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018) leadership is defined as a process which involves influence therefore taking place in groups and involving common goals.

Organisation culture – Defined as the signs and symbols, shared practices and underlying assumptions of an organisations (Spicer, 2020).

Stereotypes – Stereotypes are reflective of general expectations about members of particular social groups (Ellemers, 2020).

1.8 Assumptions

This study was based on various assumptions. These assumptions assisted in understanding that certain level of uncertainty was possible in the research. It was assumed that individuals who participated in the research would provide concise and accurate data during collection without bias or prejudice.

The interviewed sample of women leaders represented all women in the corporate industry of South Africa was another assumption made by the researcher. It was assumed that the participants of the study had experiences and observed leadership practices in organisations before agreeing to participate in the study.

The next chapter reviews academic literature that supports the study, therefore presenting relevant theories and explore various parts of literature on which research questions are constructing.

Chapter 2 – Theory and Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Women are underrepresented in top leadership positions in organisations and it is so globally (Gupta et al., 2018). This is besides the fact that there is an increase in women entering the workforce and developing to be successful in their career paths. They have made substantial growth in reaching senior executive and management roles across the world. However, few top leadership positions are held by women (Schock et al., 2019). This global phenomenon still require attention. This study aims to explore the factors that drive this problem.

The attitudes regarding the effectiveness of female leaders often mirror local cultural beliefs about the role of females within a society. Repeatedly, women face prejudiced assessments of their competence as leaders (Smith et al., 2020). The chapter opens with a discussion of the identified theory that underpins the study, followed by a review of the literature relevant to the study, including gender and leadership, organisational culture, gender stereotypes, women leadership barriers and women leadership success factors.

The aim of the study is to explore the stereotypes that women leaders experience as far as rising to senior leadership roles in organisations is concerned.

2.2 Role Congruity Theory

The role congruity theory developed by Eagly and Karau (2002) indicates the inconsistency in women and leadership roles which leads to evaluations of women leaders that put them at a disadvantage because there is an underlying preference for men. The theory suggests two types of prejudices caused by the incongruity: the expected leadership role and women's gender role. The primary bias is that of perceiving prospective female leaders as being less promising than male counterparts because of the perceived gender role stereotypes based the leadership role being perceived to represent male stereotype characteristics. Female leaders evaluated as being successful in carrying out their leadership roles based on the incongruity between a leadership role and the expected gender role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These prejudices against women leaders create limited access to leadership roles and add more obstacles for women to overcome to become successful in leadership positions.

The theory also views female leaders less positively than male leaders and thus make it difficult for female employees to assume leadership roles. Gender stereotypes and prejudices occur in areas that enhance the perceptions of incongruity between female gender roles and leadership roles. This is shown through research paradigms in which evidence of this is shown. According to Eagly and Karau (2002) the incongruence between the perceived masculine role requirements and the gender stereotype hinders the development of women leaders. The perception of challenges in achieving leadership roles for women is embedded in socialisation as seen through the lens of the role congruity theory. Women have shown to have increased in middle management role. However, it is rare for them to reach senior leadership roles.

Thus, the theory suggests that evaluations rely on pre-existing attitudes instead of an individual's information and performance (Wiedman, 2020) and further states that women are seen as incongruent to leadership positions (Mölders et al., 2018). This implies that leadership roles require one to possess male traits like competitiveness, aggressiveness, independence, forcefulness, and decisiveness (Dwivedi et al., 2018a). Leadership roles from a role congruity perspective are associated with masculine characteristics where women are seen less congruent with the role of leadership. Generally, women are seen as less attractive candidates for leadership roles. When they reach these roles, women are appraised differently and less favourably, even when the same behaviours are portrayed by men (Gupta, et al., 2018).

The role congruity theory is embedded in the social role theory, where it evaluates the congruity between gender roles and other roles, especially leadership role (Wang et al., 2019). The theory builds upon global gender stereotypes by comparing beliefs and norms of how men and women should behave in society (Yang et al., 2020). Gender roles are established beliefs about stereotypical attributes of women and men, who are supposed to have divergent attributes and behavioural preferences. The role congruity theory, suggests that women are generally expected to have stronger communal traits. The perception of role congruity is most likely to negatively affect females. Zhang et al., (2019) states that the congruity theory is an extension of the social role theory which identifies major differences in socialisation that explain gender differences in behaviour and beliefs about the respective social roles of men

and women. According to the role congruity theory, leadership is a social role related to mediation that is more in line with the social role of men than the social role of women. In addition, the social role of the agent in relation to leadership remain unchanged in most social contexts, where more representative men are given more opportunities to participate in social interactions and thus gain more influence (Wang et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). This prejudice may explain for the perceived challenges for women in attaining leadership roles. These prejudices arise from the relations that are perceived by people when it comes to characteristics between members of a social group (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Furthermore, the theory suggests that perceived gender roles and leadership roles give rise to two types of prejudices. These prejudices come from when a perceiver holds a stereotype about a certain social group. Eagly and Karau (2002) emphasise that prejudice towards female leaders follows from an incongruity that an individual perceives between the characteristics of a woman and the requirements of a leader, explained by the social role theory. According to Gupta et al., (2019) the social role theory is solicited by the agency and communion paradigm, that highlights gender stereotypical beliefs. The social role theory proposes that men and women have different social roles, hence the perception that men are agentic, assertive, and independent whereas women should be communal, kind, sympathetic, sensitive and nurturing (Mai et al., 2020).

Role congruity theory is a build-up on the social role theory which takes on global stereotypes by comparing beliefs about how men and women should behave, known as injunctive norms and understanding how women and men actually behave known as descriptive norms (S. Yang et al., 2020). When injunctive and descriptive norms are seen to be congruent, individuals will be viewed more favourably. This means that when women take on more submissive roles and men show agentic characteristics, they will be viewed in a favourable way. In contrast, when the roles are incongruent to norms, individuals are viewed less favourably.

There exists prejudice and discrimination arising from gender role stereotypes which are generalised beliefs about traits attributed and prescribed to men and women, leading to women being underrepresented in top leadership roles. Gender stereotypes are attached when it comes to judging task performance of men while social relationships are used when it comes to judging women (Ellemers, 2018). Due to the stereotyping, assertiveness and performance are seen as agency in men and

warmth and care are viewed as communality in women. Ellemers, (2018) reinforces the idea that gender stereotypes influence the perceived potential for men and women when being selected for careers. The perception of performance by men and women are valued and rated differently. These inconsistencies come about when strong stereotypes which are evident when an assessor holds a stereotype about an individual or social group that is incongruent to the norm and attributes that are thought to be required for success in the role (Wiedman, 2020).

Even though about half of the population is female and female labour force is increasing, Luksyte et al., (2017) note that the prospective value of a women's contribution in the workplace is reaching high levels. For organisations to reach their full potential, they have to acknowledge and rely on female employees' innovative work behaviours. However, contributions that women make in the workplace may be viewed and valued differently from those of their male counterparts. The suspect reason is the role congruity theory.

Attributes of a successful leader are incongruent with communal characteristics as suggested by the theory. These characteristics are nurturing and compassion. Notably, these traits are normally ascribed to women and the discrepancy between leader and gender role often results in women being perceived as ineffective leaders (Luksyte et al., 2018). A prejudice therefore exists against prospective women leaders because leadership skills are more ascribed to men than to women. Women who are affective leaders tend to violate standards for their gender when they exert male-stereotypical, agentic attributes and not manifest female stereotype communal attributes. The women may be evaluated unfavourably for their gender role violation, especially by those who endorse traditional gender roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In agreement Ma et al., (2022) find that characteristics of agent, such as determination, independence and ambition, for leadership success requirements are considered to be less desirable to women than in men. Therefore, the influence of women depends on the index of their behaviour in a given social environment and those dominant women may experience a backlash, especially if they are perceived as lacking in warmth as opposed to morality (Ma et al., 2022). The theory, therefore, is relevant in that it encompasses the concepts of stereotypes about women and leadership which may suggest the reasons for the perceived challenges in achieving leadership roles for women.

This theory is widely used in literature to explain stereotypical norms women leaders are exposed to and expected social behaviour. This makes it an appropriate theory to use to explore stereotypes that exist in an organisation pertaining to the advancement of women leaders to more senior leadership positions in the workplace. This is the essence of this study.

2.3 Organisational Culture

Organisational culture represents a shared set of beliefs, values and norms, as well as assumptions that exist among organisational members that influence the attitudes of employees' thoughts, feelings, decisions and behaviours (Zheng et al., 2018). Organisational culture is also defined as a system of socially mediated behavioural patterns that help associate human communities with social environments (Dubey et al., 2017). Organisational culture is a consequence of leadership styles, characteristics of the organisation including structure, history, environmental factors and the cultural philosophy of the founder (Barkhuizen et al., 2022).

The culture of an organisation influences how an individual makes sense of themselves and organisational members as well as shaping an individual's priorities, values and behaviours (Zheng et al., 2018). Thus, the culture of an organisation comes from the members of the organisation who interact together to create customs, habits and develop an unofficial code of conduct which can support or impede the organisation's managerial aspirations.

Employee behaviour is determined by organisational culture which is a collection of values and beliefs, (Hogan & Coote, 2014). In addition, Kwantes and Boglarsky (2007) agree to define organisational culture as constant beliefs, viewpoints, morals and way of doing things. Shared normative beliefs and shared expectations for action become a collection of beliefs, values and actions forms a way for each employee or individual or group to work together to achieve a common goal.

According to Carvalho et al., (2019), male power is produced and reproduced in organisations, this becomes a place where male identity, status and power are constructed. Thus, the organisation and its hierarchy reflect gender power relations where men are seen as powerful and women as submissive. It results in a disproportionate number of women at the bottom and men on the top. The structuring of male managers is that they are the norm, while women are perceived as less fit for management because of the continual gender role tradition, therefore

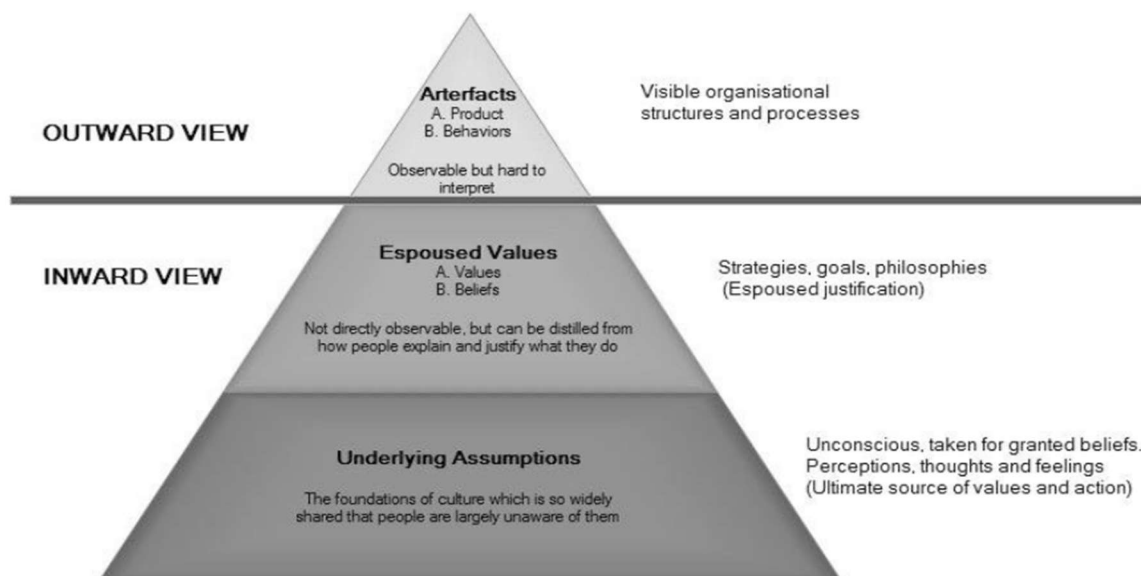
emphasising the role of women as that of being mothers, reflecting in organisations as a separation of functions.

Organisational practices may be influenced by organisations policies including governance and incentives but culture of an organisation is influenced by factors which are not tangible like culture (Graham et al., 2022). Chatman and O'Reilly (2016) distinguish between organisational culture and organisational climate. The organisational climate is a common perception of, and the meaning attached to the policies, practices, procedures, and behaviours' that employees observe which are rewarded and supported. Organisational climate becomes perceptions of certain aspects of the work environment, such as management support. Furthermore, Chatman and O'Reilly (2016), found that the two components are similar in that they are used to understand psychological phenomena and organisational behaviour. Both focus on a common meaning, but organisational culture is an individual's perception of some aspects of organisational structure and systems for forming group-level measurements. However, culture is an individual's assessment of the expected attitudes and behaviours required to fit into a group and be considered a member of the group.

As noted above, culture focuses on shared meanings, values and norms as a source of collective identity and commitment, while Chatman and O'Reilly (2016) place less emphasis on aspects of the work environment, such as safety or service. In addition, culture has normative powers to dictate appropriate attitudes and behaviours, which may mean that non-compliance with the norm may result in sanctions or exclusion from group membership.

After all, organisational culture is a complex phenomenon involving various expressions and laws of social life.

Iceberg models can be used to further investigate organisational culture levels as illustrated by Schein (2010), represented below.

Figure 2.1*Schein's Organisational Culture Model*

Schein's Organisational Culture Model

Note: From "ResearchGate: Schein's organisational culture model" by K. Doan, 2015, Organisational culture: How should we do things around here?

(<https://www.researchgate.net/figure/3-Scheins-Organisational-Culture-Model-fig2-288345206>)

As this model reveals the visible and invisible elements of organisational culture, it consists of three levels: behaviours, values, and assumptions. The first level is characterized by artifacts such as the employee's dress code, office furniture, equipment, employee behaviour, and the mission and vision of the organisation. The second level of this model is the value belonging to the invisible element, that is, the employee value expressed within the organisation. Individual values play a role in shaping the organisational culture. The thinking processes and attitudes of employees influences organisational culture. Graham et al., (2022) suggest that organisational culture directly or indirectly influences employee behaviour, loyalty to and performance of the organisation.

The third level consists of assumptions, which are employee values that cannot be measured but influence organisational culture. This is a practice that is not often discussed, but is implemented in its own right.

This study aims to focus on the second and third level of the iceberg model to determine how and which norms and behaviours influence the advancement of employees in the workplace.

Lee and Kramer (2016) identify strategies that organisations can follow to achieve diversity and inclusion. One such strategy is an organisational culture formed through the Purposeful Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (PDIS), and the other is an organisational culture formed through a compliance-based diversity policy. Strategies of purposeful diversity and inclusion have been identified as heuristics that guide organisational approaches to problem solving, learning, discovery and action, where they are embedded in organisational culture through strategic material and symbolic processes. It is a strategic resistance to institutional pressures or cultural pressures to conform to institutional norms and values, (Lee & Kramer, 2016). This culture takes the form of specific, proactive action and symbolic processes. In more traditional organisational cultures, diversity depends on the environment in which the organisation is located, such as its geographic, legal, and cultural environment. The diversity and inclusion policies of these institutions generally respond to pressures from the outside environment, which may include compliance with legal requirements to increase the level of diversity, such as anti-discrimination measures, anti-discrimination laws and affirmative action (Lee & Kramer, 2016).

Culture involves an individual level and displays how they make sense of the operations of the organisation, therefore giving meaning to what they experience in the workplace. This sense-making becomes the individual's interpretation of the events and situation at work (Kwantes & Boglarsky, 2007). Working people develop a mutual set of blueprints and perceptions on a way an organisation operates (Kwantes & Boglarsky, 2007). According to Pettigrew (1979) seminal work views culture as a system that operates for a specific group at a specific time, which has a publicly and collectively accepted meaning, and thus encourages member participation. Schein (2010) identifies three layers in the organisational framework, which are said to be interrelated. The first layer is made up of the basic assumptions and beliefs, the second, the norms and values regarding proper attitudes and behaviours and lastly the artifacts that can reflect symbols and languages form the third layer.

There is evidence that women lag behind men in management positions in companies as well as the hierarchical development of women has been seen to be

slow (Hoobler et al., 2018). There is a low ratio of women to men in managerial roles (Rosette et al., 2018). There exist the “think manager – think male” (p4) paradigm. This paradigm was to explore the nature of stereotypes assigned towards women when it comes to managerial roles. Women who want to progress in organisations need to make sure that their gender positions are seen as dominant and competent enough. This paradigm adds to how the traditional stereotype that leaders must possess agentic characteristics and are associated with men (Dwivedi et al., 2018).

On the contrary, a meta-analysis of seventy-one studies showed that dominant women are viewed as less likeable than dominant men in an organisation. They are also less hireable (Rosette et al., 2018). According to Rosette et al., (2018) women are disadvantaged in the process on hiring due to the perception of incongruence when organisations look for roles requiring dominance or general agentic behaviour. This is prevalent in male dominated environments.

This is consistent with the notion that gender stereotypes guide the positions that women are allowed to occupy in organisations and the resources accessible to them. Therefore, an appointment of a woman to occupy a position just because she is a woman, which could be as a token in the workplace. They may have negative experience from social isolation that are formed by social identity issues (Hoobler et al., 2018).

2.4 Gender and Leadership

Leadership is defined as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining relationships in the workplace through a variety of multidimensional skills, as a process that is successful when a leadership style is distinguished by a thorough understanding of how to relate to people, organisations, tasks and processes, themselves, and others (Dean & Perrett, 2020). Additionally, leadership involves a process of influence which takes place in groups and those groups should have a common goal (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018).

Gender roles are societally shared beliefs about the characteristics of women and men, made up of descriptive and compelling characteristics, and thus dictating what women and men do and what behaviours are appropriate for women and men (Hernandez Bark et al., 2016). Gender roles, therefore, influence a person's standards, behaviours and preferences. Hence the reason why people try to act in line with their gender roles.

In a study conducted by (Badura et al., 2018) results indicated that men emerge as leaders more than women. Drawing from this, women need to overcome some preconceptions for them to occupy leadership positions. According to Hernandez Bark et al., (2016) women have the same and at times higher educational levels than men and make about fifty percent of the workforce and yet they remain underrepresented in management positions, especially in senior management roles. Further to this, research has shown that women are successful leaders who perform at an equal capacity or even better than men in the same positions. Having distorted proportions of women in leadership positions can be demotivating and diminish their desire to aspire to be in managerial roles (Bark et al., 2016). Even though there is a rise in women education, seemingly organisations have failed to capitalise on the talents of females as this has not resulted in a significant increase in uptake of females into senior leadership roles. It can thus, be said that this is an indication of organisational culture creating barriers to women advancement into senior leadership positions.

Women are found to potentially inherit jobs that risk challenging to their leadership capability, a phenomenon known as the “glass cliff” (Athanasopoulou et al., 2017). Therefore, women who eventually make it to senior leadership positions or breakthrough the glass ceiling – a work barrier that is methodically invisible which hinder the advancement of women in the work place (Dickens, Womack, & Dimes, 2019), often find themselves in precarious leadership roles and may be scrutinised and criticised more than men and not well favoured when being evaluated even if the performance of both gender leadership is the same (Gupta et al., 2018). According to (Morgenroth et al., 2020) findings women would then find themselves on a glass cliff. This phenomenon is where female leaders are appointed to leadership positions where there is a period of underperformance which are seen as risky or precarious compared to that of their male colleagues, thus setting female leaders up for failure and pushing them over the edge (Main & Gregory-Smith, 2018). Women often do not have the support or the authority to achieve their strategic goals and find themselves serving a shorter term when compared to their male counterparts (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018).

An argument by Morgenroth et al., (2020) suggests that the masculine traits that are favoured by an organisation on day-to-day business operations are less favoured when it is time for crisis. Feminine characteristics are then considered favourably for

a leader to possess. In this situation women are perceived to be an appropriate fit for the leadership role and most likely will be chosen to be a leader. This glass cliff phenomenon is a possible factor contributing to the under-representation of women in top leadership (Main & Gregory-Smith, 2018) and may lead to the “think crisis-think female effect”.

The “glass cliff” analogy has been used extensively in literature on gender and management, referring to the invisible barriers that women and minorities face in organisation that hamper their progress to senior and executive management roles (Carvalho et al., 2019). It demonstrates discrimination in the workplace. The “glass cliff” metaphor has its focus on the structural gender inequality explanations to top management rather than individual explanations and therefore said to be simplistic in its nature because it implies that there is a single invisible barrier obstructing upward progression. However, the “glass cliff” phenomenon explanation does not pay attention to the barriers along the way to top management. The phenomenon also neglects to highlight systematic and subtle forms of discrimination. Lastly it focuses on stable careers in an organisation and does not analyse flexible careers such as fast job rotation and co-operation oriented organisational relationships (L. K. Yang et al., 2022).

A reason identified by Morgenroth et al., (2020) is that organisations may prefer females during a crisis is the gender stereotype shared in society thus resulting in a link between how men and women are perceived, and the perceptions of the attributes required for leadership in different situations. Women are, therefore, in a position of failure because they are not suitable in the stereotypic expectation of what is perceived to be an effective leader. As stated previously, women typically get selected to leadership positions at a time for crisis, which sets them up for failure (Dwivedi et al., 2018). Gupta et al. (2018) argues that when organisations are in a state of crisis, female communal traits associated with managing people becomes highly favoured making women more congruent with the characteristics needed for the leadership role rather than that of men.

The main explanations for gender inequality in organisations that is provided by literature are biases on women of sameness or differences in relation to men and the existence of the “glass ceiling” phenomenon underlining the power relation role

shaping gender inequality in organisations. There is literature aiming to find whether males and females are the same or different. Carvalho et al., (2019) finds that some studies show that there is no significant difference between men and women in terms of leadership styles. Some literature suggests that women and men are different and view women as inadequate, fomenting the notion that women should become more like men in their behaviour.

Factors that act as barriers for women hierarchical advancement and may discourage women to aspire to be in leadership roles are the domestic and household responsibilities that they face compared to their male counterparts (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018).

2.5 Gender Stereotypes

Stereotypes are a general reflection of expectations about members of a certain social group (Ellemers, 2018). The focus is on the task performance when judging men and social relationship when considering women. Thus, stereotypes can be defined as the beliefs about the characteristics, attributes and behaviours of members of a particular group (Gunia & Levine, 2019). The stereotypical behaviours can be positive or negative because they may give the perceiver some kind of proof that gives cognitive reality to any characteristic that he or she may have incorrectly ascribed to target a person and serve as grounds for expectations about a targeted behaviour (van Rossem, 2019).

The beliefs reflect more generalisations rather than individual qualities. In turn, these prejudices may be translated subtly to discriminatory behaviours in the workplace, especially in human resource managerial decision making such as promotions, recruitment and selection (Ellemers, 2018) preventing women to be promoted to senior leadership positions. This gender bias arises from a societal gender role stereotype which is attributed to generalised beliefs about the characteristics attached to men and women. The stereotype dictates, describes and prescribes the qualities and behaviours of men and women (Gupta, et al., 2018).

The gender stereotype may be explained by the social role theory which suggests that managers have expectations about candidates relating to behavioural tendencies and activities which are coherent with social roles. These may be based on gender, economic standing and other demographic subsets (Glass & Cook,

2018). The social role theory explains that men and women act in accordance with their subscribed social role, which is often segregated along gender lines. In this regard, women are seen or perceived to be more involved in care giving, characteristics ascribed to being more nurturing, caring and concerned with personal relationships. Contrary to this, men are seen by society as possessing masculine traits associated with leadership, strength and assertiveness (Ellemers, 2018). Schein (2001) has indicated a psychological barrier to women career advancement as the “think manager – think male” phenomenon which has been seen to perpetuate bias against women in different careers. This phenomenon influences managerial selection, placement, promotion, training decisions and sex role stereotyping.

When relating to leadership positions, candidates are expected to be technical and have attributes perceived to be masculine. Women may be perceived as not possessing enough of masculine traits or leadership qualities required for promotion to senior level positions, which hinder their career progress (Gupta et al., 2018). These gender biases, stereotypes and male-typed leadership agendas have moulded the prescriptive expectations about the ability for women to lead, therefore undermining the success of women in leadership (Dwivedi et al., 2018). This gender difference stereotype on whether an individual can become a leader has a negative presumption that women need to overcome to ascend to leadership roles. (Badura et al., 2018) argue that perceptions of a leader in organisations are associated with high ratings of job performance and career progression. This way, the gender difference in perceptions of leadership result in an increasingly negative impact on female career progression.

Having a similar leadership style may not translate into the equal evaluation of the effectiveness of leadership for men and women. This is due to the impact of gender stereotypes in the evaluation and advancement of leaders because of the generalised perceptions about the traits of women and men. The traits or characteristics can be said to fall under two categories which are agency and communality (Hentschel et al., 2018). Agency are characteristics and behaviours associated with taking charge and being in control of a situation or group. Men are perceived to be more agentic, whereas communality are characteristics and behaviours associated with taking care of others and building relationships, traits perceived to lean more towards females (Badura, et al., 2018). Gender stereotypes

thus become prescriptive in determining behaviours expectation of and presented by a gender.

The agency stereotype is specifically damaging for females in the workplace, predominantly because workplace roles are traditionally considered to be male (Mölders et al., 2018). If women are seen to be competent in relation to the stereotype, it appears that they become socially penalised for violating gender norms, especially when it comes to leadership roles (Mölders et al., 2018). The agentic stereotype stipulates that women are seen as less agentic than men and therefore perceived to be less likely to emerge as leaders. The agency stereotype therefore explains the differences in gender and leadership.

Organisations play a part in influencing stereotypes through practices such as recruitment, promotion and the culture of the organisation. The workplace can also promote stereotyping through the division of labour according to gender.

In South Africa, some organisations have introduced quotas for women representation in leadership structures to encourage the inclusion of women in areas where they are usually underrepresented (Faniko et al., 2017). Additionally, organisations can implement programs and policies aimed at supporting and retaining females, but these initiatives can create even more barriers for females if not designed and handled carefully (Gloor et al., 2020).

According to StatsSA (2022), women in South Africa make up 51% of the total population. The South Africa's Constitution had set out a principle of gender equality stated in the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill which calls for 50% representation in decision making positions. Even though women make up more than half of South African population, they are still significantly underrepresented in senior leadership roles. On a positive note, though the Business Women's Association of South Africa (BWASA) (2021) found that women make up 45.5% of the total employed workforce in the country but these jobs are at lower levels where StatsSA (2022) indicates that the figures have not moved since 2002. There has been great improvement to represent women in senior leadership roles. However, the number still remains under 50%. In a study conducted by BWASA women in Leadership Census 2021 uncovered that 27.7% of Directors, 29.4% of executive managers and 17.3% of women held the Chief Executive Officer and Chairpersons combined.

These affirmative action and quotas initiatives do not come without their own challenges where Mölders, et al., (2018) states that there is also argument that quotas are against liberal principles, consequently favouring women by hindering competition and undermining women achievements. The introduction of quotas often requires an organisation to change its culture, disrupting the status quo. Women also tend to resist such measures because they promote the stereotype that those benefiting from the policies are not adequately qualified for the positions and are incapable of succeeding on their own merits (Faniko et al., 2017).

The orientation towards leadership in the workplace is shaped by individuals' position in the organisational hierarchy and the existing gender roles and expectations (Glass & Cook, 2018). Embedded in the socialisation theory which postulates and encourages different behaviours in men and women influence gender differences in the leadership style that females adopt.

Against this backdrop, there is an increase in communality being considered as a trait that is beneficial to have as a leader. Female leadership advantage, referring to a situation when women are seen to be more successful than men in leadership behaviours that require an amount of communality and relationship-oriented leadership behaviours (Mölders et al., 2018). In contrast to the agentic traits, being in communality could be connected to women being seen as qualified for leadership and deserving of leadership role.

In a study conducted by Wille et al., (2018), they suggest that organisations can make an effort in promoting gender equity in leadership by ensuring that women are not penalised for showing agentic characteristics. Organisations must ensure that stereotypes are countered by raising awareness of gender stereotypes, taking a zero-tolerance approach to gender-based valuations and applying a more structured approach to evaluation and promotion systems.

2.6 Women Leader Barriers

Many organisations have masculine characteristics entrenched in their setting, which create barriers for women in leadership positions (Dean & Perrett, 2020).

Pertaining to career and education Glass and Cook (2017) stipulate those women leaders have a higher educational level than that of male colleagues. Furthermore, women in executive positions tend to have more experience in community and

service organisations. Women have been shown to be strongly embedded in social and professional networks compared to their male counterparts (Glass & Cook, 2017).

Females face incongruities between gender roles and leader role expectations. These incongruities can lead to demand for both agentic and communion for female leaders. Having both agentic and communion traits may pose a major challenge because they are seen to be opposite spectrums. Thus, having a higher agency may lead to a perceived deficit in communion characteristics (Zheng et al., 2018). This opposition is more prominent in women than men. A contradicting view by Athanasopoulou et al., (2018) posit that in the context of organisations, women have limited access to networks and face lack of sponsorship thus impeding on the career advancement of women.

When compared to their male counterparts, women with high potential are over mentored and under sponsored (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018). The lack of sponsorship results in less chances for women to advance to top roles and women become reluctant to try for these roles. Overcoming these barriers requires women to have an enormous degree of self-development which involves developing networks and seeking out mentors to assist with their career development (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018). While Wille et al., (2018) suggest that organisations need to provide resources to women leaders and those women aspiring to leadership positions. These resources include support and mentoring which will advocate for the development and success of female leaders.

Women who have been deemed successful and occupy senior leadership positions are expected to participate in improving opportunities for other women. Faniko et al., (2017) express that this expectation will most likely not suffice as it connects to the “Queen Bee” phenomenon. This is where women who have reached their career success become critical towards junior female colleagues and will not advocate for initiatives that support women as a whole. This phenomenon is identified and described by three classes of characteristic behaviours: keeping away from junior women, associating with higher status group which are male and justifying the status quo by opposing policies that would resolve the gender inequalities (Faniko et al., 2017).

This label of queen bee is allocated to women leaders who detach themselves from other females in the workplace. Due to that most of the leadership positions are occupied by male leaders (Arvate et al., 2018). The female leader adjusts to the masculine culture in the organisation and pursue individual success. The queen bee phenomenon is normally seen where women are in a highly male dominated work environment (van Veelen et al., 2020). According to Arvate et al., (2018) the behaviour is in response gender inequality that has been experienced by the female leader. In agreement (van Veelen et al., 2020) states that queen bee phenomenon is prevalent in women who have experienced gender bias and gender discrimination in their career progression which manifest itself as low gender identification. Women, therefore find themselves adopting stereotypical masculine characteristics. However, the queen bee behaviour is displayed towards lower-level women and not towards women leaders in the same level (van Veelen et al., 2020).

Further components that may hinder women's career advancement are trade-offs that women make on work-life balance inhabiting the area in which women operate and their own experiences. In doing this, women often then find themselves attempting to balance work and nonwork spheres resulting in them experiencing negative job satisfaction with self-esteem and career advancement consequences (Athanasopoulou et al.,2017).

Because women take primary responsibility for raising families, at times taking time off from work, career advancement and progress gets delayed and stalled when compared to male colleagues or women without families and thus making it hard to catch up with their peers (Athanasopoulou et al.,2017).

The homophily theory proposes that the ability of women to advance successfully as leaders is reliant on the presence of other female leaders within the organisation (Glass & Cook, 2018). This encourages women who have managed to achieve senior leadership roles to support other females through networking, mentoring initiatives and sponsorship (Snellman & Solal, 2022). The theory comes from the similarity attraction theory which suggests that individuals tend to be attracted to individuals that are alike, thus when confronted by a comparable individual based on observable traits such as gender, the assumption is that they share similar values, perspectives and priorities (Glass & Cook, 2018). This results in a positive evaluation of a similar individual and thus lead to homophily, referring to similar demographics within a group. The theory continues to suggest that social similarity is imperative

among groups to overcome distrust and dearth of support when individuals are among the minority in a team or organisation (Glass & Cook, 2018).

Another aspect of barriers for women leaders is the leadership emergence which is a denotation of whether a person has managed to reach a leadership role in a group or perceived as being a leader. While leadership effectiveness are perceptions of whether a leader is effective (Landay et al., 2019). Eagly and Karau (2002) state that men are more inclined to emerge as leaders than women. Women are also, mostly rated as having a higher derailment potential. Evidence suggests that women and men are equivalently effective as leaders. However, men are ranked as more effective in what is perceived as effective in masculine role and women are rated more effective in what is perceived feminine roles (Landay et al., 2019). On the contrary de Hoogh et al., (2015) assert that the males are perceived to be more effective as leaders whereas women who display the same leadership characteristics are perceived to be less effective and that women who display dominance are negatively associated with likability.

The expectation that women must conform to female characteristics, such as gentle, kind, empathetic and nurturing usually denotes those women are perceived as being likable but not competent in decision making roles. Women find themselves in conflict with other commitments which include work because the expectation that women take on more family responsibilities which are perceptions that are rooted in social norms (Bishu & Headley, 2020). The social expectation, thus, may lead to the so-called gendered organisations, producing muscular advantage and opportunities for men in the work place and may incentivise an employee who is committed to work over personal responsibilities. Gendered organisations make networking and mentoring for aspiring women to male dominated positions less accessible and distinguish between roles for women and men. Yang et al., (2022) refer to this as the glass wall where women are seen in positions of less authority and find themselves in career stagnation.

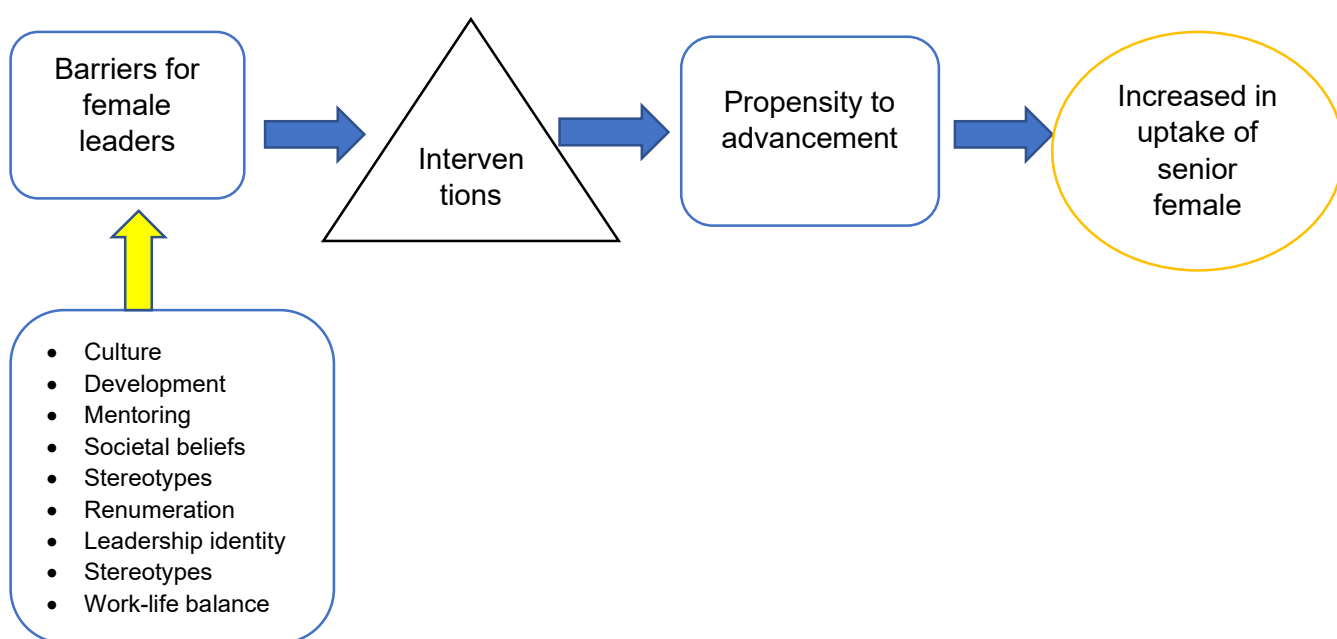
The “think manager – think male” culture can also be displayed by gendered organisations as explained by Dwivedi et al., (2018) who indicate that masculine traits which are linked to competition, ambition and self-confidence are associated with successful managers. Whereas women who portray masculine traits at work are punished for the incongruity with gender expectations. On the other hand, women who portray feminine traits may be viewed as not having leadership qualities to be

successful in leadership roles, creating barriers for women trying to advance their careers to leadership roles.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

Figure 2.2

Conceptual Framework – Uptake of Female Leaders to Senior Leadership Positions



2.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a wealth of research into female underrepresentation in top leadership positions. However, the absence of research into organisational culture in influencing the promotion of women leaders to senior leadership roles suggests that there is a scholarly and business need to comprehend how the culture of an organisation can influence the promotion of female leaders.

Research questions based on the arguments and conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 are detailed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 – Research Questions

3.1 Introduction

The literature on the Role congruity theory, organisational culture, gender stereotypes, gender and leadership, and women leader barriers were reviewed in the previous chapter. The review culminated into research questions discussed below.

The primary research question is:

How do women experience the culture of an organisation in their career progression?

The following form the secondary questions for the study:

- How do women face assessment and evaluation challenges as leaders?
- What stereotypes do women experience post – appointment into leadership roles?
- How does organisational practice impact on leadership and development of women leaders?

3.2 Research Question 1

How do women experience the culture of an organisation in their career progression?

Career progression can be said to be an upward movement in relation to job level, role and title within an organisation's hierarchy. It also signifies increase in income. Therefore, the research question aims to explore the different experiences that females may have had in relation to their promotion to senior leadership roles within their organisation. The question also seeks to understand the lived experiences of the participants as some may have been stereotyped and therefore missed opportunities for advancement or for growth. In addition, the question also seeks to determine the attitudes of those people that are surrounding the female leaders to obtain their experiences and perceptions and if any biases towards female leaders exist.

3.3 Research Question 2

How do women face assessment and evaluation challenges as leaders?

Female leaders seem to hit a point where career progress is hindered for advancement and women reach senior leadership roles, are faced with the glass cliff which sets women up for failure. Therefore, the question aims to solicit answers in relation to how women leaders are confronted with assessment and evaluation when seeking to advance into senior leadership roles. The question also seeks to understand the challenges experienced by these women when being evaluated for senior leadership roles and whether there are any gender related ways to act in order to be considered for advancement.

3.4 Research Question 3

What stereotypes are experienced by women post – appointment into leadership roles?

Literature reviewed in Chapter 2 suggests that women are expected to exert agentic traits to be viewed as leader like. The research question seeks to understand the stereotypes experienced by women leaders.

Criteria to promotion to senior level positions may be found to be unfavourable to women leaders, these criteria disadvantage women as leadership emergence characteristics are from the perceptions of the decision maker culture such as “think manager – think male”, thus, the question also aims to find the lived biases after being appointed to leadership positions. The question seeks to understand the opportunities that are affected due to stereotyping within an organisation.

3.5 Research Question 4

How does organisational practice impact on leadership and development of women leaders?

Research shows that organisational culture can be referred to as people within an organisation judging about things are done thus shaping behaviour and attitudes

which become shared values, norms and beliefs. When women work in a business with a masculine organisational culture, the practices in such organisations make it difficult for women to enter and hold positions of authority and power due to their perceived communal traits and gender. The organisational practices include managerial selection, promotion, performance evaluation, training and development which may result in discrimination in the workplace by gender stereotyping. These practices may affect criteria to promotion, opportunity to promotion and remuneration offered to women for the same position as their male counterpart.

This question also seeks to understand whether the organisational practices have impact on the development of women leaders. In addition, the question aims to understand whether these practices support women's development to proceed to senior leadership roles.

Chapter 4 – Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The chapter aims to outline the research design and methodology employed to answer the research questions stipulated in Chapter 3. A qualitative approach was used to explore the experiences of senior and middle management women in leadership to obtain insights in to the stereotypes that drive the advancement of women leaders in the workplace.

The study applied a mono research method through qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, aimed at answering the research questions identified in chapter 3. Data collected was analysed and categorized according to identified themes and linked to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

4.2 Choice of Research Design

4.2.1 Purpose of Research Design

Research design is defined as a plan for collection of data in a study. It is aimed at answering research questions (Bhattacharjee, 2017). The research design must follow a three-phase process, the data collection process, the instrument development process and the sampling process.

Data collection methods can be grouped into two categories which are positivist and interpretive. Interpretive methods adopt an inductive approach which begins with data and attempts to derive a theory about a phenomenon of interest from the observed data. This study adopted the interpretive approach.

The research methodology was shaped by looking at and considering the layers of the research onion, (Appendix A) (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.2.2 Philosophy

A research philosophy is considered to be what the researcher perceives to be truth, reality and knowledge (Bonache, 2021). This is supported by Saunders and Lewis (2018) who define research philosophy as assumptions about a process in which the researcher sees the world and the development and nature of knowledge. These

assumptions influence both the research strategy chosen for the study as well as the methodology selected as a part of the research strategy (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The first philosophy a researcher may adopt is positivism, which is a type of empiricism in which empiricists believe that knowledge must be objective and free of bias from the researcher's beliefs and value systems (Bonache, 2021). Further to this, positivists are of the belief that facts exist and can be proven. The realism view accompanies positivism as a paradigm which influenced the research methodology because what we perceive through our senses accurately depicts the world (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). We find a contrast on critical realism which Saunders and Lewis (2018) mention that it concentrates on explaining what we see and experience in terms of underlying reality structures that shape observable events.

The last philosophy is interpretivism which suggests that truth and knowledge are subjective, with culture and history therefore based on peoples' experiences and their understanding (Bonache, 2021). This philosophy informs the way in which data is collected, interpreted and analysed. It is essential because it deals with the explanations and represents a specific set of circumstances and individuals coming together at a specific point in time to create a unique social (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Interpretivism is concerned with understanding specific individuals in a particular time and place, therefore making sense of their world. An interpretivist perspective deemed relevant by Saunders and Lewis (2018) in fields involving organisational behaviour because the complexity of the organisations condition is complex and presents a set of contexts and individuals coming together at a certain time. The researcher aims to in-depth understanding of the experiences of the participants and understand their behaviours. Hence, the philosophy adopted for this study was interpretivism because it is deemed to be the best suited to apply as given its nature, it enabled the researcher to understand what is going on in a work organisation and tries to examine its validity.

4.2.3 Research Approach

There are two main types of reasoning in research which are inductive and deductive (Stephens et al., 2018). In the deductive approach, the data is collected so as to analyse the research problem. Theories are not developed for this approach but are tested.

The inductive approach, theories are developed and tested (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). According to Stephens et al., (2018) inductive approach employs observations about individuals' experiences to larger generalisations and theories. The inductive approach was applied for the purpose of this study. Themes, concepts and patterns from the data collected were identified. This approach was appropriate for the study as it was based on learning from understanding meanings people attach to events.

4.2.4 Research Strategy

Research strategy indicates the response to a research question and shows, the way in which the researcher would go about answering it. Research strategy is guided by research questions. Research strategy is defined as a course of gathering and deciphering of information with a clear objective (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The case study strategy concentrates on a smaller sample number so that processes can be understood in depth. The case study strategy was adopted due to its exploratory nature because it seeks to understand the sample in depth.

4.2.5 Methodological Choices

There are two main research approaches that can be used in research, based on the objectives, and needs the research seeks to fulfil. The two approaches are quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The third method is one that combines the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods in the same study. In this research study, the qualitative approach was seen to be the most appropriate given the research questions and the research objectives that have been identified. This chosen approach was based on semi – structured, open-ended questions interview instead of the analysis given by other approaches of research.

Qualitative research is viewed as an inquiry process based on developing a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of a social problem. This research process usually involves an analysis of the issues and procedures that arise, such as data collected in the context of participants, inductively generated data, from specific articles to generate topics. This kind of design uses an inductive style with an emphasis on individual feelings and the researcher interpreting the data into meaningful themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It is distinguished by data collection in a natural setting, with the researcher serving as a key instrument. The study

includes detailed descriptions of the process rather than specific outcomes. In order to provide meaning to the research consumer, the data is analysed in an inductive approach.

Mono method approach is a single method approach, described by Saunders and Lewis (2018). Where a mixed method is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research method in the same study. This study followed the mono research method through qualitative research through the use of semi-structured, open-ended interviews to address the research problem and research objectives.

4.2.6 Time Horizon

(Denscombe, 2021) describes cross-sectional research as a glimpse of a specific research setting at a certain period. Here, data is collected and analysed in a short period of time. Cross-sectional research can be used in both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Longitudinal study is described as the study of change and development over time (Bhattacharjee, 2017). This study is beneficial in collecting data to track change. For this study, the cross-sectional method was adopted as the study aimed to collect data at a particular time and collected within a short space of time. The reason for the selection of the time horizon was time constraints. The study was required to be submitted within nine months.

4.3 Research Methodology

The methodology adopted discusses the methods in which data is collected and analysed. Research methodology can develop in three ways, by designing exploratory, explanatory or descriptive research design. Exploratory study aims to find new insights and asks new questions to evaluate a topic in a new light. Explanatory research is a study of a situation or a problem to gain understanding of relationships between variables while a descriptive study is designed to produce precise representation of people, events or situations (Creswell and Creswell, 2018)

The research method that was applied in this study was an exploratory design method using the qualitative approach. The exploratory study was conducted through semi-structured and open – ended interviews with women in leadership

positions and those aspiring to enter more senior leadership roles in selected organisations in the Gauteng region. These individuals have provided new insights to the research question.

4.3.1 Population

McGivern (2021) defines a population as the universe of enquiry or individuals, associations, occasions or things that are pertinent to the exploration of the research problem. Saunders and Lewis (2018) agree with this description and assert that a population is the total arrangement of gathering individuals in a group, organisations or places. The population of the study consisted of identified female employees based in the Gauteng province of South Africa.

4.3.2 Unit of Analysis

A unit of analysis can be described as a person, collective, or object that is targeted by the study which may include individuals, organisations, technologies and countries (Bhattacharjee, 2017). It assists in answering the question of 'what' and 'who' is being studied, elaborates Creswell and Creswell (2018). Thus, unit of analysis can include individuals, group of individuals, organisations, countries, technology, and objects that are the aim of the study.

The study identified the unit of analysis to be female individuals in leadership roles and those who aspire to be in senior leadership position in organisations that are based in Gauteng province.

4.3.3 Sampling Method and Size

Sampling techniques can be categorised as probability sampling and non-probability sampling (McGivern, 2021). Probability sampling is a technique where a sample is selected at random from a complete list of the population (Saunders and Lewis, 2018). The researcher who selects the samples knows the chances and ability to select each member and has no influence on the selected members. The selection process should ensure that an equal and homogeneous population is represented. The sampling model that represents the population needs to be updated, supplemented and complete.

With non-probability sampling techniques, a complete list of the population is not known. The probability of a person being chosen is not recognised, so the sample cannot be chosen at random (McGivern, 2021). This means that the researcher does not have knowledge of the chance of a member being selected. Categories of non-probability sampling are divided into convenience sampling, snowball sampling, quota sampling and judgement sampling or purposive sampling (Saunders and Lewis, 2018).

For qualitative data, a judgement sampling can be used in selecting the sample, where the researcher uses their own judgement to select a sample. Therefore, the researcher actively chooses a sample that will best help answer the research question. The sample must meet a set criterion which helps answer the research question. The sampling technique is convenient and cost effective (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Purposive sampling was used in this study to select the sample for semi-structured interviews. The identified participants from organisations were contacted by the researcher telephonically. This method is deemed most appropriate for this study because it ensured that a representative sample from organisations of individuals was chosen. This non-probability judgement sampling technique was used as it was the best suited to answer the research question.

The sample size was sixteen individuals selected from the identified organisations. The intention was to interview eight of senior managers and eight middle managers. However, only seven middle managers and nine senior managers were interviewed. The eighth middle manager was not available.

The expected saturation was reached by the time the sixteen interviews had taken place. According to (Mthuli et al., 2021) saturation is reached when further reiterations among theory and information yield no new experiences or changes in the current theory or peculiarity of interest where extra information yields no negligible change in the main categories or the connections. Several authors have suggested different sample sizes for a qualitative study such as this one ranging from six to twenty-five (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mthuli et al., 2021). The interviewed sample size of sixteen falls reasonably well within this bracket.

4.3.4 Measurement Instrument

A semi-structured interview schedule with open-ended questions was used to collect data for this study. In-depth interviews were conducted with each of the selected participants. The interview guide was created based on the specific themes identified in the research questions. The interview schedule was pilot tested with a subject matter expert to gauge the appropriateness of the questions. In addition, one other person was asked to answer the interview questions in order to determine how long the interview was likely to take. Feedback from the pilot test was incorporated into the final interview schedule.

4.3.5 Data Gathering Process

When considering collection Schmiedel et al., (2019) suggest that the amount of data should be large enough so that the results of the survey can be generalised in terms of representativeness, and appropriate choices should be taken into account when collecting data.

Participants were informed via email, telephonically and WhatsApp text messaging about the study for them to consent to taking part. The interviews took place at the work premises of the participants in keeping with the requirement to obtain data within the context of the participants environment. Where physical contact posed a challenge, online platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams were used to conduct the interviews. Questions were read from the interview schedule to which participants were expected to respond. Follow up questions were asked to seek further clarity where necessary. The interviews lasted approximately an hour. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed into text for analysis.

4.3.6 Analysis Approach

The data collected from the study was prepared and organised by reducing the data into themes (Cypress, 2018). The transcripts from the interview process underwent an analysis to determine the main themes and findings. The main points were grouped into categories answering the relevant research questions. The themes were determined through coding and representing the data through figures, tables and discussion.

The study adopted a five-step process of qualitative data analysis as suggested by (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018). The five steps include compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting and concluding. This involved transcribing the data to enable sense-making from the data. The transcription was done manually by writing out the text from the audio recordings. Once the responses have been collated, consistent and organised, the data was disassembled.

Disassembling involved separating data and creating code groupings which are meaningful. This was done through coding which is defined as processing raw data into usable data by identifying themes, concepts and ideas that have a connection with each other (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). A code is a short, descriptive word and phrases that assign meaning to the data (Lester et al., 2020).

When no new codes emerged, the process moved to reassembling phase where codes (Appendix G) were codes were categorised to themes (Appendix H). These themes capture an imperative aspect of data in relation to the research questions and show a level of meaning within the data. There are two ways in which data can be put together, identified by Castleberry and Nolen (2018) into hierarchy and matrices. Hierarchies are visual tools that cluster similar codes. Matrices are made up by arranging participants roles, themes, variables and emerging concepts into rows and columns. Both methods were used to provide structure and communicate relationships among codes.

Interpreting involves the researcher making analytical conclusions from the codes and themes identified. Castleberry and Nolen (2018) further explain steps involved in interpretation to be complete. There should be a beginning, middle and end to show how the interpretation was drawn. In addition, interpretation should be fair in that other researchers should reach similar interpretation if given the same set of information. The depiction of interpretation should be an accurate representation of raw data, thus adding value and credibility to the study. Lastly, concluding were the researchers' responses to the research questions.

4.3.7 Ethical Considerations

Given the nature of this study, there were several considerations. To start with, all participants were to be treated with respect and courtesy. An informed consent strategy was implemented to clarify to all participants the purpose and method of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity of individual respondents was guaranteed and permission to record the interview was requested from the participants. No names were required or obtained from participants to ensure anonymity. Further, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the interview at any point should they feel uncomfortable.

Further to this, an invitation letter clearly stating the purpose of the interview was shared with the participants. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form. The data collected was saved with a password protection in order to prevent unauthorised access.

To continue collecting data, the researcher attained ethical clearance form from the Gordons Institute of Business Science (GIBS) Ethics Committee prior to commencing with the data collection (Appendix C). Furthermore, all participants were requested to complete an Informed Consent Form (Appendix D) after the interview proceedings had been explained. To maintain anonymity of participants when reporting findings, the participants names were altered to pseudonyms.

4.4 Quality Controls

Findings from a research study can only be useful if they can be trusted. This means that the information in the research results should be credible, reliable and transferable so that they can be trusted

Triangulation involves the practice of looking at things from more than one perspective (Gill et al., 2018). This means using different methods and different data sources. The researcher is able, therefore to gain a better understanding of the matter under study, increase the completeness of the study, and provide inferred richness and a more complete understanding of the study. That means more confidence in the results. Triangulation minimises errors and biases, optimising accuracy in the data collection and analysis process.

4.4.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness allows the researcher to make their own research practices visible and is therefore auditable, allowing others to better understand the findings produced (Gill et al., 2018). There are four criteria for establishing trustworthiness: credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability.

4.4.2 Credibility

This criterion includes determining the reliability and validity of the results of the study from the perspective of the research participant. From this perspective, only participants of the study can really determine the reliability of the results, because the goal of a qualitative study is to understand the experiences from the point of view of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In this study, credibility was established through interview sessions and triangulation of the data. The study ensured triangulation through multiple data sources by interviewing candidates who hold different viewpoints and are different levels of power (Natow, 2020). In this study, interviews conducted with women who were in senior leadership positions and those who were in middle management roles.

To ensure truth in the study, the researcher conducted women in leadership analysis on the data collected during the semi-structured interviews. The analysis involved collating the data and identifying themes that were consistent which drive the insights found in the study. Triangulation of sources was used in the study by collecting data from different sources using the same method and interviewing the participants at different points in time.

4.4.3 Transferability

Transferability is the level to which the results of the qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. From a qualitative point of view, transferability is primarily the obligation of the person doing the generalising (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). If there is a strong degree of relevance, researchers can adapt their interpretations or conclusions from one context to another context (Gill et al., 2018). The researcher enhanced transferability by describing the research context and the assumptions that are the focus of the research. Even though

transferability is not the main purpose of the research, the researcher had aimed to enhance the transferability of the study findings by describing the literature and research findings. This has enabled the researcher to relate the research findings to similar experiences.

Transferability is communicated through sampling factors, which include the study location, number of respondents and time frame of data collection and analysis.

4.4.4 Conformability

Gill et al., (2018) refer to conformability for the researcher in an attempt to identify specific hypothesis and predictions in the results of their research. Conformability therefore is the degree to which results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. Some methods can be used to ensure conformability, including document methods for verifying and rechecking data during the data collection and analysis process. To create triangulation, the research used different sources and methods to interpret the data collected. The study employed multiple data analysis methods where an inductive approach was used to gather findings and concepts from collected data. An inductive approach was followed by using deriving concepts from themes emerging from the data analysis.

4.4.5 Dependability

Dependability in this study was established through keeping all gathered information during the study in a safe place and information was treated with confidentiality throughout the process. The study ensured that all methods used are documented, and the logic of the results and conclusions of the study were clarified, to increase the dependability of the research. Dependability is assured by a detailed research methodology, allowing a reader to ascertain that proper research practices were followed and allowing future researchers to repeat the study.

4.5 Limitations

There are several limitations that the study was subjected to. Due to the purposive sampling method used, the study may create a bias as participants are chosen by the researcher. This method of collecting data is subject to bias because the interviews are semi-structured and questions may be leading to participants. Honest

responses from participants may be difficult to gauge thus leaving space for misleading responses.

The research method is qualitative and exploratory approach. Therefore, details from the analysis may be lost thus accurate findings need to be determined. The identified sample size may not want to participate and participants who first agree to be interviewed may retract their decision to be interviewed. Transcription and translation of recordings may affect the validity of the research.

Access to females in senior leadership roles, due to the busy nature of senior leaders setting appointments was through their Personal Assistant and the date given for the interview may be outside the time frame needed to complete the study. To mitigate this limitation, the researcher had to rely on external network to assist and arrange interviews.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methods that were used during the study and research designs thus creating a path which the researcher has conducted the study. The chapter has shown how the outcomes of the study were obtained in line with meeting the objectives of the research. Therefore, discussing the research methods used during the research process. The following Chapter 5 will present key findings from the data collected during the interview process.

Chapter 5 – Presentation of Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents key findings from interviews with sixteen female leaders, both in middle and senior leadership levels. These interviews were aimed at answering the research questions posed in Chapter 3. The interviews conducted have assisted in providing meaningful insights into the experiences of female leaders in connection with stereotypes in the workplace.

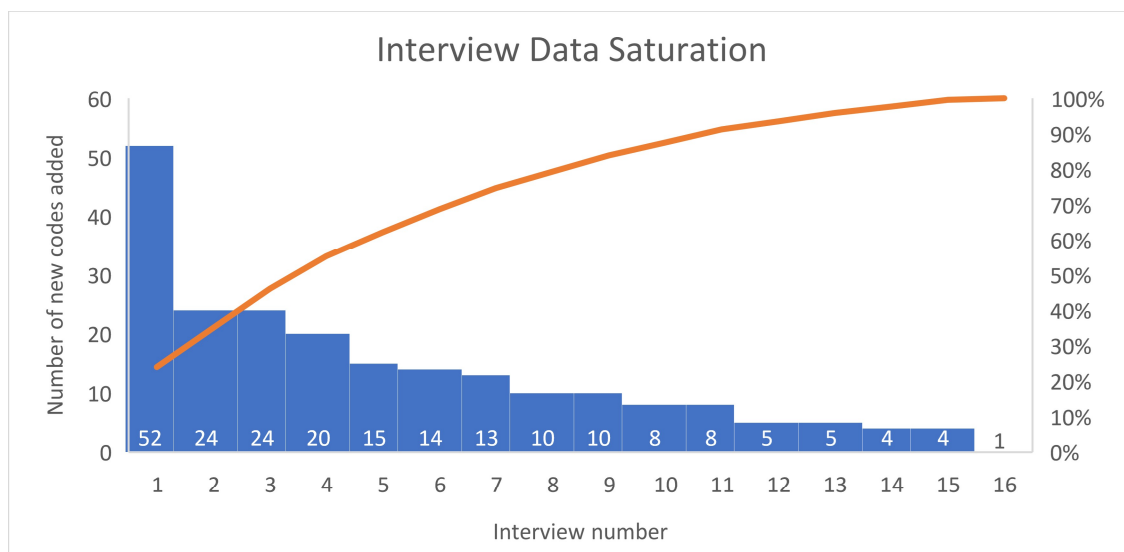
The chapter begins with a summary of the participants interviewed, followed by a qualitative analysis of findings and discussion of the research questions. The key themes identified are presented last.

5.2 Interview Demographics and Interview Method

5.2.1 Data Saturation

The plan for the study was to conduct sixteen interviews. Eight being with female leaders in senior leadership positions and the other eight female leaders in middle management positions. The expectation was that a point of saturation (Mthuli et al., 2021) would have been reached by the time all sixteen interviews had taken place. A total of nine senior leaders and seven middle management leaders were interviewed. Saturation had already been past by the sixteenth interview.

As can be seen in Figure 5.1 below, saturation had been reached by the ninth interview because the number of new codes emerging from the interviews started reducing. The fourteenth and fifteenth interview offered four new codes whereas the sixteenth interview only provided one new and unique code. This indicates that the sample size was sufficient for this study.

Figure 5.1*Interview Data Saturation Graph***5.2.2 Interview Method**

The method used for sampling for the interviews was non-probability judgement and purposeful sampling. After the first two participants known to the researcher were interviewed, they were asked to recommend other potential participants, thereby satisfying the snowball method of collecting data. Triangulating the sampling method helped increase the richness of the data collected. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the research participants met predetermined criteria before they could be included in sample. The interviews were conducted within a space of a month, mainly due to the availability of the participants. Participants were interviewed virtually using Microsoft Teams. The use of Microsoft Teams allowed the interview to be recorded and transcribed. Recordings were downloaded, saved with password protection as stipulated in Chapter 4, to prevent unauthorised access and backed up on the researchers Google drive.

A pilot interview was conducted with a subject matter expert to ensure the relevance and suitability of the questions in the interview schedule. A second pilot interview was conducted with an individual known to the researcher to determine the approximate duration of the interview. The interviewed individual became part of the sixteen participants interviewed. Feedback from the pilot test was incorporated into the final interview schedule. Participants were interviewed on a one-on-one

basis. Follow up questions were also asked depending on the responses provided by the participants.

Taking into consideration that the researcher may have biases and influences that exist because biases are formed through lived experiences, education and personal values, which may affect the trustworthiness of the data collected, and therefore, impacting the way the interviews were conducted. The researcher mitigated this risk by being fully aware of their own biases and portrayed a neutral stance and having an objective mind set during data collection, even though interviews were conducted virtually.

5.2.3 Participants Demographics

Table 5.1 below provides information about the demographic of the respondent that were interviewed. The respondents are not placed in any particular order and identification of the participants will be indicated by a number, in an attempt to maintain confidentiality of the research participants.

Table 5.1

Participants Demographic Graph

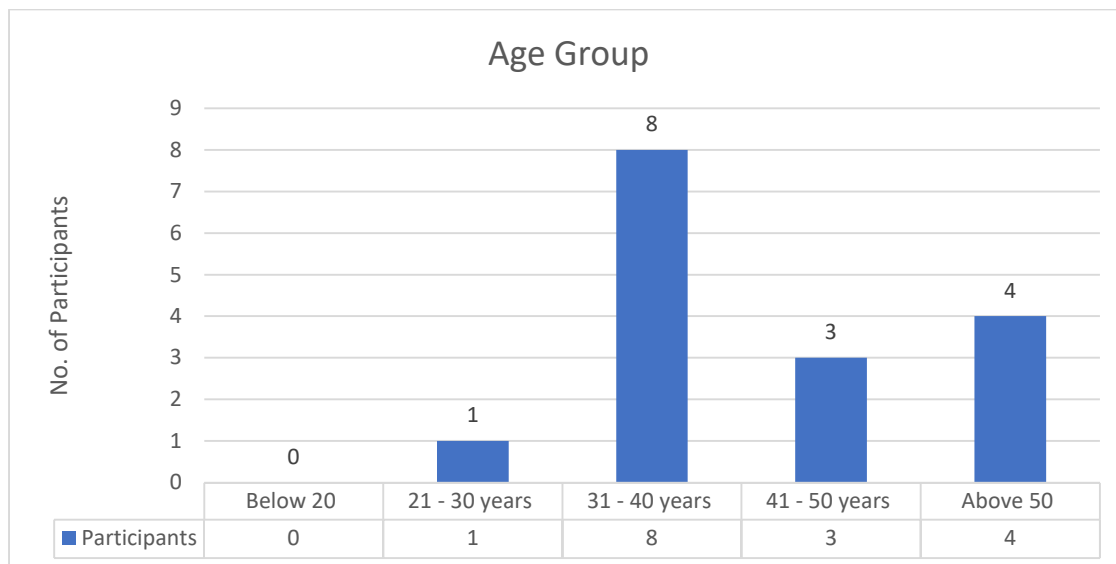
Participant	Age group	Leadership level	Length in position	Length in organisation	Male/ Female dominated workplace
01	Above 50	Middle	6 – 10 years	10 years and above	Male dominated
02	31 – 40 years	Senior	1 – 5 years	6 - 10 years	Male dominated
03	31 – 40 years	Senior	Below 1 year	Below 1 year	Male dominated
04	41 – 50 years	Middle	1 – 5 years	1 – 5 years	Balanced

05	31 – 40 years	Middle	1 – 5 years	1 – 5 years	Balanced
06	50 and above	Senior	10 years and above	10 years and above	Male dominated
07	31 – 40 years	Senior	1 – 5 years	1 – 5 years	Male dominated
08	Above 50 years	Senior	10 years and above	10 years and above	Male dominated
09	31 – 40 years	Senior	6 – 10 years	10 years and above	Male dominated
10	41 – 50 years	Middle	1 – 5 years	10 years and above	Male dominated
11	31 – 40 years	Middle	6 – 10 years	10 years and above	Balanced
12	31 – 40 years	Middle	1 – 5 years	1 – 5 years	Male dominated
13	Above 50 years	Senior	6 – 10 years	10 years and above	Female dominated
14	31 – 40 years	Middle	6 – 10 years	10 years and above	Male dominated
15	21 – 30 years	Senior	1 – 5 years	1 – 5 years	Balanced
16	41 – 50 years	Senior	1 - 5 years	1 – 5 years	Balanced

5.2.3.1 Age Group

Figure 5.2.1

Participants Age Group



This demographic indicated that most of the middle level leaders fell into the 31 – 40 age group. This observation raised a question of whether there is a correlation between the age bracket of the women and the level of seniority at work. Could this be that they are within this bracket as this is the child bearing age when more women start families, which disadvantages them from accessing in opportunities at work? and one participant stated

“And also, that, there are people who prefer not to have women between the ages 28 to 35. It's simply because, they at stage where they are stating families, getting married and having children.” (Participant 05).

“Another thing that I've noted like in my organization, the women who are in the senior positions, they will always be older women... whereas with the women, it's like they only put you in a senior management position when you sort of passed the child bearing age. If I can put it that way, because we don't have any execs which are like below 45 years even. Most of them are in their 50s. That's when women, they're getting those positions.” (Participant 11).

“Gender is not a criterion but other things might be criteria like, how old are your kids? are they at school going age? what is your family situation is like?”
(Participant 07).

It would be interesting if future research could correlate the age group of women and the advancement and level of seniority at work. This could explain the observation of senior women participants are older as not many young women have those senior roles.

5.2.3.2 Leadership Level

Figure 5.2.2

Participants Leadership Level Graph

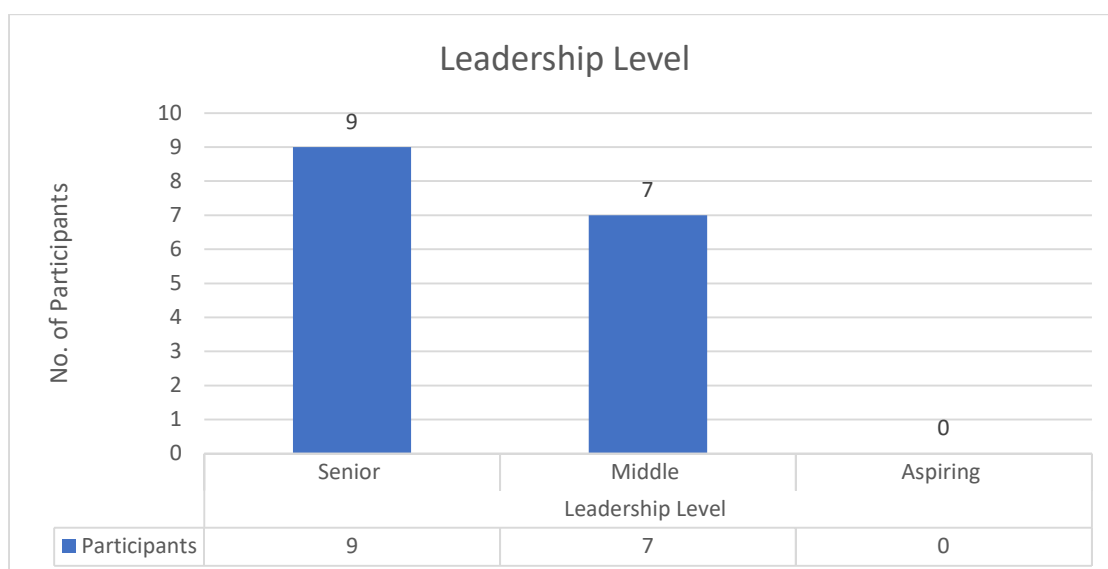


Figure 5.2.2 indicates the number of senior and middle management leaders that participated in the study.

5.2.3 Interview Data Transcription

Since the interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams, the researcher would ask for permission to record the sessions. This helped in generating a recording and a transcript of each interview directly from Microsoft Teams. Each transcript was downloaded, and the accuracy of the transcript verified by the researcher against the recording. Taking into account that the Microsoft Teams software does not know other languages, there was the risk that some words may be incorrectly transcribed. The transcripts were verified against the recordings. Interjection words were removed upon verifying and transcribing process to ensure

consistency and ease of flow of transcription. Transcribing took about two to three hours to complete depending on the length of the interview.

5.3 Coding and Analysis

Following the data analysis method prescribed in Chapter 4, the transcribed interview documents were uploaded onto ATLAS.ti which is a qualitative data analysis software program to aid in creating codes from the data collected. The first level open codes were generated and categorised into axial codes that were eventually reduced to selective codes thus identifying themes.

The uploaded transcript was named according to the number and leadership level. The type of identification of the document was created by the researcher.

5.4 Results: Themes

The following section highlights the themes that were identified through the coding exercise conducted by the researcher.

5.4.1 Family

Starting a family or being pregnant was identified as a hindering factor in the advancement of females to senior leadership positions as one of the respondents expressed that during her job interview, she had conveyed that she did not want to start a family to secure her current position. This may have affected the participant need to start a family and may have placed the participant at a disadvantage if she had put it across that she would be starting a family in the near future.

“Especially in my recent position that I have been that I’ve secured it simply because I have expressed the lack of desire to settle down. I feel like had I expressed that I want to settle down in the next year or that I’m married or you know then my chances would have been lessened given the amount of reliance or dependence that the CIO has on me.” (Participant 12).

“In a way that they ask you if you are planning to have to extend your family or are you planning to have a baby in the next two months.” (Participant 14).

Another participant indicated that for her to advance, she had to sacrifice her family, as there was a lot of travelling attached to advancement. This negatively affected the participant as she had lost time with her family. This may indicate that there is a lack of consideration or recognition for family wellbeing in organisations.

“...But it was hard if you wanted to succeed. There were so many sacrifices you had to make with the kids. Being a mom there was no concession, there was no understanding of that.... I lost a lot of time with my children, valuable time that I can never, ever, ever get back, and my daughter also then had started with separation anxiety, and it went to anxiety.... although she's a young adult now but it still stays with me. I still carry that guilt for when she was younger and it was because of me being away from home.” (Participant 04).

Most participants said that they felt that pregnancy minimised the opportunities for females to advance in their careers and becomes an inconvenience to the organisation. There may be an understanding that female of child bearing age do not get promoted because they are going to take time off work, which then becomes an inconvenience for the organisation or the team. This may explain why females in middle management are experiencing a lack of advancement to senior positions.

“I think there is this thing when it comes to hiring, that sometimes male leaders are against promoting or hiring females because there is this thing that she still going to have a child, they are still going to get pregnant. She is going to be costly and all that.” (Participant 07).

“And then sometimes they say she's better in that particular position and then not get promoted and they also have this thing that somebody is a single mother. She'll keep on asking for certain things like family responsibility.” (Participant 15).

“There's that stagnant period, even when you look at careers which is similar to what I'm experiencing now, then when I look at the people in the rank above. They are all have children in varsities. Their kids are already graduating. So, it's like that's the only time you actually get to move to the next level.” (Participant 09).

Even when women are in management level positions falling pregnant in the organisation is seen as unfavourable because the participants are informed not to have children or to fall pregnant. This may result in females reducing the number of children they have because falling pregnant comes at a cost of not being promoted.

“I did experience that with [organisation name] and surprisingly, it was coming from another female, who used to say don't dare get pregnant, don't get pregnant,

make sure you don't get pregnant.... When you fell pregnant, it wasn't nice. Females would not get opportunities. They would say that females shouldn't have a baby for the next two years.” (Participant 16).

“It's always a struggle when a female has to go away on maternity leave for three to six months.... When I went into maternity leave and not too long ago. The question was when are you coming back? when you come back, you get back to your position, then there are comments, even though it said in a light manner, is don't get pregnant again” (Participant 14).

5.4.1.1 Conclusion

What was found during the analysis of data was that a majority of organisations view pregnancy and starting a family as an inconvenience to the organisation as women need to take time off work. Women get affected by this as they get deprived of opportunities to advance because they are seen to be in child bearing age and an age where they start families. Some organisations may consider that those women would not be fully at work as their attention would be split between family and work. Some work that requires travelling may make it difficult for women as they are perceived to be primary care givers, and therefore not be able to carry out such work. Women who look for advancement find themselves having to sacrifice family life.

5.4.2 Respect

The concept of respect was not conveyed blatantly by the respondents. However, from the responses, there seemed to be a level of lack of respect for female leaders from male counterparts as women leaders would be expected to perform duties which are perceived in society as female roles.

“I actually experienced that, I was expected to behave as a female and where one governance member expected female managers to serve and to assist male managers with tea and biscuits.” (Participant 09).

“I normally see we still have men that, if you are sitting with them or you are sitting next to them when you stand up and you go have coffee, they ask you to bring them coffee also, but when they stand to make coffee, they will never ask you when they are standing up to go make coffee, ‘can I bring you a cup’ and I think that for me fundamentally, just says nothing about this person. Why do you think I should make you coffee if when it's your turn to go make

coffee you creep out and then you suddenly you have coffee next to you? Why, if you could ask me when I stand up, why can't you ask me when you stand up. To show that you don't have that mentality that we should make men tea.” (Participant 15).

“I'm I feel like I'm expected to do work which is very menial, which is outside of my work or my scope of work, and I'll make an example, at work we used to have a PA and I feel like now I've become the PA.” (Participant 06).

“Female leaders, and particularly for me, in a boardroom context, for example, if we're sitting around the table and you're asked to take minutes, the female leader would be the one person that would be asked to do that.” (Participant 13).

5.4.2.1 Conclusion

As can be seen above, female leaders are expected to perform duties that are seen as roles or duties for women. There are, therefore, feelings among women leaders of being undermined by their male counterparts.

5.4.3 Work Environment

The work environment poses a lot of disadvantages for women leaders. Some respondents found that they were not taken seriously as leaders. Participants expressed their feelings towards the environment they work under.

“Women are less taken seriously, and I think also less heard. And I say that because I feel as though, a woman could say something, and it's ignored. But a man says exactly the same thing and it becomes like a gospel.” (Participant 06).

“People who do not take me seriously, they wouldn't think I know what I knew and also the profession is new in South Africa. So, you find that getting to work with people, getting to engage and negotiate. People just don't take you seriously, you know, they will be making funny jokes or where's your boss.” (Participant 12).

Within the scope of work environment, there seem to be a reflection from the participants that there are roles where males are preferred over females. Women

lose opportunities in that they are not seen as capable of performing certain leadership roles. The quotations below demonstrate this fact.

“Male colleagues in the same management level and then they would be preferred for projects or even if it's your project it you are always being coerced to work with that male colleague because my interpretation is that if it's like a technical aspect, then they feel like the man will probably know more.” (Participant 05).

“You'll find that the males will get certain type of work that you are not entrusted with. Certain type of project that you are not entrusted with as a female. It looked that way to me.... new work to be done, project to run projects etcetera. The males were always picked first, and the woman not so much, we always got the work that the males didn't want to do or what they call crap projects. And that's why you would be given things that the company feels, even if we don't do it correctly, there will be OK” (Participant 10).

“Females being volunteered by males to take things like notes, the more administrative roles. You do tend to see a bit of that, and I do appreciate it though when they are quite dominant females within our workplace who really do not take kindly to that and are very outspoken and when that does happen” (Participant 11).

When it comes to promotion opportunities one participant found that the male counterpart was offered the opportunity to be interviewed and opportunities for advancement. There seems to be a preference for males to be advanced into the senior positions as opposed to women and a culture that males are better suited for certain roles.

“We studied in the same class, we've got exactly the same qualifications, the same experience. It's so funny. I don't know how it happened... But I think it happened two times ... recently we had both applied for a senior position... because we both in the same level at the moment and then I didn't even get called to the interview. They called him, I felt terrible. It really didn't understand why, I was not called to the interview” (Participant 03).

“There was a time where I had to be promoted to director and as much as I was qualified, I didn't get that role. And two males who are exactly the same

age as myself. Exactly, with the exactly the same experience both got promoted to directors.” (Participant 10).

On the contrary, another participant indicated that there are numerous factors as to why an individual may be promoted including liking, culture fit, and preference where experience and qualification may not be seen as a main factor to promotion.

“I believe people get hired for many, many things and qualifications and experience are not necessarily the main factor. So, I firmly believe that culture fit, preference, like. are some of the things that people get hired for then experience, of course experiences will, even if you have the same experience, but they will tend to look at culture fit, preference and like.” (Participant 16).

Safety became a prevalent concern to participants where they expressed that the work place should provide a safe space for females. This safety can be in the form of physical safety and psychological safety. This may be a factor in building individuals' confidence to pursue roles that they would normally not go for.

“I believe that companies need to provide a safe working environment for women, not just women for everybody, physical safety, psychology safety... Psychological safety is a two-way street in the sense that when you have the courage to step up to your role, no one should punish you for that.” (Participant 16).

“So, you have to have a culture, you have to create an organizational culture where people are comfortable being themselves and they feel safe enough to be themselves and because if they're not, that limits their growth.” (Participant 05).

5.4.3.1 Conclusion

The work environment plays a key role in embracing female leaders in recognising and giving them a safe place to grow. A conducive environment allows women leaders to grow and acknowledges the presence of female by letting their voices be heard. However, the lack of this environment can hinder the advancement of women in behaviours and practices of the workplace.

5.4.4 Perception of Performance

Performance may be a key indicator for an organisations' progression. However, some respondents conveyed that their male counterparts are perceived as better performers than females. This can translate into males having better opportunities.

"Individuals perceive certain positions that they are difficult to be handled by a woman and I think maybe it could be why we finding that layer of regional MM's not getting to a point where we have a woman, for some reason there is this thing in the people's heads that I don't think a woman will be able to handle this pressure." (Participant 16).

"I just do think that when you are male in the organization, you have better opportunities and I think it's just the general feel that males can do it better." (Participant 10).

"Before you're even given the opportunity ... I felt having to prove myself or having to work 10 times harder than my than a male counterpart simply because I'm a woman. Can I take the pressure? And not because it's based on merit at all but based on the fact that or on a male stereotype or patriarchal behaviour that believes that women are weak." (Participant 13).

5.4.4.1 Conclusion

There is an unconscious bias towards males in the organisational setting in that males are viewed as being able to better handle pressure and execute duties better than females do. This unconscious bias may be a contributor to having less females in leadership positions.

5.4.5 Resource Support

Respondents highlighted a range of resources needed to support female leaders to succeed in their roles. The results reflect the resources mentioned as key to supporting female leaders. Workplace forums, coaching and exposure were some of the factors expressed by participants as resources needed. These can be said to be motivating factors for females to perform and exceed expectation.

"They don't have anything for females. Things such as, this week, we are focusing on females. So, I think they could do more of that. By having such and even conference but they don't have such initiatives." (Participant 07).

“They I think maybe they need to provide more a of the workshops especially related to female leadership and female leaders. Women in leadership, if they can provide more of those workshop effect type of initiates, as I have indicated, that they need to involve the upcoming, the aspiring leaders, involve them more and engage them more. That will really assist in developing the new leaders.” (Participant 14).

“We should be seeing more female workshops. I feel that the more we have those and the more we have in females having that validation as well, not from males, but the validation amongst ourselves and that really anything can be achieved that a male can achieve within the same industry as well. For me, I think that would go a long way.” (Participant 11).

Fair treatment was expressed by some participants especially in the form of remuneration as they felt that women do not earn the same as men, even though they may have the same experience and qualification. This may be demoralising to female leaders and may contribute to a lack of the desire to advance to senior roles.

“Pay is not the same as males. I was told Confidentially by someone on the side so it linked to what the person was talking about at the Women’s circle that, we are not being treated fairly when it comes to salaries whereas we are qualified, you do the exact same job as the other person.” (Participant 03).

“It goes skew right at the from that beginning, because the moment you secure the job, Human Resource department makes it OK that you start off with a lower salary than your male counterpart. It must be benchmarked it exactly the same level.” (Participant 01).

5.4.5.1 Conclusion

The findings from this theme highlighted some elements which cause concern to female leaders and maybe seen as barriers to their success because as a female leader, one plays a lot of roles thus elements such exposure and coaching seem to be imperative as contributors to success.

5.4.6 Career Planning

Formal and deliberate development programs were identified by the participants as needed to develop females into senior leadership positions. There seems to be a lack of programs and plans from organisations that are aimed at identifying female talent.

“When you have identified that somebody performs and this person is educated and clearly you can see that this is a leadership material and this is a woman. There is a need to be deliberate in what programs can we put this person on, so that we don't delay getting them to that level, to director level.”
(Participant 15).

“I think where we are lacking though, I think it's in succession planning or having formal development programs, to give middle management females exposure to what they would need to eventually develop to a senior management role.” (Participant 04).

“I truly just don't think that the opportunities for females are there unless we as an organization make deliberate efforts in equipping females to move into senior roles and that just starts from things like succession planning.”
(Participant 06).

5.4.6.1 Conclusion

To help females succeed and to see a faster uptake of female leaders into senior leadership roles, there needs to be deliberate plans to identify and support female leaders. Programs that will aim to empower female leaders are seen to be desirable for females to assist in their career progression.

5.4.7 Personal Characteristics

There was a general impression by the participants that not only can an individual rely on the organization, but a female leader also needs to exert certain characteristic to be able to succeed.

“You need to equip yourself with education, secondly, you need to be very strong and vocal. I'm saying those three key things education, firm, strong and be able to talk your views are very important for women to do. Don't walk into a meeting and men think about that their views are more sensible or more strategic than those coming from woman. I think that way we won't win.”
(Participant 16).

“I believe that you have to be relatively assertive. You have to be confident in and you need to know your work. When you go into a room full of men which shouldn't really be men, mixed, and as long as you know your topic well, you

must portray confidence and you must show that you know what you're talking about to gain that respect from everybody in the room” (Participant 02).

“You need to walk in there push the walls down and take your seat and when I say push your walls done, not saying go there and be aggressive and be militant, no. Show your space, be visible be active and raise your hand and know your craft. Also, the networks that you have are important” (Participant 12).

5.4.7.1 Conclusion

Female leaders believe that there are certain characteristics that one needs to portray in order to succeed in leadership role. These characteristics include assertiveness, resilience, building on your network and being firm.

5.4.8 Trust

There seems to be a feeling from the participants that women leaders are not trusted with decision making because women attach emotions. This therefore impacts on career development because women may be perceived as being irrational. Once they are in senior positions, the feeling is that they still placed in positions that are seen as soft.

“You do realise that males actually think that we are too emotional to be leaders and it’s a general feel that is there, we are generally not trusted with our emotions. Males don’t think that we can control our emotions in certain situations in order to be leaders, we are very emotional. That’s the one thing that I’ve picked up in my organization.” (Participant 10).

“The stereotypes that exist in maybe like in the community about women like being emotional. I think they cross over to the workplace and obviously when people come into the workplace, they carry those similar stereotypes of like how women are.” (Participant 05).

“When you get to that level where the director level, I just also think that it’s still male dominated, where you can find a female, it’s for softer things like PAC, not the those like hard driving positions you will find a woman. (Participant 16).

5.4.8.1 Conclusion

Organisations carry the societal stereotype that women are emotional and cannot, therefore, be trusted with leadership roles because the perceived emotions may impact women's decision-making abilities. This may become a limiting factor to realizing senior leadership roles for women.

5.4.9 Policies

Employment equity seemed to have put females in an advantage as the government has stipulated inclusivity agendas for organisations. There seems to be a belief that the employment equity policy has forced organisations to move in a certain direction and involve females in leadership positions.

"We have this this thing where you do submissions to the Department of Labour for your employment equity and how your companies positioned in terms of improving equity etcetera. And even that is has become more of a tick box exercise, because that's been now outsourced to a company that is now handling that process completely, so you can see that there's no importance." (Participant 06).

"I think the work equity, employment equity has forced males to consider females and I think the work equity employment equity has assisted me a lot and I was a part of the employment equity... But if those rules and regulations in government were not there, I'm not sure if the female would actually be in the in the roles that they in." (Participant 11).

"We do have equity statistic where our business is currently trending or tracking how many women in power. So, by doing so, it is empowering us as women to say we are being given an opportunity to grow." (Participant 08).

5.4.9.1 Conclusion

Organisations may adopt the employment equity quota to comply with government regulations. However, they may be keeping the female leader number at a minimum to avoid penalties from the government.

5.4.10 Flexibility

Flexibility at work was identified as a major factor with the participants in that it seemed to be a support structure that female leaders need in the work place because

women do not play one role in their lives. Since women are seen as primary care givers are home, the theme of flexibility came out strongly with the participants. There are participants whose employers already offer some support. It was also emphasised that flexibility does not take away from producing results.

“I think they need to realize that we are not just an employee, we are a wife, if they can allow us to have flexible hours, as long as we produce results of which we know we can.” (Participant 03).

“We need support to be flexible but still push results, always meet it deadlines. That’s the support I can see. And not be scared to talk. I think they’re supposed to be that openness. They trust between the employer and the employee.” (Participant 14).

“We’re very flexible at [organisation] in such a way that they understood that, yes, I’m a single parent and school comes out at 1:00 o’clock and so I can structure my meetings or my work in such a way that 1:00 o’clock I can go and fetch my child from school. Drop her off at home. Then I can continue with my work. Whether continue working from home or I can go back to the office or I can have physical meetings with clients. So, I was supported in that way, I can be very flexible.” (Participant 15).

“I truly feel like if people had mentors around, they would really be able to move into senior roles.” (Participant 06).

5.4.10.1 Conclusion

Flexibility was valued by participants as a key factor in supporting female leaders to thrive in their roles. Even though a majority of the participants highlighted this need, there are some organisations that offer females the flexibility they need.

5.4.11 Mentorship

Some participants indicated the importance of mentorship in creating opportunities for female leaders as a form of support which organisations should offer female leader. Senior leaders indicated that they did not receive mentorship from anyone within the organisation. However, they had to source a mentor outside the organisation.

“There needs to be more of an emphasis on coaching and on mentoring. Which is very different to training and development. I feel that it’s an area which needs to be focused on because that speaks to the softer skills.” (Participant 04).

“I think I got support in my role by virtue of me finding myself, coaches and mentors outside the organization. Yes, it was specifically for the role of CEO, which had never occupied before... So, I had to seek external mentoring and coaching.” (Participant 09).

“When I changed jobs and I tried to get a mentor that would be paid for this side, unfortunately they didn’t have anything like that.” (Participant 14).

5.4.11.1 Conclusion

There seems to be a consensus in that female leaders need mentorship as a form of support to increase the opportunities to be promoted to senior leadership roles. Organisations may identify women leaders in middle management and offer mentorship thus increasing their opportunities to advance to senior leadership positions.

5.4.12 Queen Bee Phenomenon

Participants expressed that some female leaders who have advanced to senior roles, become a barrier for other female leaders to advance into these roles. The behaviour observed from these female leaders may indicate that they are threatened by the presence of another female leader and that they might be outperformed, states a participant.

“Female on female hate in the work environment is so real. I was thrown into this role. I literally had a three-day induction or handover and this is where the person that’s still within the organization and whatever reached out for support or help or direction. She just directs me to MS Teams. I haven’t received support from females.” (Participant 12).

“I found this more from women than man. Yes, there are men who want you to know your place.” (Participant 16)

Surprisingly, it was coming from another female, who used to say “don’t dare get pregnant, don’t get pregnant, make sure you don’t get pregnant”, I mean How. (Participant 08)

5.4.12.1 Conclusion

The expectation would be that women that have managed to make their way to top leadership positions would enable and empower other women leaders to reach the same success. Some senior female leaders become barriers to the advancement of women by offering no support in developing and empowering women leaders as well as influencing policy making.

5.5 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter aim to answer the research questions stipulated in Chapter 3. These findings present insights into stereotypes experienced by female leaders in middle and senior leadership roles. The results provide insights into different cultural aspects of an organisation in advancing female leaders. The findings also reveal the stereotypes experienced by female leaders and the impact cultural practices of organisations have on the development female leaders in the workplace.

The following Chapter 6 focuses on the discussion of the identified themes and aims to link these themes to answering the research question.

Chapter 6 – Discussion of Findings

6.1 Introduction

Research findings presented in Chapter 5 from the semi-structured interviews conducted with sixteen participants in senior and middle management roles are discussed in this chapter. These findings will be discussed against literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Each research question will be discussed against the themes that emerged from the data, linking the insights to the research questions.

6.2 Discussion – Research Question 1

Research Question:

How do women experience the culture of an organisation in their career progression?

This research question was aimed at exploring the influences of culture within the organisational context on the progression of careers of women leaders. Literature suggests that organisational culture refers to the beliefs, assumptions, norms and values that are shared by individuals within an organisation, and therefore shaping how individuals make sense of the organisation and themselves (Zheng et al., 2018). The behaviours of employees in an organisation are influenced by organisational culture directly or indirectly and affects loyalty and performance of the organisation because these become the attitudes and a way of thinking by employees (Schein, 2010). This, therefore influenced the development of the research question. Furthermore, there are psychological barriers explained by Schein (2001) “think manager – think male”, a phenomenon which still exists. This view supports the notion of bias against women and influences managerial selection, placement, promotion, training and sex role stereotype in their career path. The discussion starts with a look at the work environment female leaders find themselves in.

6.2.1 Work Environment

Opinions regarding how effective women are in leaderships are a reflection of local cultural beliefs about the societal role of females than that of performance (Smith et al., 2020a). The workplace, thus, possesses societal beliefs which then become organisational beliefs that negatively affect women or individuals who are seen as

incongruent to gender roles. Women experience stereotypes when they do not conform to cultural norms.

A number of factors emerged as causes that lead to the work environment as a factor in the advancement of women leaders. One aspect of the work environment that emerged from the findings associated with lower value that the organisation places on contributions made by women leaders, seem to be taken less seriously. This is in tandem with Luksyte et al., (2017) found, that contributions made by female leaders in the workplace may be viewed and valued differently from those of their male counterparts.

Still within the context of the work environment, respondents indicated that their male counterparts would be preferred over female leaders for some duties or positions of leadership. This finding is line with literature in that Dwivedi et al., (2018) suggest, that female leaders are viewed less favourably as candidates for leadership roles and when women do reach these roles, they are evaluated and assessed differently, even if the same behaviours are exhibited by male leaders.

Participants also indicated that the gender stereotypes in organisations show that some roles are still occupied by male leaders and women in leadership positions that are perceived as soft and that promotion opportunities are afforded to male counterparts even though a women may have the similar experience and educational backgrounds. This is line with the role congruity theory discussed in Chapter 2 that states that women are incongruent to leadership positions which places women at a disadvantage because there is a fundamental preference to men (Eagly & Karau (2002).

While literature has not highlighted the importance of safety the study has found that participants were concerned when it comes to work environment safety. This safety involved physical safety as well as psychological safety. The findings suggests that women leaders seek safety to be themselves in the work place as safety is seen as a limitation to growth and become leaders.

6.2.2.1 Summary

Respondents have emphasised the importance of a positive work environment because it allows individuals to flourish and grow. A work environment where everyone in the organisation is valued equally. There seems to be a need for an organisational shift and creation of a work environment female leaders feel safe, and opportunities are equal and based on merit.

6.2.2 Policies

Implementation of programs and policies developed to support females in the workplace can create barriers (Gloor et al., 2020). For organisations that are identified as more traditional, implementing diversity is highly dependent on factors such as geographical, legal and cultural the environment. Therefore, these organisations develop inclusion and diversity policies in response to external pressure such as compliance with legal requirements such as affirmative action laws that aim to increase the intensity of diversity in organisations.

The majority of the participants of this study indicated that there was a lack of formal plans by organisations to promote female leaders and relied on the enforced legal requirements to avoid penalties which would be imposed by legal authorities. As mentioned in chapter 5, most respondents come from male dominated organisations, and thus it can be generalised that these organisations are still traditional and stereotypical.

The participants responses align with literature in that organisations employ diversity policies due to external environmental pressures and may not necessarily see the need to change their culture.

6.2.2.1 Summary

Respondents highlighted the importance of having policies such as the employment equity in place, suggesting that they may not have been in the roles they are occupying in the presence of such laws. This is because some organisations may not see the need to advance women leaders in their careers.

6.2.3 Trust

A key finding that emerged from the findings was that male leaders lack trust in the ability of women leaders to meet leadership role expectations. The finding also showed that male leaders believe that women are too emotional and therefore underrepresented in decision-making roles. This lack of trust is translated in the type of roles women are allocated to which are perceived to be soft. The phenomenon is explained by the social theory which is underpinned by agency and communion paradigm and highlights beliefs of gender stereotypes (Gupta et al., 2019). The paradigm alludes to social role perception that men are agentic and views women as being communal.

A lack of trust in female leaders from male counterparts may be linked to the low representation of women leaders in senior roles and therefore has a negative effect on female perceptions about their organisations. Trust then becomes a barrier to the advancement of women to senior leadership roles where Glass and Cook (2018) expound on the homophily theory which proposes that individuals seem to be attracted to individuals who have similar characteristics which they identify with and share the same values such as gender. This leads to trust among those with similar characteristics in the group, resulting in a favourable evaluation of this similar demographic.

Responses from the participants in this study support the above-mentioned literature. Findings show that because women do not fall in the same demographic as men in organisations, seem to reinforce that trust levels are lowered within a group.

6.2.3.1 Summary

The participants have placed emphasis on the lack of trust from organisations due to cultural stereotypes towards female leaders, which acts as a barrier to the advancement of females in the workplace. The lack of trust is perpetuated by social beliefs which are embedded in gender stereotypes.

6.2.4 Summary of Research Question 1 discussion

The discussion above answers the research question by highlighting the findings and how they relate to existing literature. Organisational behaviour was compared to literature on the representation of females in senior leadership roles. Culture and its

impact on organisational behaviour also emerged as a factor in the underrepresentation of females in senior leadership roles. The study also found that there is a value aspect that is lacking in organisations that undervalues the contributions made by female leaders. Policies imposed by legal authorities have helped see a shift in the uptake of women into senior roles in the work place. Noteworthy is the finding that a majority of the organisations representation in the sample are not making deliberate plans to see an increase in the uptake of female leaders in the workplace. An element of trust in female leaders is seen to be lacking as this is translated by the perception that female leaders are emotional and make irrational decision and therefore cannot be entrusted with decision making roles.

6.3 Discussion – Research Question 2

Research Question:

How do women face assessment and evaluation challenges as leaders?

A mindset towards female leaders' effectiveness in an organisation is normally a reflection of a cultural belief about female roles in a society rather than that of performance of the women leaders. Women find themselves facing prejudice when it comes to their assessment of competence as leaders (Smith, et al., 2020).

Literature suggests that there is an expectation that women must conform to what is perceived as female characteristics, which include gentleness, kindness, empathy and nurturing that show a woman's likability. On the contrary, female leaders are viewed as not being competent when it comes to decision making roles (Bishu & Headley, 2020).

This leads to the role congruity theory which proposes that the perceived gender roles and leadership roles are responsible for propagating prejudices. The prejudice arises when a perceiver holds a certain stereotype about a certain group (Eagly & Karau, 2002). When females become incongruent to the perceiver's beliefs about the characteristics of a woman and the requirements of a leader, prejudice arises. This is because of the agentic traits associated with men and communal traits associated with females, highlighting the stereotypical gender beliefs, which is explained by the social theory which assigns different female and male social roles (Gupta, et al., 2019).

6.3.1 Respect

The role congruity theory is derived from the social role theory which looks at stereotypes as a whole by comparing beliefs about how genders (female and male) should behave, how they actually behave, which are known as injunctive and descriptive norms. When these norms seem to be congruent with each other, the person is seen in a favourable light. Yang et al., (2020) found that when females take on roles which are perceived as submissive and men take on more agentic roles, they are viewed more approvingly when compared to contrasting characteristics.

Women are expected to comply with perceived female characteristics including being gentle, kind, empathetic and nurturing which implies that the women are likeable but not competent enough for decision making roles. A conflict emerges for women as stated by Bishu and Headley (2020) on the perception which is rooted in social norms that women take on more family responsibility.

The respondents in the study indicated that as women, they were expected to perform certain duties that may be outside of their scope of work but perceived as normal in social settings. A participant pointed out that even though male and female colleagues may be at the same leadership level, women are expected to assist the male colleagues with tea and coffee or a female leader would be asked to take minutes in a meeting. Though not specifically stipulated as a lack of respect, the respondents were clearly frustrated and annoyed while discussing this. It is evident from the findings that there is an expectation of behaviour from women leaders in the workplace which aligns to traditional cultural norms where they are seen to be more suited to perform duties that are perceived as soft.

The findings align with literature as women are expected to conduct themselves by the perceived feminine roles which can be communal traits such as nurturing.

6.3.1.1 Summary

Behaviour expressed by male counterparts towards females may be an indication of the type of culture the organisation espouses. This theme indicates that organisations still hold traditional beliefs that females ought to conduct themselves in a certain way and perform certain duties which are traditionally viewed as female roles in society which are translated in the workplace as female leaders being

expected to assist with tea and coffee even though female and males are occupying the same level in the organisation.

6.3.2 Family

Athanasopoulou et al.,2018 indicate that women take principal responsibility where raising a family is concerned. This sometimes, entails taking time off work. For example, falling pregnant and having to go for maternity leave for an extended time, delays or suspends the females career advancement opportunities when compared to their male counterparts. This places women in a position where they must constantly play catch up with their peers.

Adding to this, the components that also contribute to the delay in advancement for women is the trade-off between work-life balance which is an area that women often find themselves in. Women then often find themselves trying to balance between work and non-work demands in their lives which may lead to delays in career advancement (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018).

Participants conveyed that in job opportunities family, becomes a factor. Starting a family becomes a concern for the organisation. This concern on whether a female leader is planning on starting a family may be seen as a distraction from performing work duties and that the female leader attention will be divided. A participants stated that they believed they were afforded the opportunity simply because they conveyed a lack of desire to start a family. Women in senior positions seem to have past the child bearing age which may indicate that because women are considered primary care givers, it may become an inconvenience for the organisations as women may require time off work such as maternity leave, therefore becoming a cost for the organisation as they need to seek temporary employment or have a person stand in for the absent female leader.

The study found that pregnancy minimises the opportunities to be considered for senior positions as respondents stated that pregnancy is something that is not spoken of positively in their organisations. One participant said that even when she was on maternity leave, she would be asked when they would be returning to work, even though colleagues know that there is a certain time frame for maternity leave.

There is a perception that when respondents have families, they are unable to perform certain work expectations such as travelling because they have an obligation of care giving at home.

On the contrary one respondent indicated that their organisation does consider that women have families and family obligations such as picking children from school at a certain time. Those factors are incorporated into their work structure. This may indicate that there is a small shift happening in organisation that allows females to perform other roles even though this example is an exception rather than the common experience of female leaders.

Women who broke barriers and became senior leaders found that they had to make a lot of sacrifices when it came to their families because they had to prove themselves to the organisation. One participant alluded to the fact that they had to make sacrifices such as missing her children's milestones because they were chasing a career.

The findings of the study seem to agree with literature that having or starting a family is viewed unfavourably for female leaders as this may be suggestive that women may be less productive than their male counterparts.

6.3.2.1 Summary

Social perception that women who start families are the primary nurturers of those families poses and creates a disadvantage when it comes to advancement into leadership positions. Organisations may rate pregnancy negatively because females may take time of work and are viewed as though there are certain duties women will not be able to execute such as putting long hours at work. When women are on maternity leave, it is seen as a set back by the participants because they may not be able to catch up with their male counterparts, career wise.

6.3.3 Trust

The way in which female leaders are assessed in an organisation is a reflection of the cultural beliefs within the organisation regarding what the roles of females are in a society and not assessed because of performance of the female leaders. There are prejudices that are frequently faced by women when it comes to their assessment of their competence as leaders (Smith et al., 2020) even though women may present numerous advantages in gender specific leadership styles.

Performance of female leaders is assessed in a way that women find themselves in risky leadership roles which become scrutinised and criticised more than their male counterparts, which leads to the female leaders being evaluated negatively even if the performance of the female leader is the same as the male leader (Gupta et al., 2018). Dickens et al., (2019) find that this is a barrier that is invisible and made methodically to hinder the progression of female leaders in the workplace called the glass ceiling.

The findings on trust seem to have answered two different questions. It spoke to research question number one in how female leaders experience culture of an organisation as they progress in their careers. It also seems to be relevant to research question 2 in the aspect that there seem to be caution when it comes to female leaders being given positions or tasks which are considered critical to the business. Female leaders are usually offered the help of the male leaders to oversee the execution of the tasks. Male leaders are allocated project perceived to be “hard” or more technical while female leaders are assigned tasks that are considered “soft”. This demonstrates a lack of trust in the abilities of female leaders to execute successfully on projects considered to be hard or technical.

Respondents find that there is a perception in organisations that there are certain positions that women cannot handle because of the pressure that role places on the job holder. This, in turn disadvantages women in their quest for advancement into senior leadership roles. Women tend to find themselves having to put in extra work and time to prove that they can handle leadership roles. When organisations lack trust in female leaders, it translates to the fact that women are incapable of occupying certain leadership positions. Findings of the study align with literature. However, this aspect may well be an area that requires more research in the future.

6.3.3.1 Summary

Women face higher scrutiny when performance is involved. This demonstrates a lack of trust in the capability of female leaders. Some organisations believe that women cannot handle the pressure associated with certain leadership roles, which becomes a culture, especially in organisations viewed as traditional or male dominated. Even when females reach these senior roles, they are assessed and evaluated differently compared to their male counterparts, which creates invisible barriers for women.

6.3.4 Summary of Research Question 2 discussion

The research question of the study has been answered by the findings of the study and supported by literature. Elements that are used to assess the performance of women leaders in the workplace are found to disadvantage women and therefore seen to hinder their career progression or opportunity for advancement to leadership roles.

The element of family negatively affects female leaders in their space in that they are seen to have divided attention because women are seen as primary family care givers which then hinders their advancement. Again, when females are of child bearing age, they seem to miss out on opportunities because of the perception that women will not be fully at work and tasks such as travelling will not be fulfilled which may be translated as lack of performance. Respondents seem to suggest that women tend move to senior leadership roles when they are seen to have less responsibilities at home. Women of child bearing age are seen to be a burden to the organisation because they will require time off work.

When women make it to these senior roles, they experience that their male counterparts seem to give them less respect and are expected to conform to social gender roles. Women who are seen not to be congruent with these roles are assessed negatively. The lack of respect disadvantages women because they seem to be taken less seriously in the workplace.

Trust can be seen to link with respect in that the tasks or projects that are assigned to female leaders are viewed as non-critical to the organisation and those projects that are viewed as critical are allocated to male colleagues. If a woman leader is assigned a critical or technical project, a male counterpart is offered to assist in the execution of the project. This can be interpreted to mean a lack of trust in the female leader who is assigned the project in the first place.

These elements discussed may result in women becoming reluctant to assume senior leadership roles. Women may become demoralised because there is an array of barriers that hinder their success.

6.4 Discussion Research Question 3

Research Question:

What stereotypes are experienced by women post – appointment into leadership roles?

Literature indicates that even though there has been an increase in the educational level of women, statistics show fewer women in senior leadership roles. This low levels of uptake of women to senior leadership roles may signify a culture in organisations that creates barriers for women to be promoted.

Women often experience the glass ceiling phenomenon. The phenomenon implies that there are invisible barriers that prevent women from advancing to senior roles in the organisations (Dickens et al., 2019). Women who manage to reach these senior roles are said to break through the glass ceiling. Once women are in senior management roles, they are often faced with the glass cliff which is where women get appointed when an organisation is going through turbulent times or when the organisation is not performing well, which in turn sets women leaders up for failure. This results in women serving shorter terms of office (Main & Gregory-Smith, 2018).

6.4.1 Perception of Performance

Gender stereotypes that exist in organisations are associated with work performance, when men and women are evaluated according to social factors such as cultural norms. Assertiveness and performance are characteristics which are associated with men's agentic traits and warmth and care are associated with women's communal traits. Ellemers, (2018) argues that gender stereotypes influence the perception of performance and career advancement for women and men.

When assessing whether an individual can become a leader or not, organisations display an entrenchment into gender stereotypes that influence the decisions taken. These presuppositions forces women to have to overcome the stereotypes in their quest for leadership. A study conducted by Badura et al., (2018) found that the perception of a leader in organisations is connected to a high assessment of job performance and career advancement which means that the perception of gender differences in leadership places women in an unfavourable position and thus impacts them negatively in their career progression.

Participants in the current study indicated that there are several stereotypes that affect women leaders in the workplace, such as quality of work execution which influences the perception of women leader's performance. Respondents also highlighted the presence of the perception that males perform better than women. This influences the type of duties or projects which may be viewed as technical

projects that are allocated to male leaders. Women, therefore, find themselves having to work that much harder to prove that they can perform as well as men.

The perception of performance is consistent with the gender role stereotype which Gupta et al., (2018) referred. There is a perception that women are more family focused, therefore conflicted with work compared to male counterparts. The impact of this perception, therefore, leads to low performance scoring and lower their advancement opportunities for women leaders. There is a consistency in literature and the findings of the study in that the respondents of the research articulated that their level of performance was perceived to be lower than that of males in such a way that if there is a technical project to be done a female leader would be paired with a male leader so that the male leader would assist the female leader. Participants stressed the lack of confidence in female leaders by the organisations.

A participant indicated that female leaders are given projects which are considered as not critical to the organisation, with minimal impact on the organisation should something go wrong with the project or task. This is in line with literature that says that female leaders receive low evaluations and are most likely not adequately rewarded in their contributions. Thus, the study findings indicate that women leaders are viewed unfavourably in the workplace and may be one of the explanations as to why there is a low uptake of women leaders to senior leadership positions.

6.4.1.1 Summary

Due to the perception that men can perform better than women in the workplace, women tend to find themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to performance evaluations and the types of duties which are assigned to female leaders. This perception is a precursor to the low uptake of women in senior leadership roles as women are seen as more family focused and therefore finds conflict between work and home life.

6.4.2 Personal Characteristics

The perception about traits of women and men are generalised gender stereotypes which impact the assessment of leaders and their advancement opportunities. These characteristics are agency and communality. Agency are behaviours associated with men which are seen as being in charge and taking control of a group whereas communal characteristics are those behaviours associated with care giving, building relationships and, therefore, perceived to be more feminine (Badura et al., 2018).

This perception leads to an expectation from each gender which become prescriptive gender stereotypes.

Mai et al., (2020) suggests in literature that women get penalised for portraying behaviour which is not congruent with societal norms, including behaviour such as displaying leadership styles that are autocratic, being involved in self-promotion and seeking power. When women are seen to behave like men, they face unfavourable consequences in organisations.

Participants indicated that when they show characteristics which are more like their male counterparts, the women leader is viewed as bossy, domineering and insensitive. In some cases, the female leader is required to tone it down because they are viewed as becoming too strong. Another instance when female leaders use words that male colleagues use, such as vulgar language, the female is looked at unfavourably because of the gender stereotype that women are supposed to conduct themselves in a certain way.

Literature suggests that women and men are equally effective as leaders. However, men are most likely to emerge as leaders than women because women are assessed as having high potential for derailment (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In instances where males are assessed, they are perceived to be more effective as leaders whereas when women show similar characteristics, the dominance is perceived negatively (de Hoogh et al., 2015).

Respondents of the study highlighted the fact that female leaders are perceived as motherly and soft. However, when women leaders displayed traits perceived as being for males, the women were viewed unfavourably. Participants stated that certain characteristics must be present for a leader be successful in an organisation. These characteristics include resilience, firmness, assertiveness, confidence, and a good knowledge one's craft, being vocal by saying what you want, maintain visibility and create networks. The participants also indicated that their male counterparts were very expressive and unapologetic about what they want. Female leaders should also be confident enough to be able to state what they want.

Resilience was one of the most prevalent characteristics stated by women leaders. This may be because the environment and culture that women find themselves in, is

not conducive to female leaders, therefore female leaders need to learn to overcome such barriers in the industry or organisations they find themselves in.

The findings revealed that firmness and assertiveness are believed to be imperative to have. They asserted that a leader must stand by one's idea without necessarily being masculine. Women leaders must constantly be visible to enable them to start building networks and making those networks work for them. Respondents also said that a female leader must show confidence in that they must be able to say what they want. They asserted that confidence is an indication of knowing your craft. Female leaders need to learn to be vocal and let their voices be heard even in an environment that does not allow them to. What emerged from the results is that personal characteristics are important to make the female leader successful in their role. These personal characteristics need to be developed by the female leader so as to be able to have longevity and earn respect for their craft.

An aspect that is in support with literature is that when female leaders exert masculine characteristics in their leadership style, they are assessed negatively, to the extent that they are viewed as bossy or domineering. From previous literature it is rather unclear as to what characteristics are required for female leaders to portray in order to be successful in their career path and journey.

6.4.2.1 Summary

The success of the female leader is also dependent on characteristics that females need to develop to remain effective, earn respect and be perceived as leaders who are at the same level as their male counterparts. These characteristics do not necessarily mean that the female leader needs to show masculine and agentic characteristics because, at times showing these characteristics may prove to impact women negatively.

6.4.3 Resource Support

Athanasopoulou et al., (2018) found that women do not have the resource support to anchor their strategic goals onto, which then results to women leaders serving shorter terms than expected compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, Gloor et al., (2020) suggest that organisations can play a part in implementing programs and policies that support and retain female leaders. However, the initiatives can create more barriers for females if implemented incorrectly.

A pertinent finding revealed the desire of participants for resources support to enable female leaders to advance in their careers. Respondents articulated a strong need to be treated with fairness and equally. An aspect of this fairness has to do with remuneration that is unequal between female and male leaders. Women leaders still earn less than their male counterparts. One participant stated that not offering females the same pay as men perpetuates the stereotype that women in the workplace are less than men

Coaching featured as another resource that the participants deemed necessary to assist women leaders reach senior leadership and financial assistance to assist females upskill themselves to ensure that the female leader is fit for the position. The participants also acknowledged that female leader lack exposure and opportunities to build networks in their organisations.

The respondents explained that initiatives such as work forums or workshops need to be provided by organisations with specific emphasis on developing women leaders.

The need for female leader initiatives and support is in line with Gloor et al., (2020) who highlighted the need for organisations to implement programs to help support and retain female leaders. These initiatives may inspire more females to aspire to senior leadership roles. Respondents also emphasised that organisations need to prioritise the education of male employees to minimise the existing stereotype. Findings of the study align with literature in that female leaders are not afforded resources to support them to reach senior leadership roles. Organisations do not seem to have programs in place to help support women. This lack of programs creates barriers for women to advance to senior leadership positions because most organisations are still very male dominated.

6.4.3.1 Summary

Female leaders need the support of their organisation to help them advance to senior leadership roles. Respondents have highlighted this need as imperative as most organisations do not offer such support, thus leaving female leaders demoralised as the gender stereotypes are perpetuated. There seems to be a need for female leadership programs which may provide an opportunity for organisations to engage with female leaders.

6.4.4 Queen Bee Phenomenon

Women who have advanced to senior leadership roles, particularly in male dominated organisations may not support initiatives that aim at supporting females, thus blocking the advancement of other females (Faniko et al., 2017). This is known as the queen bee phenomenon. The female leader may exert behaviours such as opposing policies that aim to resolve gender inequality in the workplace.

Having an increase in senior female leaders can be viewed as positive but may have negative outcomes for women (Kunze & Miller, 2017) because women in these roles may portray the queen bee phenomenon. Literature indicates that women leaders display this behaviour in highly male dominated environment where a female adopts masculine characteristics (Arvate et al., 2018). However, this behaviour is also displayed by senior female leaders who want to pursue individual success therefore distancing themselves from other females in the workplace.

Respondents explained an experience they encountered with a senior female leader that refused to support the respondent displaying characteristics of the queen bee phenomenon. This behaviour led to the comparison of the quality of work delivered by the participant.

6.4.4.1 Summary

Senior female leaders may adopt the masculine traits in response to the gender inequality experienced previously in their career progression. Female leaders in senior position may distance themselves from other females who seek their support because they are seeking individual success. This becomes a barrier for women to advance into senior leadership roles.

6.4.5 Summary of Research Question 3 discussion

Research question three sought to understand the stereotypes experienced by female leaders. The findings supported what had been viewed in literature. Findings also show that women leaders who portray characteristics that are perceived as male traits are viewed negatively and evaluated negatively.

Gender stereotypes embedded in organisations influence the perception of the performance of women leaders which can be seen as a barrier that needs to be overcome by female leader to be able to advance to senior roles. Organisations

seem to perceive the quality of the work of female leaders as less than the male leaders. This is seen in the type of tasks that are allocated to female leaders and male leaders. Women have to put in extra effort in their work to prove they can produce the same results as a man.

When women portray characteristics that are against societal norms, they are viewed negatively. They get accused of being bossy, and sometimes told to tone their behaviour down. There are, therefore, gender stereotypes that exist in organisations which places female leaders at a disadvantage. In addition, senior female leaders may become a barrier to female leaders aspiring to advance into senior leadership roles because of the queen bee behaviour displayed by senior women leaders.

Female leaders need the support of organisations to help to counter these stereotypes in the workplace. This should include educating male leaders on stereotypes affecting female leaders.

6.5 Discussion Research Question 4

Research Question:

How does organisational practice impact on leadership and development of women leaders?

Women are seen to have limited access to networks and sponsorship within organisations. The lack of sponsorship and networks hamper on the progress of women careers when compared to their male counterparts. According to Athanasopoulou et al., (2018) females that show potential may become over mentored and under sponsored. This dearth of sponsorship potentially results in limited chances for women leaders to progress to senior leadership roles. This results in the reluctance by women to pursue these top roles.

Organisations who hold social expectations by its individuals become gendered organisations. Gendered organisations create advancement opportunities for men and incentivise individuals that are committed to work over personal responsibilities thus producing a muscular advantage. The gendered organisations reduce accessibility to networking and mentorship for women looking to reach senior roles and make distinctions between males and females which creates a glass wall. Keeping women in positions of lower rank and therefore experience stagnation in their career (Yang et al., 2022).

6.5.1 Career Planning

Literature suggests that women have greatly invested in their careers through education and are seen to be the largest group with university degrees. Women now also have access to education and educational opportunities and qualifications just like men (Schock et al., 2019).

Respondents agreed that succession planning was an important fact that would serve to help female leaders get ready for higher levels of leadership. It was indicated that organisations lack a clear career development plan such as a succession plan. However, the uptake of women into senior leadership roles is still slow in spite of the fact that women are equally qualified as male leaders.

There may be a perception that education on its own is enough to help someone become a senior leader. On the contrary, as much as education is imperative, there are other factors that assist in promoting progression to females to senior roles. Female leaders need a development plan and a planned career path to assist in their progression. Besides building networks and mentoring, a clear career plan is required to ensure success.

There is limited literature on the career planning and succession planning for female leaders in the workplace. This may be an area for future studies.

6.5.1.1 Summary

Female leaders need to be supported by their organisations to grow in their leadership roles. A clear development plan is required to assist female leaders and to see an uptake in female leaders.

6.5.2 Mentorship

As stated previously that there is a lack of female leaders in top leadership positions. This makes female leaders vulnerable to standing out in a group and thus susceptible to great scrutiny. Wille et al., (2018) suggest that as women rise in leadership roles, organisations ought to make sure that women in these roles are afforded adequate resources, support and mentoring to encourage development, to ensure success in these roles. Organisations can implement women leadership development programs as a form of support.

Mentorship was suggested by Dean and Perrett (2020) as a formal and informal way to female leadership development. They suggested that informal mentoring is a way of conquering barriers formed against women in the workplace. Formal mentoring programmes lead to building of networks that can be used to tackle the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles. Providing mentorship to female leaders can reinforce a culture of support within an organisation. Furthermore Wiedman (2020) suggests that mentoring programs can be beneficial in helping women become aware of their competencies and act as means of guidance.

Respondents placed emphasis on mentorship as a form of much needed support to female leaders and indicated that their organisations are not placing sufficient focus on women leadership because there are no forms of support afforded to female leaders that could help ensure success in their leadership roles. Often, female leaders find themselves seeking mentorship from external organisations. Literature and the findings are therefore in agreement in that to see an increase in the uptake of female leaders, there needs to be deliberate efforts and programmes of support to ensure that females get to the leadership roles and are retained in the role.

6.5.2.1 Summary

Mentorship is seen as an imperative contributor to the success of female leaders. There is still an opportunity for organisations to implement women leadership programs because all the respondents alluded to the fact that there is lack of support from organisations, in terms of mentorship support.

6.5.3 Flexibility

Women leaders and working women find it challenging to balance between the demands of their professional life and the role that women play in the family. On the contrary men do not seem to face the same challenges as women. When organisations seek to employ an individual, having less commitments outside work may prove to be advantageous to the organisation because there may be a perception that the individual may not bring their full self to work if they have too many distractions outside work.

The main person who takes care of the family and raising families are women and from time to time, women may seek time of work, not only does this delay career

progression (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018). It can be seen as a performance measurement matter, which disadvantages female leaders.

Due to the fact that women play multiple roles, the participants stated the need for flexibility in their roles as a form of support from their organisations. The idea was that female leaders or females in the workplace need to be afforded the flexibility to play all roles of their lives but still produce the performance levels required by the organisation. This finding provides new insights and will contribute to literature because there is a lack of emphasis on flexibility for female leaders in the literature reviewed.

6.5.3.1 Summary

Flexibility at work and home are what respondents highlighted as a form of support that female leaders need from their organisations. Respondents asserted that one cannot be fully at work when there is something wrong with their children. Hence the need for flexibility because females are considered as primary care givers. Therefore, the flexibility to be able to fulfil both roles is a requirement for female leaders.

6.5.4 Summary of Research Question 4 discussion

There is a social expectation from organisations on the role of females and males, which translates into the creation of opportunities and incentives applicable to one gender over another. The organisations minimise the accessibility of networking and mentorship for female leaders, thus holding women at lower levels stagnating their careers.

This limited access to networks and sponsorship for women in organisations hinders the progression of females to senior leadership roles. Women may become under sponsored, which results in hinderance in the chances for women to progress.

To combat these barriers, the study highlighted findings which are important to seeing an increase in the uptake of female leaders in organisations. Career planning as a remedy to assist female leaders to equip themselves to move to the next level is seen as imperative.

Mentorship was also highlighted by the study as what female leaders need to be able to progress to the next level. There is an emphasis on mentorship to help support females in their careers as there is a lack of mentorship programs in organisations

forcing women leaders to seek mentorship from sources external to their organisations.

Women are seen as primary care givers. Therefore, women may find themselves looking for time off work. this is portrayed negatively by the workplace.

There seems to be a need for flexibility as a form of support to female leaders to enable them to execute their jobs well. Women play multiple roles.

6.6 Conclusion

Chapter 6 has provided a discussion on the results presented in chapter 5. The results to research question number 1 show that the work environment contributes greatly to the lived experiences of female leaders. Supported by literature that states that organisations hold certain societal beliefs which are brought in by individuals. A collection of individuals with the same beliefs thus become the culture of the organisation. When organisations hold a gender stereotype about women, it affects women career progression. Organisations hold no formal plans to assist in the advancement of women. Women find themselves in leadership roles simply to fulfil the box. From the findings, there seems to be a lack of trust towards female leaders in that there are tasks that are never allocated to female leaders. Research question 1 was therefore answered where the results indicated the experiences of female leaders in organisations. The findings therefore align and support the literature that was reviewed.

The aim of research question number 2 was to identify the challenges faced by women leaders in the workplace. The results highlight that female leaders tend to look after families and seen to require time off. It was also observed that pregnancy can hinder the progress of female leaders. The lack of respect also appeared to be an important aspect on the challenges faced by women leaders, where women face a lack of respect from their male counterparts. In addition, respect was also cited as a barrier to the advancement of female leaders.

Following the findings of research question 2, research question 3 desired to find out whether women leaders are affected by stereotypes after their appointment to senior leadership roles. The perception on the performance of female leaders seems to raise some questions. However, participants indicated that female leaders need to

exhibit certain personal characteristics to ensure their progress and stay in those roles. When supported with resource, females can progress in their careers.

Research question 4 was seeking to find the impact of the practices of organisations on the development and leadership of female leaders. Findings indicated that organisations do not seem to have career planning such as succession planning for their female leaders. Flexibility seemed to be an important factor in ensuring that female leaders progress. In addition, organisations ought to develop mentorship plans as female leaders find themselves seeking external mentorships.

The results found and discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 are used to develop a framework designed for the successful uptake of female to senior leadership roles in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

The lack of and slow uptake of women in leadership roles was the cause for this study. Globally women represent 27% of all leadership positions. In South Africa, women account for 45% of the workforce but the proportion of those in senior leadership roles still remain low (BWASA, 2021). The BWASA Women in Leadership Census indicates that there is slow growth in women in higher management positions. It is acknowledged that, there has been some progress in these areas but, the number still remains under 50% which is required by the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill.

The aim of the study was to explore the role of organisational culture in retaining and advancing women leaders into senior leadership positions. Cultural stereotypes experienced by women in the workplace, assessment and evaluation criteria, challenges faced by women leaders in organisations as well as the stereotypes experienced once women have entered the leadership positions and the practices of the organisation all combine and negatively impact leadership and development of women leaders.

This last discusses the contributions of the findings to literature and the practical implications thereof. The chapter starts by summarising the findings of Chapter 5 and the discussion that followed in chapter 6 to propose a framework for the uptake of female leaders in the workplace. Limitations to the study are then followed by recommendations for future research.

7.2 Research Findings

7.2.1 Women experience of organisational culture in their career progression

Organisations have their own inherent beliefs and behaviours which translate to culture. Some organisations are considered traditional and are seen to be male dominated. Since the organisational environment is changing, organisations need to adapt and develop a culture which is inclusive and less discriminatory in order for it to remain competitive. Findings show that women leaders are marginalised in many of the organisations. These concepts formed the main constructs of the study.

The main research question was: “*How do women experience the culture of an organisation in their career progression?*” this was broken down further into sub-questions that helped unpack the main question.

Three key themes were derived from the findings, including work environment, trust and policies. The themes support literature in the organisational culture field. Organisational behaviour impacts on the experiences of female leaders in that the work environment places a certain level of value on female leaders which is translated to stagnation on the progress of these leaders. This is because contributions made by women leaders are viewed and valued differently from their male counterparts. Female leaders are also viewed negatively as candidates for leadership. Within the context of the work environment, safety formed an interesting finding in that female leaders needed physical and psychological safety in the workplace, the absence of which hindered growth for women.

Policies formulated in response to legal requirements seem to be the main motivation for those organisations that have progressed in appointing women into leadership roles. Even so, women are still underrepresented at senior managerial levels in these organisations. A lack of trust was identified as a barrier experienced by female leaders in organisations, organisations do not trust women leaders with critical decision-making roles.

It is therefore evident from the findings that there is a misalignment between organisations and female leaders because there is an expectation from female leaders that organisations must shift their perspectives on what is perceived as women social roles. This then impacts on the experiences of women within the culture of the organisation.

7.2.2 Assessment and evaluation challenges for women leaders

Women in leadership demonstrate an inconsistency with gender stereotype norms, supported by the role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002). When these consistencies are realised in women and leadership roles, women are put at a disadvantage when it comes to performance evaluations compared to men. The theory puts forward prejudices associated with the expected leadership roles according to gender, causing incongruity and thus the bias against female leaders

who are viewed as less promising leaders compared to their male counterparts. This bias is due to the perceived gender role stereotype, that leadership is regarded as a male characteristic.

Since women are the primary caregivers for families, this negatively impacts women. It is presented as a challenge to their progression to senior leadership roles. It was found that pregnancy seemed to be viewed unfavourably in organisations because women would need time off work, again hindering their progress because they play catch up to their male counterparts. Being of childbearing age caused a stagnation to progress in the workplace, where women are seen as not to be able to perform certain duties that involve travelling, for instance. Literature is supported by these findings as there is a perception that women take on more family responsibility (Bishu & Headley, 2020).

The expectation that women must comply with perceived gender norms implies that women are likeable when they are nurturing, gentle, kind and empathetic and that they are not fit to be in decision making roles, which talks to the respect and trust factors of the findings. Women find challenges in their leadership space in that they are expected to conform to gender norms and are not considered competent to be in decision making roles. They are expected to display certain behaviour which is seen as acceptable in the workplace.

Furthermore, evidence indicates that women are supposed to conform to gender role stereotype and should execute menial duties, which are seen as fit for women. The trust factor is evident from the findings in that there is reluctance in placing women in decision making roles because women are perceived to be irrational and emotional. This may mean that organisations hold traditional beliefs towards female roles.

7.2.3 Stereotypes are experienced by women post – appointment

The role congruity theory addresses the congruency between gender roles and leadership roles, which is an extension of the gender stereotypes when comparing beliefs and norms on how women and men are expected behave. Women are expected to have more communal traits (Yang et al., 2020). As stated above, women are underrepresented in top leadership roles. Ellemers (2018) suggests that there exist gender role stereotypes which are attached to task performance when

evaluating men and women. Assertiveness and performance are seen to be more of male traits whereas warmth and care are for women. These stereotypes strengthen the notion that perceived potential for men and women are valued and rated differently when it comes to selection of careers and perceived performance.

The findings show that there is a perception within organisations that men perform better than women. Women, therefore, find themselves impacted negatively, especially when they are evaluated and the type of tasks allocated to them. The stereotype has translated into a low uptake of females to leadership roles, since women are expected to focus on the home front to avoid conflict between work and home. In addition, a barrier for women to advance to senior leadership roles are female leaders who are in senior leadership position. These female leaders display a behaviour referred to as the queen bee phenomenon where they distance themselves from other females in the workplace.

Even though there are negative perceptions and stereotypes about women leaders. Participants indicated that certain characteristics must be developed if anyone wishes to be successful in their leadership role and to ensure the stereotypes are not upheld and women earn respect as leaders. These characteristics include resilience, firmness, assertiveness, confidence, maintaining visibility and creating networks.

In order to combat the existing stereotypes in the workplace, female leaders need the support of the organisation through the provision of resources. Without this support, female leaders are left demoralised because stereotypes leave them without opportunities as they lack exposure, coaching besides being inadequately remunerated when compared to their male counterparts.

7.2.4 Impact of organisational practices on leadership and development of women leaders

Gendered organisations are those organisations that hold a certain expectation influenced by social norms. When organisations are gendered, there is a great possibility that opportunities are created for men and individuals who commit to work over their personal lives. These men get incentivised resulting into a muscular advantage being created. Such organisations limit access for female leaders to networking and mentorship because they make a distinction between male and

female, thus creating a glass wall for women leaders. According to Yang et al., (2022) the glass wall creates a stagnation to women careers because women are stuck in lower ranking positions.

Organisations need to ensure that women have access to resources, support and mentoring to encourage them into leadership roles and to ensure that they succeed in these senior roles (Wille et al., 2018). Key findings indicate that organisations need to offer women career planning, flexibility and mentorship to ensure success in the leadership roles. The following were the conclusions from the findings.

There was a consensus from the respondents that organisations need to implement a succession plan to ensure the development of female leaders and assist them to prepare for the next level of their careers to increase the success rate in those roles. Mentorship was seen as important for the development of female leaders. In some instances, female leaders established mentorship outside of their organisation. In addition, female leaders need flexibility in their careers as women are seen to play multiple roles in their lives. Flexibility would form one type of support needed in their leadership roles.

It is also evident from the findings that there is a lack of development programs for female leaders in the organisations which may indicate the reason for the slow development of female leaders into senior leadership position. This slow uptake in female leaders may be an indirect indication that organisations are still traditional. The much-needed organisational shift is very slow and still portray masculine traits.

7.3 Proposed Framework

Several findings emerged from this study. The findings were combined to create a proposed framework for the increase uptake of female leaders.

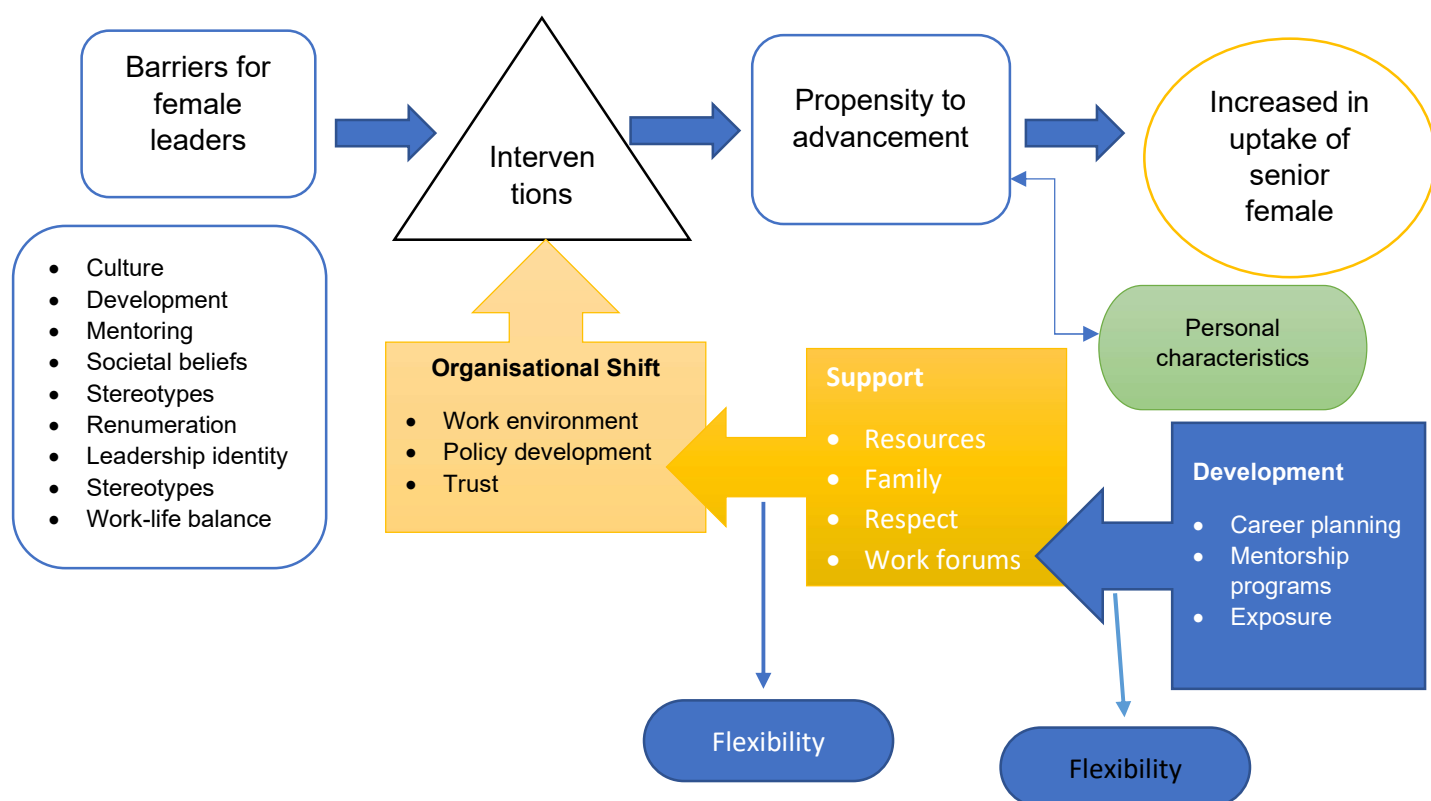
Organisational barriers mitigated by interventions which include organisational shift, support and development should place the organisation in a position where they can see an increase in the uptake of female leaders. A framework illustrated in Figure 7.3 is based on the findings discussed in Chapter 6 and informed by the conceptual model in Chapter 2. Organisations looking to increase their uptake of women leaders in their space can adopt or adapt this framework to guide them in mitigating barriers

and implementing interventions. It is hoped that this proposed framework will act as guidance to organisations on factors to consider to ensure an increase in female leaders and retaining them in the senior role.

The framework begins with barriers experienced in the workplace and the interventions to be put in place, starting with the organisations way of doing things, and then moves to the support that the organisations can offer female leaders to help them succeed in their career and planned development, whilst offering flexibility in the workplace. Female leaders also need to present some personal characteristics to ensure longevity in the roles.

Figure 7.3

Conceptual Framework – Female Leader Uptake and Retention



7.4 Contribution of the Study

Based on the findings of the study and discussion in Chapter 6, the following are the contributions to literature.

- Literature places emphasis on characteristics that are viewed negatively when expressed by female leaders. However, literature does not point out which characteristics are favourable to ensure an increase in female leaders

and to ensure they are retained in their roles. This study has highlighted these characteristics such as resilience, firmness, assertiveness, confidence, and a good knowledge one's craft.

- Although literature has shown the importance of mentorship and sponsorship for female leaders in the workplace, literature does not appear to have made any provisions for a career development plan and succession plan when considering female leaders. The current study proposes serious consideration of career development plans and strategies to increase the uptake of female leaders into senior leadership roles.
- Women leadership capabilities have been linked to societal perception and not performance. The effectiveness of female leaders has not been linked to organisational performance. This is an unfortunate status and should be challenged forthwith. Performance of female leaders should be evaluated on the same or at least similar basis as the men leaders. Due recognition must be granted to female leaders when it is warranted and deserved.
- Findings indicate that female leaders need flexibility in their work career to allow room for family. The role of flexibility has not been linked to the adoption of female leaders to top management positions.

7.5 Limitations of the Research

7.5.1 Researcher Bias

A threat that is caused by a qualitative study is that it is subjective and assumptions influenced by the researcher's perspectives, may affect the outcome of the results and the interpretation thereof. The researcher became aware and acknowledges the possibility of the bias and mitigated this bias. The researcher mitigated this bias by interviewing a spectrum of women leaders in different industries with varying amount of power, thus getting different viewpoints.

7.5.2 Time Constraints

The cross-sectional method was adopted to collect data because the interviews were performed at a particular time in 2022 and collected within a short time space. The reason was because the study was required to be submitted within 2022.

7.5.3 Nature of the Study

Because the nature of the study being qualitative, the sample size is small. Which means that the findings cannot be easily generalised to the whole population because of the small sample size. This is an inherent limitation within the method used to conduct this research.

7.5.4 Access to Senior Leaders

Collecting data from senior managers had its challenges as scheduling a meeting had to be done through their Personal Assistants. At times the interviews would be rescheduled due to other commitments. At times a slot for the interview would be scheduled for weeks later.

7.5.5 Gender Bias

Due to the nature and objectives of the study, only female leaders were interviewed, this may be seen as a limitation on gender bias.

7.6 Implications for Business

Insights from interviews on the implications of the study were obtained. Suggestions are as follows:

- The findings of this study would assist policy makers make more informed decisions when it comes to inclusion and diversity in the organisation.
- Considering women in senior leadership roles will introduce a new variant or different perspective on leadership which may be associated with communal traits inherent in females, thus benefiting the organisation. The absence of this aspect of leadership may mean there is a lost opportunity in organisations to acquire several perspectives in decision making.

- Increased number of women in senior leadership roles means an increase in diversity for organisations which will bring different perspectives when decisions are made.
- The findings will benefit the decision makers because they can consider how organisations can level the playing ground for women leaders.
- Organisations may consider factors that have not been previously apparent in that women may need to take time off to take care of the family which might not be the case for men. Thus, the findings will assist policy makers to formulate policies that are favourable and not place women in a position where they must choose between family and work.

7.7 Recommendations for Future Research

There are areas of the research findings that may require further investigation. Based on those findings, the following recommendations can be made:

- The relationship between age and women in senior leadership

One of the findings from this study showed that middle managers fell between the ages 31 – 40 and senior managers were around ages 50 and above. This raised a question of whether there is a correlation between age and seniority of female leadership. The middle management demographic group of females may be seen as child bearing and raising families.

- Flexibility and Performance

An interesting finding was the need for flexibility in the careers of women leaders. It would be of interest to investigate whether flexibility translates to increased or improved performance. Whether the relationship between these two constructs is positive or negative, is yet to be determined through future research.

- Characteristics of successful leadership

Participants of this research revealed that female leaders need to demonstrate certain characteristics in order to be successful in their careers. Future studies should investigate whether these characteristics lead to the success of the female leader.

- Effectiveness of career development plan on career succession

The study suggested that a concise career development plan or program will aid to see more female leaders in top leadership roles. Thus, testing the effectiveness of career development plan is an invitation for future research.

- Proposed framework

The proposed framework seeks to be tested as an experiment to determine whether the interventions proposed increase the uptake of female leaders into senior leadership roles. A test of the relative importance of each proposed intervention and the relationships thereof would also be interesting to see.

7.8 Conclusion

At the beginning of this study four questions were asked and seeking to be answered by the study. The main question was, how do women experience culture of an organisation in their career progression? Second, how do women face assessment and evaluation challenges as leaders? Third, what stereotypes are experienced by women post-appointment into leadership roles? And fourth. How do organisational practices impact on leadership and development of women leaders?

The study has provided some interesting insights into organisational behaviour and women in leadership. Data was collected through interviews of sixteen women who are in senior and middle level leadership roles. The findings were collected, analysed, contrasted and consolidated to come up with themes that were presented in the study. The study revealed thought provoking perspectives where some agreed with literature reviewed and others need further investigation. These findings were put together to develop a framework. The framework may be helpful in creating

organisational shift and implement interventions to aid in motivating the uptake of more women in senior leadership roles.

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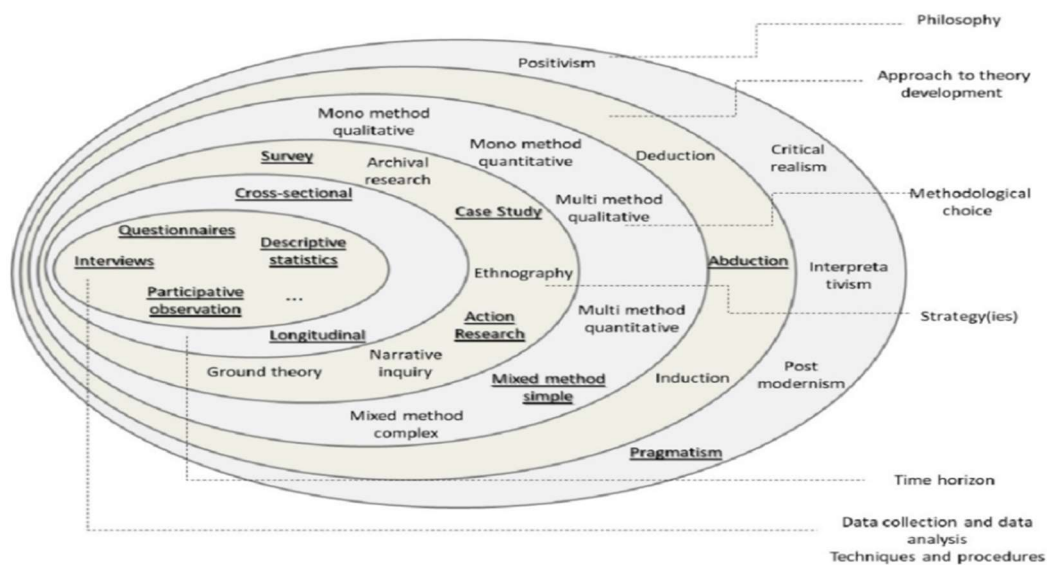
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APPENDIX A: The Research “Onion”



Note: Form” The research onion as a reference framework for the design for the research” by Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis, and Adrian Thornhill, 2018, *ResearchGate*. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-research-onion-as-a-reference-framework-for-the-design-of-this-research-Source_fig1_353696897

APPENDIX B: Consistency Matrix

TITLE: The influence of organisational culture stereotypes in promoting women leaders to senior leadership positions

PROPOSITIONS/ QUESTIONS/ HYPOTHESES	LITERATURE REVIEW	DATA COLLECTION TOOL	ANALYSIS
<p>Research question 1</p> <p>How do women experience the culture of an organisation in their career progression?</p>	<p>Gupta et al., (2018) Hoobler et al., 2018 Eagly & Karau (2002)</p>	<p>Question 1, 2 & 3 – in the interview guide</p>	<p>Content analysis on open ended questions, to determine experiences in the workplace.</p>
<p>Research question 2</p> <p>How do women face assessment and evaluation challenges as leaders?</p>	<p>Gupta et al., (2018) Eagly and Karau (2002)</p>	<p>Question 4, 5 & 6 – in the interview guide</p>	<p>Content analysis on open ended questions, to evaluate organisational biases.</p>
<p>Research question 3</p> <p>What stereotypes are experienced by women post – appointment into leadership roles?</p>	<p>Wang et al., (2019) Ellemers (2018)</p>	<p>Question 7, 8 & 9 – in the interview guide</p>	<p>Content analysis on open ended questions, to determine work place stereotypes.</p>
<p>Research question 4</p> <p>How does organisational practice impact on leadership and development of women leaders?</p>	<p>Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016 Athanasopoulou et al., (2018)</p>	<p>Question 10, 11 & 12 – in the interview guide</p>	<p>Content analysis on open ended questions, to determine organisation leadership development for women.</p>

APPENDIX C: Ethical Clearance

18 July 2022

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance
Approved**

Dear Nomfundo Dlamini,

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

APPENDIX D: Informed Consent

Gordon Institute of Business Science

University of Pretoria

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA. I am conducting research on organisational culture stereo types and I am trying to find out more about women leader experiences when it comes to senior role promotions. Our interview is expected to last about an hour and will help us understand how women leaders experience stereotypes in the workplace. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be reported without identifiers.

If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name: Nomfundo Dlamini

Research supervisor name: Dr M Ruiters

Email: 21752606@mygibs.co.za

Email: RuitersM@gibs.co.za

Phone: +27 73 531 4918

Phone: +27 11 771 4000

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E: Interview Schedule

Gordon Institute of Business Science

University of Pretoria

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this interview. As I have explained before the session that we are interested in how people view organisational practices and organisational biases. Talking to you will help me understand that better. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to me.

In this interview, I want to focus on your experiences in the work place, there are no wrong or right answers. The interview should not take longer than an hour, depending on how much we engage. I would like to make you aware that this interview is voluntary and that you can opt out at any time for any reason. Please note, everything you say is completely confidential.

Lastly, can I ask you if I can record the audio from our interview? I will not share this recording with anyone. It will help me focus on what you have to say. If you have questions for me, please feel free to ask.

Section 1 – Demographics

1. Age (tick the appropriate box)

Below 20	21 – 30	31 – 40	41 – 50	Above 50

2. Leadership level

Senior leadership	Middle leadership	Aspiring

3. How long have you been in this position?

1 – 5 years	6 – 10 years	10 years and above

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4. How long have you been with this organisation?

1 – 5 years	6 – 10 years	10 years and above

5. Would you say that your work place female or male dominated?

Section 2 – Interview questions

1. What is your understanding of cultural stereotypes in relation to female leaders in the workplace?
2. Can you share an experience where you felt that you were being stereotyped and it affected you negatively?
3. Can you share an example where you felt that an aspect of stereotyping helped you experience something positive?
4. Are the ways in which you are expected to behave at work because of your gender? Explain.
5. Describe an instance where you felt that you had similar or equivalent qualifications and experience as a male counterpart who was preferred for a leadership role.
6. Can you explain any gender related requirements that you must meet in order to be considered for advancement in your work place?
7. In which ways does stereotyping affect the opportunities for females to be promoted to senior leadership roles?
8. Do you believe that there are certain criteria to promotion that target one gender over the other? Give details.
9. What do you consider as key factors that are needed for women to reach senior leadership positions?
10. Describe the kind of support you have received as a female leader to help you develop in your current role.
11. Female leaders need the support of the organisations that they work for, for them to succeed in their role. What kind of support do you believe female leaders need? Which of this support is afforded to female leaders in your organisation and which is missing?

12. Would you say that there are tangible plans to develop female leaders in your organisation? Give details.

APPENDIX F: Initial Coding

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ academic background ○ accelerated growth ○ accepted behaviour from one race ○ access to resources ○ acknowledgement ○ additional resources ○ advancement plans ○ age ○ alignment ○ ambition ○ appearance ○ assertive ○ assertiveness ○ assurance ○ availability ○ awareness ○ balance of energies ○ barriers ○ be yourself ○ behaviour ○ behaviour expectation ○ being listened to ○ believe in your craft ○ believe in yourself ○ better chances of advancement ○ bossy ○ Can't handle pressure ○ capability ○ career development ○ career foundation ○ career reassessment ○ career stagnation ○ certain positions ○ challenge status quo ○ change yourself ○ child bearing age ○ coaching ○ competency ○ condescending ○ confident ○ conscious bias ○ creating networks ○ criteria ○ cultural concessions ○ culture ○ culture expectation ○ decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ educate male leaders ○ education ○ education support ○ emotional ○ emotional maturity ○ employment equity ○ employment equity plan ○ empowerment ○ equal treatment ○ equip oneself ○ expectation ○ experience ○ exposure ○ expressive ○ extended working hours ○ extra effort ○ facilities ○ fair leadership representation ○ family ○ family planning ○ family responsibility ○ feeling alone ○ feeling undervalued ○ female leadership workshops ○ female manager ○ female on female hate ○ female pull down syndrome ○ female roles ○ females in competition ○ feminine energy ○ fight for respect ○ fight for space ○ fight to be heard ○ financial assistance ○ firm ○ firmness ○ fitting in ○ flexibility ○ freedom to execute ○ freedom to express ○ functional expertise ○ gender ○ gender bias ○ gender equality ○ gender inequality ○ gender role expectation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ innovation ○ intimidation ○ involvement ○ job discrimination ○ job requirement ○ know your job ○ labour intensive ○ lack of ambition ○ language ○ leadership skills ○ leadership style ○ less perfection ○ less serious ○ Life stage ○ maintain work-life balance ○ male preferred ○ male support system ○ managing pressure ○ manipulation ○ masculine traits ○ maternity leave ○ men perform better ○ mentality ○ mentoring ○ mentorship ○ merit ○ motherly ○ negative experience ○ networking ○ networks ○ no formalised plans ○ no gender specific roles ○ no women in senior roles ○ non-realistic expectations ○ onboarding ○ open door ○ Opportunity ○ organisational fit ○ organisational shift ○ over qualified ○ overwhelmness ○ own your space ○ perceived gender role ○ perceived soft roles ○ perception
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ decision making ○ develop oneself ○ development ○ development plans ○ direction ○ domineering ○ Don't belong ○ doubt capability ○ prejudgement ○ dress code ○ uneven gender platform ○ unfair treatment ○ unqualified ○ unsafe ○ unspoken behaviour ○ unwelcome ○ visibility ○ voice not heard ○ willingness ○ women advancement agenda ○ women are bossy ○ women protection ○ work discrimination ○ work focused ○ work gender role ○ work harder ○ workplace forum ○ written plan ○ young males ○ individual mentality ○ uneven career platform ○ trust ○ turn negative into positive ○ type of leadership ○ unconscious bias ○ undermined ○ undermining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ grooming ○ growth ○ guard yourself ○ guidance ○ guiding principles ○ hesitation ○ homely ○ incapable of doing jobs ○ incompetent ○ inconvenience ○ progress ○ promotion ○ prove yourself ○ psychological safety ○ qualification ○ queen bee syndrome ○ race ○ readiness ○ recognition ○ remuneration ○ repetitive work ○ resilience ○ resistance ○ resistance to change ○ respect ○ respectable ○ sacrifice ○ safety ○ second guess ○ seek information ○ selective advancement ○ self ○ self confidence ○ selling oneself ○ sensitive ○ set target ○ settling down ○ show commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ perception of performance ○ performance ○ personality traits ○ policies ○ policy making ○ positions for certain gender ○ positive feedback ○ positive work environment ○ potential ○ preferred gender ○ pregnancy ○ show strength ○ skills fit ○ social beliefs ○ social upbringing ○ soft ○ soft positions ○ soft skills ○ soft work ○ softness ○ speak up ○ speed ○ stand firm ○ subtle behaviour ○ subtleness ○ subtlety ○ success ○ succession planning ○ support ○ travelling ○ tracking women in power ○ traction ○ travel
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APPENDIX H: Thematic Analysis Map

Thematic Map		
Number of Codes per group	Code Groups / Categories	Themes
8 7 9	Assertiveness Qualifications Characteristics	Personal Characteristics
9 7 5 6	Female pull down Competition Incompetence Masculine traits	Queen Bee Phenomenon
6 8	Policy making Policies	Policies
6 9 5 6 8	Empowerment Succession Plan Forums Positions Career	Career Planning
8 5 11 8	Capability Leadership Skills Recognition	Perception of Performance
7 4 5 8	Behaviour expectation Safety Gender Culture	Work Environment
9 7 7 8	Family Age Maternity Responsibility	Family
6 8 9	Support Empowerment Acknowlegment	Flexibilty
7 6 9	Behaviour Emotions Decision Making	Trust
6 5 4	Emotions Fair Treatment Value	Respect
15 9	Resources Opportunities	Resource Support
12 5 9	Career Foundation Coaching Networks	Mentorship